

## Country Report

# Russia

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This Country Report offers a detailed assessment of religious diversity and violent religious radicalisation in the above-named state. It is part of a series covering 23 countries (listed below) on four continents. More basic information about religious affiliation and state-religion relations in these states is available in our Country Profiles series. This report was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

### **Countries covered in this series:**

Albania, Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

<http://grease.eui.eu>



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**The EU-Funded GREASE project looks to Asia for insights on governing religious diversity and preventing radicalisation.**

Involving researchers from Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, GREASE is investigating how religious diversity is governed in over 20 countries. Our work focuses on comparing norms, laws and practices that may (or may not) prove useful in preventing religious radicalisation. Our research also sheds light on how different societies cope with the challenge of integrating religious minorities and migrants. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how religious diversity can be governed successfully, with an emphasis on countering radicalisation trends.

While exploring religious governance models in other parts of the world, GREASE also attempts to unravel the European paradox of religious radicalisation despite growing secularisation. We consider the claim that migrant integration in Europe has failed because second generation youth have become marginalised and radicalised, with some turning to jihadist terrorism networks. The researchers aim to deliver innovative academic thinking on secularisation and radicalisation while offering insights for governance of religious diversity.

The project is being coordinated by Professor Anna Triandafyllidou from The European University Institute (EUI) in Italy. Other consortium members include Professor Tariq Modood from The University of Bristol (UK); Dr. H. A. Hellyer from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) (UK); Dr. Mila Mancheva from The Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria); Dr. Egdunas Raciunas from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania); Mr. Terry Martin from the research communications agency SPIA (Germany); Professor Mehdi Lahlou from Mohammed V University of Rabat (Morocco); Professor Haldun Gulalp of The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkey); Professor Pradana Boy of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (Indonesia); Professor Zawawi Ibrahim of The Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (Malaysia); Professor Gurpreet Mahajan of Jawaharlal Nehru University (India); and Professor Michele Grossman of Deakin University (Melbourne, Australia). GREASE is scheduled for completion in 2022.

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GREASE - Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

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## **Introduction**

Religion can play very diverse roles in the political and mundane life of states and people. It can be a source of collective identity, it can contribute to domestic stability, and it also can strengthen the state's stance on the international arena. However, religion can be a destabilizing factor too. It can be and often is used to provoke and fuel international conflict and domestic unrest. The negative role of religion is the focus of this report, which analyses the religious radicalisation in the Russian Federation.

Officially, Russia is a secular country. The Constitution of the country, which was adopted in 1993, states (Article 14) that Russia has no state religion and that people are free in their beliefs. This secularist and democratic attitude, unfortunately, can prevent neither religious radicalisation nor religiously based violence.

Despite the variety of religious groups in Russia and a similar level of their exposition to the extremist ideas, the state is mostly concerned with the Islamic radicalisation. The main reason for it is that Islamic revival, after the decades of the Soviet suppression, took a more radical form. It was used to increase nationalist sentiments, which resulted in separatism and consequent violence. The strict state approach, in turn, fuelled further mutual distrust and made Muslims susceptible to radicalisation to a larger extent than any other religious group. And, as experts claim, "the reasons behind such susceptibility are still present."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, out of 8,985 people and 497 organizations that are identified by the state as extremists<sup>2</sup>, the majority are linked with Islam. This justifies the "Islamic" focus of the report, even though other religious groups in Russia demonstrate signs of radicalisation too. The report considers radicalisation mainly within the "Muslim" regions of the country. It analyses religious radicalisation in the republics of the North Caucasus (namely, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Dagestan), Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan.

The first part of the report constructs a general overview of today's ethno-religious composition of Russia. It refers to some statistical information considering the numbers of believers and includes expert estimates regarding the actual religious belonging of the population. The second part explores a historic background of Islamic radicalisation in Russia and reviews the legal frame that regulates the relations between the state and religious communities. This part briefly presents the interaction between the state and Muslims before the collapse of the Soviet Union and after it. It searches for the explanation of why some Russian Muslims are less susceptible to radicalisation than others. In addition to this, this part critically analyses the existing legal frame, which was designed to stop the spread of religious radicalisation. The third part groups and presents the reasons of religious radicalisation in Russia. This part includes the analyses of experts, state officials, and the opinion of the general population. This part unites all

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<sup>1</sup> Eksperty obsudili perspektivy radikalizatsii na Severnom Kavkaze I mery po ee preduprezhdeniiu 01/02/2019 [https://memohrc.org/ru/news\\_old/eksperty-obsudili-perspektivy-radikalizatsii-na-severnom-kavkaze-i-mery-po-ee](https://memohrc.org/ru/news_old/eksperty-obsudili-perspektivy-radikalizatsii-na-severnom-kavkaze-i-mery-po-ee) accessed 02/02/2019.

