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Madina A. Kochieva

Assistant of Department of Theory of State and Law

Vladikavkaz Institute of Management, Vladikavkaz, Russia

makochieva@gmail.com

MUSLIM COMMUNITY OF NORTH OSSETIA IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA. INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

Abstract. In our work, we attempt to describe the events that impacted the life of the Muslim community in the multi-confessional republic of North Ossetia-Alania at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century; to analyze their causal link, the influence of Caucasian and global trends on them. During the study, we applied descriptive-narrative and historical-genetic methods. We have come to the conclusion that at the end of the 20th – early 21st century the Ossetian Muslim community turned out to be receptive to global trends, while the Ossetian “neophytes” – to the ideas of radical Islamic movements. However, by now the split of the Muslim community of Ossetia into supporters of moderate Islam and supporters of radical views has been overcome. The terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004 had unprecedented consequences for the Muslim community in Ossetia and noticeably changed the attitude towards Islam within the Ossetian society. It has also become evident that if in the first decade of the 21st century tension between the Islamic clergy of Ossetia and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church were dominant, then in the second decade of the century the conflicts of Muslims with passionate adherents of the traditional Ossetian religion were actualized.

Keywords: Islam; North Ossetia; North Caucasus; religion; confession; Muslims; Salafism; Sufism.

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Кочиева Мадина Аслановна
ассистент кафедры теории государства и права
Владикавказский институт управления, Владикавказ, Россия
makochieva@gmail.com

МУСУЛЬМАНСКАЯ ОБЩИНА СЕВЕРНОЙ ОСЕТИИ В ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ПЕРИОД. ИНСТИТУЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ

Аннотация. Целью исследования является описание наиболее важных событий, повлиявших на жизнь мусульманской общины в поликонфессиональной регионе, Республике Северной Осетии-Алания, в конце XX – начале XXI века, анализ их причинно-следственных связей, влияние на них общекавказских и общемировых тенденции. В качестве методологии были использованы нарративный (описательно-повествовательный) и исторический (историко-генетический) методы. В процессе исследования автор приходит к выводу о том, что в конце 90-х годов XX в. и в начале XXI в. осетинское мусульманское сообщество оказалось восприимчиво к общемировым тенденциям, а осетинские «неофиты» – к идеям радикальных исламских течений. Однако, к настоящему времени раскол мусульманской общины Осетии на сторонников умеренного ислама и сторонников радикальных взглядов был преодолен. Автор также приходит к выводу, что произошедший в 2004 г. теракт в Беслане имел беспрецедентные последствия для мусульманского сообщества в Осетии и заметно изменил отношение к исламу внутри осетинского общества. Также, в результате исследования стало ясно, что если в первое десятилетие XXI в. доминировала напряжённость между исламским духовенством Осетии и представителями РПЦ, то во втором десятилетии XXI в. актуализировались конфликты мусульман с пассионарными адептами традиционной осетинской религии.

Keywords: Islam; North Ossetia; North Caucasus; religion; confession; Muslims; Salafism; Sufism.

Introduction

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the position of Islam and the Islamic community in modern North Ossetia are a poorly-explored subject.

There is a large number of extensive Russian and foreign studies on the current state of Muslim communities in other regions of the North Caucasus. Nadezhda Yemelyanova's fundamental work "Muslims of Ossetia – at the Crossroads of Civilization" is dedicated to the history of the Muslim community in Ossetia, the last chapter of which covers the events up to 2002. Other studies of the positions of Islam in Ossetia are of little volume and are devoted only to some episodes of the history of the Muslim community over the past 30 years.

General studies of the current state of the Muslim religion in the North Caucasus also cover the situation in North Ossetia very poorly, and sometimes even consider the republic as a region where Islam is not widespread, being only a buffer zone between Orthodox Russia and Georgia, and the Muslim North Caucasian republics [1, p. 278]. Obviously, this is primarily due to the reputation of Ossetia being a historically Orthodox region and having a relatively small Muslim community, living on its territory.

However, in our opinion, the experience of the existence and development of the Muslim community in the republic, where it is a confessional minority and is closed among the "antagonist" confessions, while constantly experiencing the influence of neighboring Muslim republics, as well as the unconditional influence of global religious trends, is unique and attracts scientific interest.

According to opinion polls, the percentage of people identifying themselves as Muslims in North Ossetia increased from 8.2 in 1998 to 12.2 in 2013¹. Nevertheless, it always yields to the corresponding percentage of Orthodox and adherents of the Ossetian traditional religion.

For comparison, according to the official data of the 1867 census, when the total population of North Ossetia was 47,673 people, 23 percent of religious people professed Islam. At the beginning of the 20th century, in Vladikavkaz alone, more than half of the population of which was Russian, the number of Muslims was more than 15 percent [3].

Before the October Revolution, Muslim Ossetians mainly lived in Beslan, Elkhotovo, Zamankul, Zilgi, Brut, Volno-Magometanovksy, Lesken, and all the mountain settlements of the Digor Gorge. Muslims were among many notable and significant figures of Ossetian history, including, for example, Ahmed Tsalikov, who was a member of the Muslim factions in the State Duma of the Russian Empire and the Constituent Assembly, and also headed the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Muslim Council, formed in 1917.

¹ Official website of the Ministry of National and External Relations. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.minnats.alania.gov.ru/activity/religion>

Social upheavals (wars, the Muhajirism of a large part of Muslim Ossetians to Turkey), consistent assimilation, atheistic propaganda and the complete liquidation of all Muslim organizations and institutions by the Soviet government greatly reduced the number of people professing Islam in Ossetia and destroyed local religious institutions. For this reason, we can confidently say that with the beginning of the post-Soviet period, the Islamic spiritual institutions of Ossetia revived.

Revival of Islamic religious institutions and conflicts within the Muslim community

The Soviet period was associated with the complete destruction of Islamic religious institutions in Ossetia. In 1985, the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs Konstantin Kharchev reported to the Central Committee of the CPSU that there was not a single registered association of Muslims in the North Ossetian ASSR [2, p. 169].

The starting point of a new era for the Muslim community of Ossetia, which replaced the period of pressure of anti-religious state policy, can be considered February 1988, when a community of 62 people was registered in the village of Chikola, which was historically considered Muslim, with the permission of the Council for Religious Affairs under the Council of Ministers of the USSR. In connection with this event, the executive committee of the Iraf District Council of People's Deputies recognized the dilapidated building of the village mosque as the property of the Muslim community and allowed its restoration at the expense of future parishioners.