<sup>2</sup> Perechen terroristov I ekstremistov <http://www.fedsfm.ru/documents/terrorists-catalog-portal-act> accessed 11/05/19.

the identified reasons under the categories of socio-economic, socio-political, cultural-ideological, and personal-psychological. The last part investigates the methods that the state employs to fight radicalisation and its expression in the form of extremism and terrorism. This section presents two types of methods: 1) the active counter-terrorism measures that are usually implemented by the police and the military, and; 2) the preventive methods with the contribution of the non-governmental sector. The report concludes listing the most significant reasons of radicalisation in the modern Russia.

### Current ethno-religious composition of the country

The presentation of the ethnoreligious composition of the Russian Federation is slightly problematic. It cannot be very precise due to three factors. Firstly, it can be based only on the last official census of the Russian Federation, which was conducted nine years ago, in 2010, and which does not consider the religious belonging of people. The demographic trends in the country suggest that since that time the Muslim population of Russia has increased, whereas the size of the non-Muslim population has contracted. Secondly, the census does not include the population of the annexed Crimea (over two million people), a significant part of which is Muslim. The third problem raises the question, who can be considered a believer: everyone who declares his/her religious belonging or those who strictly follow all commands of a religion? As is known, not all people follow religious practices, even if they insist on having a religious affiliation.

The said obstacles do not allow making accurate calculations of the numbers of believers in Russia. All these problems should be taken into consideration while reading Table 1, which is based on the 2010 and 2002 Russia's censuses.

Table 1: The largest ethnic groups of the Russian Federation and their "ethnic religions", according to Russia's censuses of 2002 and 2010

	Million people		Percentage of those who indicated their ethnic background	
	2002	2010	2002	2010
O - Orthodox Christians				
MS – Muslims Sunni				
MSh – Muslims Shiites				
AC – Apostolic Church				
T – Traditional (Pagan)				
B - Buddhism				
All	145,17	142,86		
Those who indicated their ethnic background	143,71	137,23	100,0	100,0
Russians (O)	115,89	111,02	80,64	80,90
Tatars (MS)	5,55	5,31	3,87	3,87
Ukrainians (O)	2,94	1,93	2,05	1,41
Bashkirs (MS)	1,67	1,58	1,16	1,15
Chuvash (O/MS)	1,64	1,44	1,14	1,05

O - Orthodox Christians MS – Muslims Sunni MSh – Muslims Shiites AC – Apostolic Church T – Traditional (Pagan) B - Buddhism	Million people		Percentage of those who indicated their ethnic background	
	2002	2010	2002	2010
Chechens (MS)	1,36	1,43	0,95	1,04
Armenians (AC)	1,13	1,18	0,79	0,86
Avars (MS)	0,81	0,91	0,57	0,66
Mordva (O/T)	0,84	0,74	0,59	0,54
Kazakhs (MS)	0,65	0,65	0,46	0,47
Azeries (MSh/MS)	0,62	0,60	0,43	0,44
Dargins (MS)	0,51	0,59	0,35	0,43
Udmurts (O/T)	0,64	0,55	0,44	0,40
Mari (O/T)	0,60	0,55	0,42	0,40
Ossetians (O/MS)	0,51	0,53	0,36	0,39
Belorusians (O)	0,81	0,52	0,56	0,38
Kabardans (MS)	0,52	0,52	0,36	0,38
Kumyks (MS)	0,42	0,50	0,29	0,37
Yakuts (T/O/MS)	0,44	0,48	0,31	0,35
Lezgins (MS)	0,41	0,47	0,29	0,35
Buryats (B/T/O)	0,45	0,46	0,31	0,34
Ingush (MS)	0,41	0,44	0,29	0,32
Others	4,85	4,81	3,40	3,51
Those, who did not indicate their ethnic identity	1,46	5,63		

Source: Ob itogah Vserossiyskoi perepisi naseleniya 2010 goda

<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0491/perep01.php>

As is seen in Table 1, the ethnoreligious composition of the Russian population is quite diverse, and the censuses do not give precise information concerning the real numbers of the believers. This problem has been in the focus of researchers for some time. One of the most credible and respectful sociological centres in Russia “Levada-group” tried to find out more accurate numbers of believers in the Russian Federation. In 2012, the analysts of the Centre conducted a survey the results of which are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The religious identity as declared by the population in the Russian Federation

• Religion	• Percentage of the population
• Orthodox Christianity	• 74 %
• No association	• 10 %
• <b>Islam</b>	• <b>7 %</b>
• Atheism	• 5 %
• Cannot answer	• 2 %
• Catholicism	• 1 %
• Protestantism	• 1 %
• Judaism	• 1 %
• Buddhism	• <1 %
• Hinduism	• <1 %
• Other	• <1 %
• Refused to answer	• 0 %

Source: Levada-centre. Russians about religion

<https://www.levada.ru/2013/12/24/rossiyane-o-religii/>

The data presented in Table 2 is based on the answers received to the direct question about a person's religious belonging. However, a deeper investigation of the question reveals a different picture. For instance, the sociologists found out that only 33% of those who declared themselves as Orthodox Christians visit churches to pray or to lit up a candle. A little bit less than that (29%) visit churches for the wedding ceremonies, funerals, baptism, or when "they feel like doing so". 24 % do not visit churches at all. Even less (11%) follow religious services or participate in some of them. And only seven per cent are considered by Orthodox priests as true believers as they confess regularly.<sup>3</sup>

A slightly better situation can be observed among the Muslims of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. In these regions, the disparity between the declared belonging and the actual practice of religion's commands is not that big. Even though Tatars and Bashkirs are very much secularized, the revival of Islam is obvious in these republics. There are new mosques built recently, Islamic shops, and some people observe religious dress code.

<sup>3</sup> Zagvozdina D, 17/12/2012 V Rossii bolshe musulman. Novaia Gazeta. Available online <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/2012/12/17/4894681.shtml> (accessed 02/06/2019).

Map 1. Russian Federation “Muslim” regions



The position of Islam is much stronger in the eastern part of the North Caucasus, where most of the population not only declare but also follow most religious prescriptions. This might be connected to the confrontational history of the region with Russia, which made the Islamic identity of the North Caucasians more salient. Furthermore, in dissimilarity to Tatarstan (53.2% of the Tatars) and Bashkortostan (29.5% of the Bashkirs and 25.4% of the Tatars), local ethnic groups in the eastern part of the North Caucasus constitute the overwhelming majority (over 70%). Such an ethnic composition implies societal pressure, which translates into the Islamization of society. However, even here it would not be correct to consider everyone a true believer. The experience of living in the Soviet state, as well as past state policies of Russification, undermined the religious identity of many (see Hertog 2005).

To sum up, the Muslim population in Russia, according to different estimates, is growing bigger. There are 12-20 million Muslims in Russia today and, according to some estimates, the Muslim population might increase up to 30 million by 2030 (Aliyeva 2014). Apparently, these estimates include “ethnic Muslims” - those who were born into Muslim families, claim their belonging to Islam, but do not observe the religious practice.

### **The state and religion**

#### **The historic roots of religious radicalisation**

Islam became one of Russia's major religions since the second half of the sixteenth century when the Moscow principality started expanding into the territories of the former Golden Horde. The conquests of Kazan and Astrakhan khanates significantly increased Russia's Muslim population, which was not only incorporated but successfully integrated by the state. The integration of the Tatars (all Turcic-speaking Volga Muslims were identified in Russia as Tatars) and the centuries of living in the same state most

probably contribute to the prevention of a massive religious radicalisation among the Volga Muslims today.

Later (in the nineteenth century) Russia's expansion and the consequent attempt to integrate North Caucasian Muslims were less successful. There are two main reasons for it. Firstly, the conquered nations had less (than in Tatar case) time for integration. Secondly, the prolonged conquest turned the Islamic identity of these nations into a primary collective identity. The distinction asserted between "Us" and "Them" by the war was strengthened by the harsh policies of Imperial Russia, and later the Soviet Union and the sovereign Russian Federation. For instance, the deportation of Balkar, Karachay, Ingush, and Chechen nations in 1944 became the chosen trauma for these peoples and contributed to creating the background for their later radicalisation (Williams 2000). The memory of the Caucasian War of the nineteenth century bears similar importance for Dagestanis. To sum up, the "suppressive state policies of Imperial Russia and later the Soviet Union prevented the effective integration of the North Caucasians" (Shabatsiuk 2014) into Russia and, in the words of Lieven (1998, 363) kept "the Muslim spirit pulsing in their veins" until the collapse of the USSR.

### **Radicalisation processes after the dissolution of the Soviet Union**

The conclusion made by Lieven concerning the "Muslim spirit" was probably based on the observation of the events that started unfolding in 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev's initiated perestroika (restructuring) provoked a huge revival of Islam. The scale of this revival can be realized through the growing number of mosques in the country. For instance, in 1985 there were only 47 mosques in the North Caucasus but just five years later there were already 431 mosques in the region (Pokalova 2017). Today, there are thousands of them and this number is still growing bigger.

In the early 1990s, Islam started becoming political (Henze 1995, 37). This was determined not only by the revival of religion but also by the appearance of the new (and politically active) branches of Islam on the territory of the former Soviet Union. The success of the missionaries, who brought these new branches of Islam, can be explained by two factors: 1) the ignorance of the Soviet Muslims, who were practicing exclusively cultural versions of the different branches of Sufi Islam; 2) the shattered reputation of the home-grown religious authorities, who discredited themselves by collaborating with the Soviet secret service, KGB (Souleimanov 2015). The words of the former Mufti of Tatarstan Ildus Faisov confirm the significance of the first factor. He describes the situation in the early 1990s in the following way: "Every Arab student for us was almost a Prophet Muhammad, we thought that now they (Arabs and Turks) will teach us the real [correct] Islam" (Souleimanov 2015). The second factor did not lose its importance even today. The state continues relying on the home-grown religious authorities and supports Sufi Islam over the other branches. This discredits Sufi Islam in the eyes of believers and especially of the youth, who see the institutionalized religion as part of the corrupt and unjust system, which increases the popularity of other branches of Islam (Starodubovskaia and Kazenin 2014).