Dzankhot Khekilaev was deservedly elected Chairman of the community, the person thanks to whom this initiative was implemented: "In order to change the attitude to Islam in Ossetia, Dzankhot Osmanovich Khekilaev methodically sent letters to various authorities for about twenty years with demands to register the Muslim community and restore the mosque in the village of Chikola" [3]. Formed in 1991 the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania (hereinafter – SAM of RNO-Alania; SAM) also elected Dzankhot Khekilaev as mufti².

One of the most pressing issues that arose for the Muslims of Ossetia during this period was the issue of the return of one of the most beautiful and oldest mosques in the North Caucasus to the capital of the Republic of Alania, the city of Vladikavkaz.

² Khekilaev Dzankhot // The official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamosetia.ru/2015/09/16/2015-09-16-18-06-06/>

In Soviet times, the Sunni Mosque served as a branch of the National Museum of History, Archeology and Ethnography of North Ossetia. According to the testimony of religious scholar Timur Dzeranov, who headed the museum for twenty years, long before the adoption of legislative acts on the return of religious buildings to religious organizations, he, at the request of Dzankhot Khekilaev, provided believers with the opportunity to hold Friday prayers in the mosque: “For the duration of the Juma prayer, the museum staff provided the mosque to the believers, and they themselves left”.

Officially, the mosque was transferred for the use of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of North Ossetia only on February 5, 1996, with the adoption of the corresponding decree of the President of the Republic of North Ossetia³. It is noteworthy that a month before, an attempt was made to blow up the mosque, which caused a deep hole in the walls and cracks in the dome of the structure. The perpetrators of this terrorist act were never found, but public suspicions fell on criminal groups protesting, allegedly, against the introduction of alcohol licensing by the republican authorities⁴.

The general trend of radicalization of Islam in the North Caucasus, caused by the opportunities for contacts with foreign Muslim organizations, trips of Muslim youth to study in Arab countries, global extremist movements, as well as the Chechen struggle for secession from Russia under the banner of the holy war, could not but affect the situation in North Ossetia.

This is how these processes are characterized in an article published by the information and analytical Muslim channel Ansar.Ru: “In almost all the republics of the North Caucasus, the same thing happened with a small difference only in scale and, probably, in sequence. There was a split between the young passionaries, who took as a basis previously almost inaccessible knowledge of the basics of the Islamic religion, and the old, mostly ceremonial, form of the profession of Islam.”⁵

Unable to find answers to their questions from the Spiritual Administration of Muslims, radical Muslim youth began to unite around another organization – Informally called “Jamaat”, – which was officially registered in 1996 as an “Islamic Cultural Center”. The young Muslims chose Ermak Tegaev, known for his radical views, as their chairman (*amir*). The community registered in Vladikavkaz also included the communities of the city of Beslan and the village of Elkhotovo and collaborated closely with the Jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria, headed by Imam Musa Mukozhev, popular among local youth, who later became one of the leaders

3 “From the history of the construction of the Sunni mosque of Vladikavkaz” // Official website of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamosetia.ru/2020/10/14/iz-istorii-stroitelstva-sunnitskoj-mecheti-g-vladikavkaz/>

4 Alexander Sashin. “Explosion in Vladikavkaz. The mosque is blown up by vodka producers” // Kommersant. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/125812>

5 Aslan Bzarov. “Why was Mufti Yevteyev forcefully removed? Following a high-profile case” // Information and Analytical Channel “Ansar.Ru”. January 15, 2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.ansar.ru/analytics/za-chto-ushli-muftiya-Yevteeva-po-sledam-gromkogo-dela>

of the Islamic armed underground groups in Kabardino-Balkaria and was killed during a special operation in 2009 [4].

It is important to note that Ossetian neophytes turned out to be quite receptive to the ideas of radical Islamic trends, since in Ossetia, as already noted, the generational continuity of religious tradition was destroyed, and, moreover, a stable tradition of Sufi Islam (as in Chechnya, Ingushetia or Dagestan), the philosophical basis was not formed which is in irreconcilable contradiction with the ideas of Wahhabism. This is how Ossetian religious scholar Timur Dzeranov describes these processes: “The poor understanding of the basics of Islam by Ossetian Muslims, especially young ones, made them defenseless before the radical Islamist doctrine of Salafism or Wahhabism that penetrated into the region hostile to traditional Islam. In the republic, among young Muslims, Wahhabi emissaries from Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria initiated missionary activities; extremist religious literature flooded North Ossetia from abroad and the Islamist centers of Russia. There is evidence that units of such a radical international Islamic organization as “at-Takfir wa-l-Hijra” and “Hizb ut-Tahrir” operated within the territory of the republic” [5, p. 193].

The confrontation between moderate, “secular” Islam in the face of the SAM and radical Muslims in the face of the Islamic Cultural Center was growing for several years, including episodes of open rejection and disrespect of the parties to each other, which eventually escalated the conflict.

The clash of representatives of the two opposing parties occurred during the Third Congress of Muslims of North Ossetia, which was held on April 25, 2004. Imams of 14 Muslim communities of the republic criticized the leadership of the SAM of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, referring to administrative problems, lack of financial base and dependence of the leadership of the SAM on government structures. The composition of the Council of the SAM of RNO-Alania (the highest governing body that had the authority to elect the mufti) was re-elected, and more than 90 percent of it were opponents of Khekilaev. In an interview with the author of the portal, Dzankhot Khekilaev called this congress a “Wahhabi assembly”, at which a coup was actually carried out. Khekilaev called the newly elected members of the Council imams of the “Wahhabi movement”.

However, the election of a mufti with “radical” views could lead the leadership of the Muslim community out of the control of the state apparatus, and, as one of the members of the Muslim community explained to us, the Republican authorities intervened in the situation in the person of Abrek Batrayev, who was at that time a member of the Council, as well as the Deputy Minister for Nationalities of the RNO-Alania. Abrek Batrayev persuaded Ruslan Valgasov, a young member of the community, to be elected as mufti. Having neither an Islamic education, nor significant spiritual experience, nor any bright and attractive views for young people, Ruslan Valgasov did not enjoy such great popularity among the community

as the head of the Islamic Cultural Center Ermak Tegaev and his deputy Suleiman Mamiev did. Serious reputational damage in the eyes of believers was added to Valgasov by the fact that in the past he was a traffic police officer, that is, a person connected with state power. However, not being a member of Khekilaev's "team" and enjoying the support of the Republican authorities, he apparently seemed to the confrontational parties to be a compromise figure. Such a scenario could hardly by itself exhaust the conflict between the leadership of the SAM and the radical youth, and even after the election of a new mufti, the confrontation continued to grow.