Despite the mentioned factors, it can be agreed with Lieven (1998, 363) that before the start of the First Chechen War in 1994, there was no social or political basis for Islamic radicalisation in any Muslim populated republics of the Russian Federation. Indeed, the war of 1994-1996 changed the situation. It inspired further Islamization of the local nationalists, who were introduced to (and to a significant extent adopted) the new branch of Islam - Salafism. The latter was brought to the region by the international jihadists.

The Second Russo-Chechen War (1999-2009), which spilled over the borders of the republic, contributed to the Salafisation of the whole North Caucasus. The popularity of Salafism among the North Caucasians can be explained by several interrelated factors. Among them are the harsh policies of the state, the atrocities of the war, the fear of death, the economic hardship, etc. Therefore, as Hahn (2007, 2) notices, "radical Islam became a shelter for many, who were searching for remedies for their problems". Moreover, the war in Chechnya produced two correlating tendencies - it decreased the number of fighters and increased the level of their radicalisation. Those who remained on this path were truly ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of God. Moreover, they have internationalized - it became irrelevant to them where to wage jihad. This can be surmised from the allegiance pledged by the North Caucasian jihadists to the caliph of the ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in 2014.

To sum up, during the last three decades, Russia lived through very massive social and political upheaval. This instability contributed to the appearance of a politically active branch of Islam (Salafism) on the territory of the former Soviet Union. The adherents of this type of Islam became the backbone of the later radicalisation of the Muslims in Russia, who sympathized with the Chechen struggle for independence. Other reasons of religious radicalisation are presented after a brief introduction to the legal frame that regulates interaction between the state and religion.

### **The laws and regulations**

As was noted above, Russia has had a long and uneven relationship between state and religion. This can still be seen today in the legacy, which modern Russia has inherited from the state-predecessor: The Soviet Union. Especially, it is obvious in the state's attitude and its policies towards religion. In a few words, these policies are oriented to ensure the state's control over religion.

In the case of Islam, it comes as a state's attempt to recreate the Soviet system of religious education. In addition to this, the state tries to ensure control over the believers through the hierarchical system of religious institutions, which, theoretically, make Russian Muslims accountable to the central Muslim Spiritual Board. The promotion of the less political Sufi branch of Islam goes in line with these policies.

The new technologies that allowed more communication over the borders and the possibility to study in the world-famous religious centres, such as Al Azhar University, made these efforts of control by the state almost fruitless. Russia realizes this and tries to adapt to the new reality through new (in some cases updated) legislation, which aims to prevent religious radicalisation and to regulate the state-religion relations.

Due to it being recent, the said legal frame does not constitute a huge body. Most of these regulations, that were adopted after Vladimir Putin's ascendance to power in 1999 (Hmyzova 2016) are presented in Appendix 1.

It should be recognized that Russia's legal frame provides a considerably good basis for countering and preventing radicalisation. However, it is not perfect and is often criticized due to its imprecision that allows loose interpretation of the terminology and thus inspires abuse of the law<sup>4</sup>. For instance, there were some cases when the accusation of extremism was based on expert opinion, which could not be unbiased (Gordeev 2015). An interviewee for this report confirms:

"It is already some time that the police and FSB use this tactic. They find "an expert", who receives a payment for his opinion. The opinion of such an expert goes in line with what the police want to hear. Obviously, no respectful expert would do so. Well..., sometimes they trick even decent experts. Usually, they ask their opinion regarding only a small excerpt, which might seem as extremist propaganda. But in the context of the whole text, it would not seem so. That's how sometimes a book, which is, in fact, a scientific work, can end up in the list of the extremist literature and that's how some people end up in prison for nothing..." (Moscow 18/03/2019).

In addition to this, public criticism targets the local legislation. Based on the presented documents each subject of the Russian Federation is entitled to initiate its program for preventing or countering terrorism and religious extremism, adapting it to the local needs. This freedom resulted in the creation of multipurpose programs, plans, strategies, and documents with limited access. These documents are usually available only to the local law enforcement bodies and in many cases clash with the Federal Laws. Among those available for the public eyes, human rights activists usually mention the law N47-R3 "on the prohibition of the extremist religious activities, and administrative responsibility for the infringements of the rules that regulate religious activities" (Kabardino-Balkaria) and the equivalents of it adopted in Dagestan (in 1999) and Chechnya (in 2001). The law allows a loose interpretation of the key terms such as extremism and, according to the leading Dagestani sociologist Zaid Abdulagatov (2014), results in the rather unlawful behaviour of the police officers. The lack of accountability creates a negative image of the police force, the judicial system, and the state in general, which translates into people's (sometimes radical) protest reaction.