However, it was during this period that Ossetia had to go through an event that affected the situation of Muslims not only in Ossetia, but throughout Russia, and radically changed the state policy towards Islam and especially its radical movements.

The change in the attitude towards Muslims in the republic after the terrorist attack in Beslan

From September 1 to September 3, 2004, a terrorist attack shook Beslan. All the terrorists who attacked the school were Muslims, and this fact radically changed the attitude of society and the authorities of Ossetia to both visiting Muslims and Ossetian Muslims, despite the fact that most of the indigenous population of Beslan historically professed Islam. The influence of the Beslan tragedy on the nature of confessional relations in North Ossetia can certainly serve as an object of a separate serious study. We can only outline some of its consequences.

After these events, the eyes of the special services could not help but turn to the activists of the Islamic Cultural Center. On February 2, 2005, the agents of the FSB of Russia in North Ossetia, together with the members of the Department of Internal Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, arrested the chairman of the Islamic Cultural Center Ermak Tegaev. The online edition of the Caucasus Times, referring to the law enforcement agencies of the republic, reported that 270 grams of plastid and 3 electric detonators were found in Ermak Tegaev's car during his arrest. He was also accused of possessing religious literature, textbooks and videotapes of an extremist nature. The Soviet District Court of Vladikavkaz sentenced Ermak Tegaev to 2.5 years of imprisonment in a penal colony. The imam of the Sunni mosque, the closest associate and deputy of Ermak Tegaev, Suleiman Mamiev, did not wait for the outcome of these events and emigrated to Turkey [4].

Commenting on the detention of Ermak Tegaev to the republican newspaper "Severnaya Osetiya", Mufti Ruslan Valgasov unequivocally accused the organization of illegal activities: "The Islamic Cultural Center is a public organization that, in my opinion, actually has nothing to do with either Islam or religion. This is the

case when they write one thing in the charter, but in fact they are engaged in another”. Answering the question why the SAM of RNO-Alania had not responded to such activities for so many years, Ruslan Valgasov referred to the negligence of special services: “In any case, it is not in our competence to check what cases are being done under the guise of a public organization”.⁶

In April 2005, Murat Tavkazakhov, a follower of “traditional” moderate Islam, born in the Muslim village of Kartsa, was elected head of the SAM of RNO-Alania. It is important to note that the leadership of the Tavkazakhov community fell on one of the most difficult periods for Muslims. Fresh memories of the Beslan tragedy predetermined the attitude of society and the authorities to everything that was somehow connected to Islam, and the leadership of the SAM of RNO-Alania regularly fell into the epicenter of high-profile conflicts.

Consequently, in 2006, the Muslim clergy were not invited to the funeral ceremony in Beslan. The Ossetian mufti then expressed dissatisfaction with the exclusive participation of Bishop Theophan of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz in them: “Half of those killed in the terrorist attack were Muslims, and they are buried according to our customs. This fact must be kept in mind”.⁷

Later, this conflict continued during the discussion about the construction of a memorial complex in Beslan. Bishop Theophan spoke about the plans of the Russian Orthodox Church to build an Orthodox church on the site of the destroyed school, which caused outrage of the chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia Ravil Gaynudin, who said that the memorial at the site of the tragedy should not be divided based on the religious grounds. Murat Tavkazakhov also did not stay aside from the conflict and shared his opinion in an interview with a “Nezavisimaya gazeta”: “Bishop Theophan is very hostile. Not wanting to erect a monument of unity in Beslan, he sows the seeds of enmity. He avoids meeting us. He declares North Ossetia an Orthodox republic, which hurts the feelings of 200 thousand Ossetian Muslims”. Regarding the memorial complex, the mufti stated that religious buildings, whether a church or a mosque, can be built nearby, and not on the site of the tragedy.⁸

Murat Tavkazakhov served as mufti of North Ossetia for less than three years. His resignation was accompanied by searches, as well as accusations of corruption and embezzlement of financial aid received from various Muslim funds to support Islam in Ossetia [4].

However, the resignation of Tavkazakhov, who, according to the official version, voluntarily wrote a letter of resignation from the post of mufti, was also

6 Mufti of North Ossetia criticized the Islamic Cultural Center // Daily Republican newspaper “Severnaya Osetiya”. February 8, 2005, No. 39.

7 The Ossetian mufti opposed the participation of the Orthodox clergy in the ceremonies of remembrance of the victims of the tragedy in Beslan // Interfax Religion. September 1, 2006. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=13614>

8 Stanislav Minin. Echo of the tragedy // Nezavisimaya Gazeta. 04.04.2007. Electronic resource. Available at: https://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2007-04-04/1_tragedy.html

considered as a “coup” in the media. Shafiq Pshikhachev, the plenipotentiary representative of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus (CCMNC) in Moscow stated that the leadership of the CCMNC is confident that the removal of Tavkazakhov is a consequence of the interference of North Ossetian officials in the life of the community, regards the accusations against him as a provocation and continues to consider Tavkazakhov the only legitimate leader of North Ossetian Muslims.⁹

Nevertheless, in February 2008, Tavkazakhov’s former deputy, Ali Yevteev, was elected the new mufti of North Ossetia. Subsequently, after Yevteev’s resignation, the Info-Islam news agency called his election one of the boldest experiments in the search for religious peace in the North Caucasus.

Ali Yevteev, who was born into an Orthodox family and converted to Islam only at the age of 22, received a spiritual education at a madrasah in Karachay-Cherkessia, then at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, and then at the International University of Medina in Saudi Arabia. All this, on the one hand, formed in him a rather uncompromising Salafist system of views, and on the other hand, led to the realization of the need for peaceful Islam within the framework of Russian statehood. According to Yevteev himself, this influenced the decision of the SAM of RNO-Alania to invite him to work with the younger generation of Muslims. Being a man with an extensive spiritual education and moderately Salafist views, he could establish a dialogue between the old generation of Muslims leading the community and passionate Muslim youth, and perhaps even prevent a bloody conflict between radical and moderate “traditional” Muslims raging at that time in other regions of the North Caucasus.¹⁰

Acting as deputy mufti, and then heading the SAM of RNO-Alania, Ali Yevteev was very active: he established communication with the Ossetian diaspora in Turkey, organized an annual forum of Muslims of the republic, regular charity events were held in orphanages and schools, the women’s charity organization “Jasmine” was founded, the restoration of several inactive mosques was started. During this period, Yevteev managed to comply with agreements with the state authorities and maintain close contact with the youth, even with the most radicalized ones.