### **Reasons for religious radicalisation**

The previous sections have established that some of Russia's regions (especially the North Caucasus) are more inclined towards radicalisation than others. This is mostly due to historical factors, such as the long and bloody conquest and the comparatively short time of (and hence not very successful) integration. The constantly recurrent

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<sup>4</sup> T. Lokshina, 03/10/19. Bogus Terrorism Charges Against Russian Journalists <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/03/bogus-terrorism-charges-against-russian-journalists> accessed 03/10/19.

clashes between the state and the society and the arbitrariness of the authorities also encouraged the predisposition of the North Caucasians towards radicalisation (Abdulagatov 2014).

However, some other factors and reasons also play a significant role. One of them is a global tendency of radicalisation. New technologies, the openness of the borders, the possibility to study abroad, etc. made it impossible to avoid the global tendencies of Islamic radicalisation. The vulnerability of Russia, as is claimed by Gadzhiev and Gadzhiev (2011), is due not only to the new technologies but also due to the collapse of the older system. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia became an attractive field for Islamists, who would often visit the country to spread their ideas and promote Salafism (Souleimanov 2015).

However, even these scholars who follow the official discourse agree that the state's weakness have also contributed to the spread of radical ideas to a large extent. According to Yakhyaiev and Sultanakhmedova (2017), the radicalisation happens because Russia abandoned the Soviet mechanisms of control and patriotic education of the youth (the most vulnerable part of the population) and did not replace them with anything yet.

After presenting the factors that might have contributed to the spread of radical ideas, the section further investigates the reasons of radicalisation in Russia. These reasons, following the suggestion of Yakhyaiev and Sultanakhmedova (2017), are grouped into four categories: **socio-economic, socio-political, cultural-ideological, and personal-psychological.**

**The socio-political reasons** of religious radicalisation are very tightly connected to the historical circumstances that were partly presented above. The years of perestroika (restructuring 1985-1990) and the decade that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union can be characterized as the years that laid a favourable background for the chaos, lawlessness, and hence - radicalisation. The state was weak, the attempt to change the country from totalitarianism into democracy resulted in anarchy, and the law merged with the crime. In brief, people ended up in a situation when one could not rely on the state institutions in the search for security (see Makarov 2011). The burgeoning separatist and nationalist movements also contributed to the later radicalisation.

The situation was exacerbated by the high unemployment and the lack of opportunity for upward socio-economic mobility, which were partly caused by enrooted corruption and nepotism. The latter problems were especially visible in the North Caucasus, where the clan connections determine the possibilities of employment and the social status of an individual. In addition to this, there is a need for transparency in the political process. This situation created demand for justice, which could not be realized due to the corrupt nature of the power institutions and the lack of effective democratic measures. This, in turn, eased the spread of radical ideologies, which suggests an alternative that seems much more attractive to people than the present situation. Therefore, the idea of fighting for a just state/system or even dying for it for many seems a much better alternative than being stuck in the limbo of today. In a few words, all that is needed to radicalise

people in such a situation is a well-presented ideology and a vision for a better future, which can be achieved only by radical means.

**The socio-economic reasons** of radicalisation in Russia are tightly connected to or even based on socio-political ones. They are rooted in the systemic crisis that swept across the Russian Federation in the 1990s. The components of this crisis play a big role in spreading protest sentiments among Muslims, which were then channeled towards radical interpretations of Islam. Among the components of this crisis, there are problems associated with the poor performance of the Russian economy, which is connected to the inefficiency of the political institutions and their inability to ensure stable economic growth and a decent quality of life. The gap between the authorities and the common population, as well as corruption, creates a basis for the population's dissatisfaction, which is exacerbated by the high level of unemployment and the lack of opportunities for a personal career.

In some regions, the systemic and economic crisis had a larger impact than in others. Particularly, it is apparent in the North Caucasus, where unemployment reaches up to 60% and where the level of radicalisation is the highest (Souleimanov 2016). Up until now, the authorities were ineffective and unable to solve the problem of unemployment and to reduce the dependency of the North Caucasian republics on subsidies from the Federal Centre. This dependency makes the budget a focal resource, the access to which is perceived as a possibility to ensure a stable income. Hence, an unprecedentedly high level of corruption on all levels of governance.

Such a situation contributes to the spread of radicalisation as a reaction and a search for social justice. It also facilitates the recruitment process for radical Islamists. As a result, corruption has been widely cited by the radicals in their appeals to the population and as an encouragement to join the jihad to restore social justice (Pokalova 2017). Therefore, as Yarlykapov (2016) claims, corruption and social injustice are among the reasons of the radicalisation.