Speaking about this in an interview with the Regnum news agency, Yevteev stated: “I may ignore it if I find out that a person came from an extremist group, if I see that he is normal, that he has repented. Because he will be of more use than if he is simply taken out and shot, thereby confirming his hostility to Islam

9 Shafiq Pshikhachev, a representative of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus in Moscow, accused the Deputy Minister of North Ossetia for Nationalities Affairs, Abrek Batrayev, of “destructive interference” in the internal affairs of Muslims // INTERFAX, April 17, 2008. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=23996>

10 The experiment failed // Info-Islam News Agency. 25.06.2010. Electronic resource. Available at: http://www.info-islam.ru/publ/stati/obzory/ehksperiment_ne_udalsja/6-1-0-10441

to everyone who is sitting in the forest, and to those with whom these “forest brothers” communicate via the Internet and mobile communications. Therefore, we are as tolerant as possible with the youth. We have committed ourselves to prove that this state is not an enemy to them, but we need confirmation, we need the government support”. Yevteev also describes the results of this approach: “Gradually, over the course of five or six years, we managed to achieve without repressive measures that when the amir of the Jamaat, Ermak Tegaev, called everyone to escape to the mountains for jihad, only two people came with him”.

However, it was this interview with Yevteev that caused him to resign from the post of mufti two years after his election: the frankness with which he told the facts about his life and his worldview to the journalist-caucasiologist Yana Amelina could not but cause a massive public outcry. Yevteev told about his studies in the camp of a terrorist and field commander Khattab, about his former inclination to join the armed jihad, about his close relations with the head of the Islamic Spiritual Center Ermak Tegaev, as well as Anzor Astemirov and Musa Mukozhev, who later became leaders of the underground uprising in Kabardino-Balkaria.¹¹

Particular indignation in society was caused by his statements about Orthodox clergy, for which Yevteev then had to apologize at a meeting with representatives of the North Ossetian Orthodox clergy. The Kommersant newspaper wrote about this: “Ali Yevteev admitted that much of what he said in the interview was based on rumors. ‘We are all human beings and we can make mistakes; I admit my mistake’.”¹² At the same time, Yevteev explained that the journalist introduced herself as a researcher studying Islam in the Caucasus, and he, not knowing that his conversation was being recorded, allowed himself to communicate in the format of a private conversation.

The reaction of society, as well as the condemnation of other representatives of Islamic organizations, were not long in coming. Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia Ravil Gaynudin in his official message to the media noted: “Such statements can be characterized as inadequate, devoid of sanity, at least not serious for a person endowed with a certain power and responsibility, and cause serious condemnation on our part”. Yevteev’s statements were also condemned by the muftiats of other republics.¹³

In general, the consequences of this event correlate with the conclusions made by Kaarina Aitamurto in the article “Patriotic loyalty and interest representation among the Russian Islamic elite”: in modern secular states, Muslim leaders are often forced to speak and make statements based not on a personal position, but on

11 Mufti of North Ossetia: “I dreamed of giving my life for the sake of Allah” // Regnum News Agency. May 2, 2010. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://regnum.ru/amp/1280053>

12 Zaur Farniev. The Ossetian Mufti apologizes to the representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church // Kommersant newspaper. 17.05.2010. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1370477>

13 Muslim clergy condemns the extremist Mufti // North Caucasian news. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://sk-news.ru/news/society/2490/>

a position that does not contradict the attitudes established in the public political context [7, p. 2]. Even if the leaders of other Muslim republics sympathized with Yevteev and realized that he had made a mistake by showing inappropriate carelessness in his statements, they could not publicly express anything but condemnation. This is evidenced, for example, by the reaction of the head of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus, Ismail Berdiev: “I am very sorry about what happened, but, frankly, I still can’t understand how he could say such a thing publicly”. A similar position was voiced in an interview with the head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan Gusman Iskhakov: “We live in a country where such statements cannot but be ignored. I would also resign in his place. From the point of view of Islamic ethics, you should not say that much”.¹⁴

In the above-mentioned study, Kaarina Aitamurto links the trends of state control in relation to public statements of organizations and figures, as well as their division into loyal and disloyal to the state with the September 11 terrorist attack.

In our opinion, in Russia, the policy of tightening control over Islamic organizations began in connection with the Chechen wars and terrorist attacks of the early 2000s and was finally consolidated after the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004. Moreover, it is known that it was after this terrorist attack that a radical change in the nature of state power in the North Caucasus took place, when direct elections of the heads of the Caucasian republics were canceled and they began to be appointed by the President of Russia at the suggestion of the state bodies of the respective republics.¹⁵

On May 20, 2010, 18 days after the publication of the odious interview, Ali Yevteev submitted his resignation.¹⁶ In addition to serious social costs, Yevteev also experienced the threat of legal sanctions: the investigative authorities of the Russian Federation received an application to check the scandalous interview for the presence of a crime under Article 205.2 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (public calls for terrorist activities, public justification of terrorism or propaganda of terrorism). However, on December 2, 2010, the prosecutor’s office decided that the commission, which carried out a comprehensive psychological, religious and linguistic study, did not find any signs of a crime in Yevteev’s statements.¹⁷

14 The heads of the largest Spiritual Administrations of Muslims commented on Ali Yevteev’s decision to resign // IA IslamNews. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://islamnews.ru/Glavy-krupnejshih-DUMov-prokomentirovali-reshenie-Ali-Yevteeva-ujti-v-otstavku>

15 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 27, 2004. No. 1603 “On the procedure for considering candidates for the position of the highest official (head of the supreme executive body of state power) of the subject of the Russian Federation” // Rossiyskaya Gazeta. December 29, 2004. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2004/12/29/gubernatori-dok.html>

16 Mufti of North Ossetia resigns from his post // Interfax Russia. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.interfax-russia.ru/south-and-north-caucasus/main/muftiy-severnoy-osetii-podal-v-otstavku>

17 The Prosecutor’s office found no signs of extremism in the interview of the former mufti of North Ossetia // IslamNews News Agency. 03.12.2010. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://islamnews.ru/news-28271.html>

On July 14, 2010, Khadzhimurat Gatsalov, a native of the village of Chikola and former deputy of Yevteev, took the position of acting mufti. On March 17, 2011, at the V Congress of Muslims of North Ossetia, Gatsalov was officially elected Mufti of the SAM of RNO-Alania; on March 16, 2016, he was unanimously re-elected for a second term, and on March 17, 2021 – for a third.

Confrontation with law enforcement agencies and representatives of the traditional Ossetian religion

During the long period of Gatsalov's leadership, the Muslim community of Ossetia was involved in many acute social conflicts. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it was Khajimurat Gatsalov who turned out to be the leader capable of consolidating the Muslims of Ossetia, bringing the community out of the state of internal and external conflicts to a state of peace and successful integration into the social life of the republic, as well as strengthening the reputation of the SAM of RNO-Alania among both Muslim and external social groups and institutions.

A striking example is the situation that occurred in the mountain village of Fiagdon in February 2011, when one of the most active representatives of the Muslim community of Ossetia, Ruslan Rubaev, built a prayer room on the site of his household and was already completing the construction of a minaret. Residents of Fiagdon demanded that the heads of the Administration of the Alagirsky district forbid Ruslan Rubaev to continue the construction and even collected more than 500 signatures under an appeal to the President of the Russian Federation. On this occasion, a meeting was organized in the village culture house, but the peaceful negotiations failed, and 300 people went to Rubaev's household, demanding that he seized the construction of the minaret.¹⁸ In order to avoid even more dangerous consequences of this conflict, Ruslan Rubaev was forced to dismantle the building. Describing this situation in his research, legal expert Tamerlan Tsgoev calls it an Orthodox-Islamic conflict [6, p. 180]. We tend to believe that the population of the Kuratinsky gorge, on the territory of which there are many places of worship associated with the traditional Ossetian religion, is not exclusively Orthodox. Moreover, conflicts between representatives of traditional beliefs and Orthodox clergy occurred quite often in this area, which are also described by Tamerlan Tsgoev in this study [6, pp. 175-178]. For this reason, it is more correct to assess this confessional conflict as mixed, and to associate such an aggressive reaction of society with the absence of Islamic religious buildings in the area and their association with Wahhabism and terrorist threats among local residents.

¹⁸ Residents of the North Ossetian village of Verkhny Fiagdon oppose the construction of the minaret // Information and Analytical Channel "Ansar.Ru". Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.ansar.ru/sobcor/zhiteli-severoosetinskogo-poselka-vystupili-protiv-stroitelstva-minareta>

On May 26, 2011, a terrible denouement took place of one of the most acute conflicts in the sphere of confessional relations in the modern history of Ossetia. On the outskirts of Vladikavkaz, the decapitated body of a scholar, poet, dean of the Faculty of Ossetian Philology of the North Ossetian State University, 71-year-old Shamil Dzhigkaev, was found.¹⁹

The chain of cause-effects that led to this event brings us to the consequences of the Beslan tragedy. On December 8, 2007, the media reported about an attack by residents of Beslan on a bus of pilgrims from Chechnya. According to the pilgrims who were heading to Sochi for further departure to Medina for the Hajj, they were attacked during the evening prayer at the entrance to Beslan. Ossetian witnesses claimed that the passers-by relieved themselves near the cemetery of the victims of the terrorist attack in Beslan.²⁰ No evidence was presented to confirm the version of one side or the other, however, for a society still heated by the horrific events in Beslan just three years ago, such piece of information was enough. News about the offensive conduct of visiting Muslims near the cemetery to the victims of Beslan spread throughout the republic and caused a fierce public outcry. Shamil Dzhigkaev, apparently very hurt by this event, wrote a poem, which in July 2008 was published in the Ossetian magazine “Mah dug” (Our Epoch).

The author’s personal archive contains materials provided by the Department for Work with Religious Organizations and Prevention of Extremism of the Ministry of the Russian Federation for National Policy and External Relations. Among these materials there is also a protocol of the meeting of the Commission on Religious Associations under the Government of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania dated December 4, 2008. It follows from the protocol that the Ministry’s employees were concerned about the situation and considered the poem inciting religious and national discord, and its publication in the media – unacceptable. The meeting was also attended by members of the SAM of RNO-Alania, who spoke about the danger of this publication: “At the cost of great efforts, we managed to normalize the situation in the SAM of RNO-Alania and we should not ruin the agreement reached... Because some uncontrolled radical representatives can deal with Dzhigkaev”.²¹

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of North Ossetia appealed to the prosecutor’s office on the issue of initiating a criminal case. When questioned about this, Shamil Dzhigkaev stressed that there was nothing religious in his poem, and it was dedicated to wolf habits. As a result, in 2009 the Institute of

19 Zaur Farniev. “A poet beheaded in North Ossetia” // Kommersant newspaper 27.05.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1648146>

20 Musa Muradov, Zaur Farniev. “Chechen pilgrims attacked in Beslan. Too close to the cemetery of the victims of the terrorist attack” // Kommersant Newspaper. 08.12.2007. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/834118>

21 Minutes of the meeting of the Commission on Religious Associations under the Government of RNO-Alania on December 4, 2008 // Current Archive Ministry of RNO-Alania for National Policy and External Relations

Criminalistics of the Center for Special Technology of the FSB of Russia, which conducted an examination of the poem by Shamil Dzhigkaev, concluded that no signs of extremism were found, but only a denunciation of human vice. The Republican Department of the Investigative Committee of the Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation closed the case against Dzhigkaev.²²

According to Shamil Dzhigkayev himself, he was subsequently repeatedly threatened: "They call, threat, appeal to the authorities and justice; they can only fulfill their main desire — to sacrifice me to their idols, that is, to their interests. For God's sake, do not teach the Wahhabis this 'God-pleasing cause'."»²³

The poet's body was found in a forest area on May 26, 2011, and already on May 31, 2011, David Murashev, a suspect in the murder of Shamil Dzhigkaev, who resisted the arrest, was liquidated by law enforcement officers. Extremist literature, a suicide belt and a sword with which Shamil Dzhigkayev was allegedly killed were found in the house of David Murashev.²⁴

Not much is known about the identity of David Murashev. The media covering these events wrote that the criminal was an Ossetian, not from a Muslim family, who converted to Islam three years before the murder, a year before that he had visited Hajj. It also became known about his disposition for crime: Murashev was previously convicted of arms trafficking.