**Cultural and ideological reasons** for religious radicalisation were partly discussed above as they are related to the history of the Russian conquest of the Muslim territories. The resistance to the Russian advance made the Islamic identity of the local ethnicities more salient and resulted in a difficult process of integration, the consequences of which can be felt even today. For instance, labor migrants from the North Caucasus are not particularly welcome in other parts of Russia (Shabatsiuk 2014). This claim is supported by worrying statistics compiled by the Levada-center. The statistics assert that up to 60% of the respondents feel negativity or even hatred towards the newcomers from the Caucasus, which most probably was one of the reasons for a similar or even harsher reaction from the North Caucasians. It is also known that up to a half of the Russian inhabitants supported the slogan "Stop feeding the Caucasus" (Shabatsiuk 2014), which demonstrates the negative attitude towards the North Caucasian republics and their population in general. This deepens the rupture between the Russians and the smaller ethnic groups in Russia. The "unwanted newcomers" develop a stronger association

with the religious kin groups and are ready to be radicalised. Even less prone to radicalisation ethnic groups such as the Tatars are keen to support their religious affiliates against the authorities or religiously different ethnic groups. As one of the informants for this report claimed: "Russia's attempts to suppress Tatar ethnicity had an opposite effect - people now are more and more interested in their roots and religion" (Kazan 19/03/2019).

In the North Caucasus, the situation is exacerbated by machism and general violence, which is very much embedded in the local culture. As one of the respondents for this report from Dagestan asserted:

'We are Caucasians, and for us, it does not take much to get violent. If other people can take things easy, we cannot. We start fighting at once. Therefore, sometimes it is easier to accuse us of being radicalised, even if we are not' (15/01/2019, Skype interview).

The level of radicalisation can also be dependent on the youth bulge. As is argued by Malashenko (2007, 31), the population of the North Caucasus is growing quite fast comparing to the rest of Russia. Over the last two decades it increased about 20%. This increase means that there are many young people in the region. Their dissatisfaction with the current situation can be a reason for radicalisation.

**Personal-psychological reasons** are also connected to all the mentioned above. For instance, the phenomenon of the Chechen female terrorists, who were generally known as Black Widows, can also be categorized as such. The nickname "Black Widows" originates from the black (mourning) clothes of women, who lost their husbands or brothers during the Second Russo-Chechen War and decided to retaliate. The motivation of their behavior, classified as terrorist, is rather ingrained in the local tradition of blood revenge, which even now is not considered (in the region) as something that stands out of normality. The way they have chosen to seek revenge was rather unusual though.

The extremist acts of youth provoked by the disagreement with the older generation can also be considered as the personal-psychological reason for radicalisation. As is known, in the traditional societies of the North Caucasus, youth is usually doomed to take secondary roles. The radical branches of Islam encourage to change this situation and youth is keen to adopt these "liberating" ideas in opposition to the suppression by the older generation.

This section can be summed up with the results of the sociological survey conducted in Dagestan in 2011 (the region started taking the "leadership" in the amount of the terrorist acts in Russia since 2010). The survey demonstrated that the population became aware of the existing problems and the reasons behind the radicalisation of youth. The largest batch of the respondents (37%) out of 500 (randomly chosen) considered unemployment as the main reason behind radicalisation. The second biggest batch (16%) claimed that radicalisation became possible due to the unsatisfied work of law enforcement bodies and the fearful system of power. Twelve percent of the participants named corruption as the main reason for radicalisation. Ten percent argued that radicalisation is boosted by the population's dissatisfaction with the local authorities. The lack of a non-religious political opposition was mentioned by nine

percent of the respondents. And only seven percent claimed that radicalisation was incited by the contacts of the North Caucasian Muslims with those from the Middle East (Muslimov 2011). Although unemployment is mentioned as the first reason of radicalisation, it is apparent that the respondents tended to blame the authorities (in different ways) for radicalisation in Dagestan. Certainly, a similar sociological survey in the different parts of Russia might have raised the different problems as the most important one, but to a large extent, the reasons, most probably, would be repeated.

### **Preventing radicalisation in Russia**

Same as in many other countries, the state institutions play the most important role in fighting radicalisation in Russia. In doing so, they utilize a variety of methods. All these methods can be grouped under two large categories. The first category includes the methods that actively counter the outcome of radicalisation in the form of extremism or terrorism. This, usually, means involvement of the law enforcement organizations or military forces and the reliance on coercion and force. The second category can be named as passive-preventive. It includes all those methods that warn about the danger of extremism, educate people about its perils, teach how to recognize the signs of radicalisation, and encourage them to oppose it. In doing this, the state relies not only on the law enforcement bodies but on civil society too. Non-governmental organizations can be a part of educative and other programs that are usually developed or controlled by the state.

The detailed explanations of the methods that are used in Russia to counter and prevent religious radicalisation are presented below starting with the most popular ones - coercive.