The described event is a vivid illustration confirming some hypotheses put forward by famous world researchers in the field of terrorism and radicalism. Mark Juergensmeyer in his study "Terror in the mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence", calls humiliation and the need for revenge arising in connection with it one of the psychological factors of involvement in radical organizations [8, p. 187]. Revenge as one of the reasons for the perpetration of terror in her study on the origin of terrorism is also considered by Martha Crenshaw [9, pp. 92-105]. In another study on political terrorism, she proposes a hypothesis that political terrorism is often associated with a sense of discrimination by the Government, which extremists perceive as a deprivation of dignity, a sense of security and freedom [10, pp. 79-113].

We tend to believe that the ostentation and cruelty with which the Ossetian poet was killed suggests that Murashev's motivation, in addition to targeted personal revenge for insulting religious feelings and the sense of humiliation experienced, could also be revenge against the state and society, which, according to the killer, did not stand up for the offended dignity of the social the group with which he identified himself.

22 Famous folk poet Shamil Dzhigkaev killed in North Ossetia; Svetlana Yemelyanova // Internet portal of Rossiyskaya Gazeta. 26.05.2011. Available at: <https://rg.ru/2011/05/26/reg-kuban/poet-anons.html>

23 Zaur Farniev "A poet beheaded in North Ossetia" // Kommersant Newspaper. 27.05.2011 Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1648146>

24 Zaur Farniev. The poet's murderer died under the fence // Kommersant, 02.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1652027>

However, the consequences of the described events were not limited to Murashev's liquidation. The brutal murder of a well-known and respected figure and the resonance caused by it led to a harsh reaction from law enforcement agencies to representatives of the Muslim community. On the night of May 31 to June 1, 18 members of the community were detained, among whom was the imam of the Vladikavkaz Sunni Mosque Kuvat Ismailov.²⁵

Mufti of North Ossetia Khadzhimurat Gatsalov was outraged by these detentions. In an interview with the *Kommersant*, he spoke about the murder and its consequences: "The members of the Muslim community strongly condemn the murder. And now they themselves are suffering from its consequences. Yes, I do believe that Murashev is the killer. The solid evidence points to that"²⁶.

The concurrent detention of such a large number of members of the Muslim community caused strong tension between the leadership of the SAM of RNO-Alania, relatives of the detainees and law enforcement agencies. On June 1, 2011, relatives of the detained members of the Islamic community filed a complaint to the Prosecutor's Office²⁷. The Council of the SAM of RNO-Alania also wrote a letter addressed to the head of the RNO-Alania Prosecutor's Office with a request to take control of the "legality of the actions of law enforcement agencies" to detain members of the Muslim community²⁸. The next day, an appeal was published by the Council of the SAM of RNO-Alania, in which the Council reported about 20 detainees, characterized them as God-fearing and law-abiding citizens and expressed confidence in their innocence. The Council also issued a warning: "The relatives of the detainees are ready to come out for an indefinite protest against lawlessness and blatant violations of human rights by law enforcement agencies. There is a real danger that the situation in the republic will get out of control and develop according to the Kabardino-Balkarian scenario" (probably referring to the events of 2005, known as the "attack on Nalchik" – author).²⁹

On the same day, at an operational meeting of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Alania, the head of the Ministry, Artur Akhmetkhanov, demanded that his subordinates take measures to prevent the involvement of young people in the ranks of radical Islam: "Our main task is to preserve the sanctity of the three Ossetian pies and the traditional faith,"³⁰ – Akhmetkhanov said. It is noteworthy that the minister himself was a Bashkir by origin and an ethnic Muslim.

25 *ibid*

26 Olga Allenova. To break the Caucasus is to break Russia // *Kommersant*. Power. 13.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1655369>

27 Olga Allenova, Zaur Farniev. Poetic crisis // *Kommersant*. 13.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1655370>

28 The Council of the SAM of RNO-Alania appeals to the Prosecutor of the RNO-Alania // SAM of RNO-Alania. 01.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2011/06/01/2011-06-01-12-50-47/>

29 The appeal of the Council of the SAM of RNO-Alania // SAM of RNO-Alania. 02.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2011/06/02/2011-06-02-11-10-17/>

30 The Interior Minister of North Ossetia demands to protect young people from Islamic extremists // IA Regnum. 01.06.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/accidents/1411334.html>

Here we should note once again that the presence in Ossetia of a large number of followers of traditional Ossetian beliefs has a tremendous impact on the nature of confessional relations in the republic and, in particular, on the life of the Muslim community.

Sufian Zhemukhov in his research “Nationalism and Islam in Russia’s North Caucasus” identifies two main ethno-confessional trends in the modern North Caucasus. The first is the transition from nationalism to Islam among certain groups, especially in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia. The second, on the contrary, is represented by the growth of nationalism among predominantly Orthodox or Muslim-Christian ethnic groups. A special development of this phenomenon, in his opinion, occurred in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia and Ingushetia [11, p. 3]. In Ossetia, the colossal increase in followers of the traditional religion of Ossetians, in our opinion, is connected with this trend – the globalization processes that actualized the issue of assimilation of many ethnic groups, strengthened the desire of many Ossetians to self-identify and preserve their unique national culture, which has preserved a vast layer of archaic religious beliefs and rituals.

Since 2011, there has been an open conflict between representatives of the traditional Ossetian religion and Islam. One of the triggers of this conflict was a conversation between a member of the SAM of the Russian Federation Felix Tsokov and students of the local medical institute in May 2011, containing statements against adherents of the traditional Ossetian religion, accusing them of neo-paganism, a negative interpretation of the text of the Ossetian folk epic – Nart legends.

In 2013, a video recording of a short excerpt of this speech was posted on YouTube, titled “Muslims of North Ossetia against ‘neo-Paganism’.” At the end of the video, its author inserted the following text: “I am not an adept of the ‘Ossetian religion’ and specifically did not comment on his statements about the Narts, as this would take a lot of time. Tsokov snatches fragments out of context, distorts and presents them in a convenient way. Unfortunately, the realities of the modern world are such that Muslims can say anything and about anyone, and they will get away with it. But if a non-Muslim tries to question or ridicule certain provisions of Islam, he will automatically become an ‘Islamophobe’.”³¹ When viewing this video, it can be seen that the deputy mufti of the RNO-Alania, Ibrahim Dudarov, was sitting next to Felix Tsokov at the time of the conversation with the students.