### **Actively countering extremism**

Since 1999, when the then chief of the Federal Security Service (better known by its Russian acronym FSB) Vladimir Putin was appointed as the prime minister of Boris Yeltsin's government, Russia turned into a hawkish state in the foreign and domestic politics. Especially rigid was the approach of the new prime minister towards terrorism. Putin's position concerning it has never changed since he declared that there will be no negotiations with terrorists. He reiterated it many times on different occasions, even using Russian slang: "So if we find them in the toilet, excuse me, we'll rub them out in the outhouse ..." <sup>5</sup> This became a motto for the law enforcement institutions, who were ready to "rub out" terrorists together with the civilians, which they did in the Dubrovka Theatre in 2002 when the special forces finished the hostage drama by gassing terrorists together with the civilian victims. The same motto was followed in Beslan in 2004 when the military turned the school hostage crisis into a bloodbath. The same happened on many other occasions that received less extensive international coverage.

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<sup>5</sup> Fifteen years of Vladimir Putin: in quotes

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/11588182/Fifteen-years-of-Vladimir-Putin-in-quotes.html>

The local authorities also follow this command eagerly. The alleged fighters are being abducted, tortured, and killed without formal trials. For instance, according to the *Novaya Gazeta* and Human Rights Centre "Memorial", only in January of 2017, the Chechen police forces executed 27 people without any legal process (Sokirianskaia 2019). The statistics of the years before, especially in the North Caucasus, are much more appalling. The Chechen authorities persecute even the relatives of the alleged fighters. They burn down or explode their houses and oust them out of the republic or abduct and keep them as hostages until the fighters surrender. People do not have any protection mechanism from this kind of state repressions (Starodubovskaya and Kazenin 2014), which continue even after the death of a fighter. It became a common practice to fire the widows of the fighters from work and to deprive them of the social and financial support that they are entitled to. Less harsh policies are adopted by the governments of the Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia. Indeed, Ingushetia is the only republic, which declared that it will invest time and money rehabilitating the widows of the fighters (Sokirianskaia 2018).

In general, the main target of the preventive methods in the North Caucasus is those who follow Salafi (commonly known as Wahhabi in Russia) Islam. The adherents of Wahhabism/Salafism are synonymized with terrorists since the time of the Second Russo-Chechen War of 1999-2009. Therefore, those who practice this type of Islam, are under constant threat of being detained or killed, especially in Chechnya and Dagestan. The exterior attributes such as long beard and short trousers usually suffice to identify a person as Salafi.

The head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov publicly declared that adherents of Salafism ("the Satans" in Kadyrov's terminology) do not have a place in Chechnya and that they "should be killed". This was reiterated by a close Kadyrov's associate, the deputy of the ministry of interior affairs Aпти Alaudinov on Grozny TV. In the address to his inferiors he stated: "I swear by Qur'an, if there is any little resemblance with Wahhabis..., I personally told – hack them down. Who you can imprison – imprison, if you have a chance to put something into the pocket [meaning drugs or weapons] and accuse after - do it. Do whatever you want, kill whoever you want" (in Malashenko 2014). And the police forces even on the municipal level do their best to complete Alaudinov's order, as every extremist attack on the territory of their district means the end of their career. For the locals, it means a round of "preventive works", which usually result in the detention of 150-200 people. As a rule, the police keep the detained in secret places for a few weeks regularly beating them, which is also considered as an effective method that prevents probable radicalisation (Yarlykapov 2018).

In dissimilarity to Chechnya, Dagestan's authorities were more willing and persistent in the search for a dialogue with the Salafi adherents. For instance, in Dagestan (in 2010-2012), by the order of president Magomedislam Magomedov, the authorities stopped repressing Salafi Muslims and their businesses, and this decreased the pool of potential fighters. However, after some time the police returned to their repressive methods, which eventually pushed the Salafis back to the underground.

### **Soft power methods**

Despite considerable success in coercion, Russia's government came to the understanding that it is impossible to win against religious extremism relying only on brute force. Since 2010, the authorities have turned to soft power methods, which are also called preventive in Russia. The central government, as it was partly explained above, entitled the local authorities to choose their ways of countering and preventing radicalisation. Hence, these methods differ from region to region and yet can be united under the categories of informative-educative and ideological-repressive. The informative-educative methods designed to 1) explain the essence of religious extremism and its danger; 2) form a negative opinion about it, and; 3) encourage people to join a fight against it. The ideological-repressive methods aim at 1) propagating socially important values; 2) promoting "peaceful" Islam over the "dangerous" form of it, and; 3) controlling the possible spread of the Salafi Islam. The detailed description of the said methods, which are practiced in some of the North Caucasian republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria), Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan are presented further below.

#### ***Informative-educative methods***

The informative-educative methods include different types of preventive activities such as meetings, lectures, mount marches, advertisements, games and simulations, special programs on TV etc. (see Kucheriavyi 2014, Levkina and Shatskaia 2014). These activities usually are being supervised or facilitated by the University lecturers, experts, specially trained police officers, local and federal authorities. For instance, a round table "The territory of peace", where students of the Kazan Innovation University presented their ideas on how to counter extremism on 06/03/2019, was organized under the auspice of the government.