In December 26, 2012, Ibrahim Dudarov was shot near the village of Chmi on the outskirts of Vladikavkaz upon returning home. Mufti of RNO-Alania Khadzhimurat Gatsalov commented on the death of his deputy as follows: “A man died for faith. I think this is due to his work in the SAM of RNO-Alania. Someone does not need such

³¹ Muslims of North Ossetia against “neo-paganism” // YouTube video. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UojDqYrmEU>

Islam in North Ossetia.”³² Apparently, the mufti suggested that Dudarov’s public activities, the moderation of his beliefs and his joint speeches with representatives of other faiths could cause discontent among people who are not interested in the normal integration of the Islamic community into the public life of Ossetia.

However, in November 2016, four years after the murder of Ibrahim Dudarov, words of solidarity with the murderers of the mufti, as well as threats of reprisal against Felix Tsokov in connection with a video recording of his speech at the medical institute were published on the social network VKontakte in the community of followers of the Ossetian religion “Uatsdin”: “We will do the same to others, and the rest will also follow them, we promise you,” – the anonymous user of the social network said in a statement. The SAM of RNO-Alania on its website published a statement to the heads of law enforcement agencies and screenshots of relevant comments on the social network.³³

The question of the anonymous person’s real awareness of the murder of Ibrahim Dudarov remains open, as well as the question of the motives of this crime, the investigation of which did not lead to any results. We believe the very fact of approving the murder of a Muslim figure, which was not noticed in any aggressive public statements or actions, speaks of the most serious tension in relations between representatives of communities that consider themselves to be the traditional Ossetian religion and Muslims.

On August 16, 2014, another crime was committed, which remained unsolved – the imam of the Cathedral Sunni Mosque Rasul Gamzatov was shot dead at the entrance.³⁴ Despite the fact that Rasul Gamzatov was also an opponent of radical Islam, published statements on this topic and even made a public report on “the causes of radicalism among young people”³⁵, the mufti of the republic Khadzhimurat Gatsalov did not support the version about the possibility of committing this crime by Islamic extremists: “The clients might be the same ones who killed Ibrahim Dudarov. Why is the murder of the previous imam not being investigated? Who benefits from killing orthodox Muslims? This was done by people who want to sow chaos in the republic. We have no radicals, no outsiders,” – the mufti stated³⁶.

The version about the absence of radical extremists in the republic who kill “moderate” Muslim clerics was also questioned by the head of the Republic, Taimuraz Mamsurov: “Someone is trying to make a republic of Ossetia a place where radicalization is widespread. I don’t understand who profits from this. Maybe this

32 The Mufti of North Ossetia connects the murder of the deputy with his work // RIA Novosti. 27.12.2012. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20121227/916395894.html>

33 The Council of the SAM of Ossetia files a statement about the crime // The official website of the SAM of RNO-Alania. 03.11.2016. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islam-osetia.ru/2016/11/03/sovet-dum-osetii-obratilsya-s-zayavleniem-o-prestuplenii/>

34 The Deputy Mufti of North Ossetia killed in Vladikavkaz // Kommersant. 17.08.14. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2547278>

35 Gamzatov Rasul Magomedovich // Kavkazky Uzel. August 18, 2014. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/247613/>

36 The Mufti of North Ossetia sees a link between the murders of two of his deputies // Interfax. 17.08.14. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/391734>

is because Ossetia has firmly established the reputation of a republic where strong interethnic and interfaith ties remain.”³⁷ The official website of the RNO-Alania Government published Mamsurov’s statements that the murder was a provocation aimed at sowing uncertainty and instability in the republic.³⁸

Stabilization of relations of the Muslim community with social institutions of the republic and the state power

One of the most important events of the last decade that affected the lives of Muslim communities around the world was the emergence of the international Islamic extremist terrorist organization ISIS.

The SAM of RSO-Alania adopted a fatwa prohibiting North Ossetian Muslims from participating in the war in Syria in May 2013, and became the first religious organization in Russia to adopt such a position.³⁹ The Council of Ulema of the SAM of the Russian Federation adopted a similar order only in March 2015⁴⁰, and the SAM of the Chechen Republic – in June 2015.⁴¹ Other governing bodies of Muslim communities during this period were in no hurry to adopt such fatwas. Journalist Yana Amelina explained this situation with caution related to the threat of revenge by representatives of radical Islam: “Other North Caucasian and Volga SAM, for whom this problem is fundamentally more acute, have not yet officially condemned ISIS, since exposing the ideology and practices of this terrorist organization puts the leaders of Russian Muslims under attack by radicals. To issue such a fatwa requires commitment and courage...”⁴²

In August 2015, at the conference “ISIS on the scales of Sharia” in Mozdok, the Religious Council of North Ossetia supplemented the instructions announced in 2013 with a fatwa that the Islamic State “is not a righteous Islamic caliphate and no one is allowed to swear allegiance to ISIS, go there or support them in any way”.⁴³

37 Mamsurov: the murder of the Deputy Mufti does not speak about the radicalization of Islam // RIA Novosti. 28.08.2014. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://ria.ru/20140825/1021359675.html>

38 Taimuraz Mamsurov: “Gamzatov’s murder is a provocation aimed at sowing uncertainty and instability in the republic” // Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, official portal. 20.08.2014. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://alania.gov.ru/news/1887>

39 Address to the participants of the conference, to the Muslims of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania // Official website of the SAM of RSO-Alania. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2013/05/28/2013-05-28-18-41-54/>

40 The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia has issued a fatwa against ISIS // TASS News Agency. March 31, 2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/1869303>

41 The Fatwa Council of the SAM of the Chechen Republic issues a legal opinion on the actions of ISIS // The Chechen Republic’s Grozny-inform News Agency. 10.06.2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.grozny-inform.ru/news/society/61230/>

42 Yana Amelina: Who is against stability in Ossetia? // Eurasia Daily News Agency (EADaily). September 11, 2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2015/09/11/yana-amelina-kogo-ne-ustraivaet-stabilnost-v-osetii>

43 The decision of the Religious Council of Muslims of the RNO-Alania // The official website of SAM of the RNO-Alania. 27.08.2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2015/08/27/2015-08-27-18-44-32/>

In June 2016, the Mufti of North Ossetia announced in the media about the possible preparation of an assassination attempt on him. He received an e-mail with a warning, telling that he needed to resign as soon as possible, and it was not worth trying to leave the republic, since they would “reach him everywhere”. After the murder of his two deputies, Gatsalov could not take such threats lightly and announced his intention to write a statement to law enforcement agencies.⁴⁴

In general, Khajimurat Gatsalov can be described as a figure who opposes radicalism and the opposition of Muslims to the secular state, for the normal integration of the Muslim community into social life, peaceful educational activities, constructive relations with the state authorities and representatives of Christianity. With regard to cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church, the Mufti expresses his desire for active and real cooperation. For instance, in 2013, he proposed an initiative to organize a joint pilgrimage of Muslims and Orthodox to the holy sites of Jerusalem.⁴⁵

Gatsalov also shows great readiness for discourse with representatives of various secular public organizations: for example, in April 2021, the mufti gave an interview to Agunda Bekoeva, an activist of the Ossetian movement against domestic violence, in which he condemned domestic abuse, justified its inadmissibility from the point of view of Islam, and expressed the need for the attention of the state and society to such issues.⁴⁶

It is also important to note the mufti's successful work with the “national” element, for which, in the conditions of the urgent need to preserve Ossetian culture, there is a great public demand. This is especially evident in the mufti's speeches and publications, where he emphasizes the similarity of the Islamic commandments and the “g'dau” – a set of traditional rules of conduct of Ossetians.

“National culture is a centuries-old layer of folk wisdom, customs, way of life, worldview, held on a religious basis, religious traditions and canons. It has absorbed the best that was created by the people for its history, which was formed by personalities who left a marked impact in the world civilization. It was from the moral elements of different eras that the multilayered “æg'dau” was formed, about which we know only by hearsay and which took place precisely on the moral basis of religious truths.”⁴⁷

The mufti also actively promotes the position of “monotheism” of the Ossetian tradition itself: “The language of Ossetians clearly defines the formula of

44 The Mufti of North Ossetia announces the preparation of an attempt on him // Kommersant. 10.01.2016. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2889205>

45 Yana Amelina. Muslims of North Ossetia: patriotic Russian vector // Scientific Society of Caucasiologists. 19.09.2014. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2014/09/19/musulmane-severnoj-osetii-patrioticheskij-rossijskij-vektor.html>

46 The Mufti of Ossetia and “Khotæ” discuss the problem of domestic violence. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJty9M31mHY>

47 Khadzhimurat Gatsalov: We have to change ourselves // Information and analytical website “Ossetia-Kwaisa”. 16.06.2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://osetia.kvaisa.ru/1-rubriki/03-vstrecha-dlyavas/xadzhimurat-gacalov-my-dolzny-izmenitsya-sami/>

monotheism, testifies that there is God and no deity except God: “Iunæg Kaddzhyn Khuytsau, æmbal kamæn næy”⁴⁸. If we are talking about religion, we must understand that God gave us language by putting the testimony of monotheism into our mouths”.⁴⁹

Also, the SAM of RNO-Alania is constantly working to resolve serious conflicts between residents of the republic, as well as between residents of Ossetia and representatives of neighboring republics, in particular, to prevent blood feuds and to reconcile “blood avengers”.⁵⁰

Summarizing the results of the last decade, it is important to note that the SAM of RNO-Alania carries out regular political and social activities and is one of the most important actors in the public life of North Ossetia, as well as one of the most socially active Muslim communities in Russia.

Conclusions

1. General studies of the current state of the Muslim religion in the North Caucasus cover the situation in North Ossetia very poorly, and sometimes even consider the republic as a region where Islam is not that widespread. However, we believe that the need for research in this area is seriously underestimated, since the experience of the existence and development of the Muslim community in the republic, where it is a confessional minority and is closed among the “antagonist” confessions, while constantly experiencing the influence of neighboring Muslim republics, as well as the unconditional influence of global religious trends, is unique and causes great scientific interest.

2. After the revival of religious communities, Ossetian “neophytes” turned out to be receptive to the ideas of radical Muslim movements, since in Ossetia, as already mentioned, the generational continuity of religious tradition was destroyed, and also, importantly, there was no established tradition of Sufi Islam (as in Chechnya, Ingushetia or Dagestan), the philosophical basis of which is in contradiction with the ideas of Wahhabism.

3. The terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004 had irreversible consequences for the Muslim community in Ossetia and the attitude towards it in society. Gradually, in the process of relatively peaceful coexistence and the absence of mass interfaith conflicts, the degree of intolerance towards Muslims in Ossetia has decreased,

48 “The only revered God who has no companions” – translated from the Ossetian language.

49 Khadzhimurat Gatsalov. The road of monotheism // The official website of the SAM of RNO-Alania. 02.03.2011. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2011/03/02/2011-03-02-08-06-45/>

50 A good deed has been done // The official website of the SAM of RNO-Alania. 23.07.2015. Electronic resource. Available at: <http://islamsetia.ru/2015/07/23/2015-07-23-20-04-13/>; The Muftis of the Chechen Republic and North Ossetia-Alania discuss the work on reconciliation of blood relatives // The Chechen Republic’s News Agency Grozny-inform. 04.03.2020. Electronic resource. Available at: <https://www.grozny-inform.ru/news/society/117687/>

but the impact of the Beslan tragedy causes the still cautious attitude of the state apparatus and society of Ossetia to Islam and its attributes.

4. In our opinion, some of the events described in the study confirm the hypotheses put forward by well-known world researchers in the field of terrorism and radicalism that one of the psychological factors of destructive behavior of members of radical organizations is a sense of humiliation and the need for revenge arising in connection with it.

5. If in the first decade of the 21st century it was possible to talk about a certain tension between representatives of the Islamic clergy of Ossetia and representatives of the local diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church, then in its second decade conflicts with the increasingly active passionate adherents of the traditional Ossetian religion have become more relevant for the Muslim community.

6. It is safe to say that in the 20s of the 21st the split between supporters of moderate Islam and supporters of radical views has finally been overcome. Manifestations of the “radical opposition” have disappeared within the Muslim community of North Ossetia. The current leadership of the SAM of RNO-Alania openly opposes radicalism and the opposition of Muslims to the secular state, for the integration of the Muslim community into social secular life, peaceful educational activities, constructive relations with the state authorities, representatives of Christianity and secular public organizations.

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