Other popular activities include the state's efforts to publish and spread leaflets that inform the population on some aspects regarding terrorism and extremism. Others encourage people to be vigilant and to report anyone suspicious or to support those who need help. For instance, one of the leaflets invites people not to be indifferent to those, who seem "unhappy, lonely, and humiliated ..." Timely provided support, according to the leaflet, can save many lives (Hmyzova 2016).

In addition to state activities, NGOs also started participating in the prevention of religious radicalisation. For instance, Chechen NGO "Women for development" works with women by discussing the Internet love stories, which in some cases resulted in women moving to live in the ISIS-controlled territories. Another organization "The Objective" organizes trainings, invites psychologists, lawyers, and people who came back from the ISIS-controlled territories to share their insights with the university, college, or high school students.

Most of these activities were mentioned by the participants of the online discussion on terrorism in the North Caucasus, which was hosted by the online media platform

“Caucasian Knot” in February of 2019<sup>6</sup>. The participants agreed that the state made very big progress in countering religious radicalisation and incorporating soft power methods into the prevention of religious radicalisation. However, most of them are either developed insufficiently or have a too formal approach. For instance, experts claimed that the state has not developed yet a sophisticated counter-narrative that would explain the evil nature of the ISIS and convince the population that it is not a “dream state”, as the ISIS propaganda depicted it. Another example of formality and ineffectiveness is the participation in the preventive activities of those who came back from the ISIS-controlled territories. This would seem a brilliant idea, but as a participant of one of such meetings (Tatyana Lokshina), who works for the Human Rights Watch organization, claimed, 95% percent of the meeting was dedicated to praising Ramzan Kadyrov and the Chechen authorities.

Another method that has been tried in the republics of the North Caucasus is the reintegration of the former fighters. In each republic, the programs of reintegration had some specifics, but in many cases, the promises not to persecute those who returned to peaceful life were not maintained, and this diminished the efficacy of the program.

### ***Ideological-repressive methods***

Ideological-repressive methods are closely bonded with the educative. The state tries to promote Sufi Islam, which is called in Russia “traditional” and which is considered to be peaceful. This is done on several levels: universities, high schools, and primary schools. There are several Islamic Universities in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Moscow, Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan. They all are linked with the state universities of the Russian Federation and oriented to prepare students for promoting the “traditional” Islam. In some republics, the preparation starts from the school. For instance, in Chechnya, the authorities obliged local imams to promote traditional Islam in the schools. They consider this as one of the main methods that help prevent religious extremism and its ideology. In every school, there is a responsible person, usually a deputy of a director, who monitors the “spiritual development of children”. These people are delegated by the republic’s Muftiate (the highest religious institution). Moreover, the Muftiate obliges parents of the primary school pupils to declare and register their belonging to one or another Sufi branch of Islam. The authorities also invest in opening new religious schools, mosques, and schools of hafizs (those who learn the Qur’an by heart). On TV, there are regular programs that explain Islam and how to live following it (Gadayev 2014). The Muftiate and the Spiritual Board of Muslims in the Chechen Republic play a central role in this. These religious institutions have developed a hierarchic system that allows the spreading of ideas and the monitoring of the situation across the republic through the local mullahs, who are responsible to the Imams (leaders) of the mosques and the settlements, who in turn are accountable to Qadis (the

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<sup>6</sup> The online discussion. Profilactika ekstremisma I terrorizma na Severnom Kavkaze, v poiskav idealnoi modeli. 28/02/2019. Available on [https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/forum/online\\_topics/6160](https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/forum/online_topics/6160) accessed 28/02/2019.

magistrates of Sharia courts) of the districts. The latter have access to the Mufti (the head of Muftiate) himself and the Spiritual Board of Muslims (Gadayev 2014).

There are also “soft” repressive methods that the authorities in some republics rely on. For instance, Dagestan’s authorities in 2015 introduced a new practice, which is commonly known as a prophylactic registry. By doing this, they aimed to create a list of people who could be potential terrorists or extremists. This was intended to refrain them from extremist or terrorist activities, as they would know that they are under close supervision. However, this idea turned into another way of terrorizing people by the police. In many cases, this registration would ruin people’s lives, their good rapport with neighbors, and would even result in psychological trauma for school children, as the police would visit and interrogate even them. At the peak of this activity, there were as many as 16,000 people on the republic’s list.

Closing Salafi mosques in some republics (e.g. in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria) was considered as another preventive method. Regular police raids during the Friday prayers and detention of up to 200 people during such raids were also among the means of the police.

Like the informative-educative, ideological methods have their faults. For instance, those who are responsible for the “spiritual development” of pupils in the schools are described by school teachers as rather uneducated. “Usually, they are people who cannot find any other jobs. It is quite an easy job, which does not require any qualifications. And they do it in a very superficial way”— Sokirianskaia (2019) quotes one teacher from Grozny.

To sum up, the majority of the methods that are in use in Russia are not as efficient as they could be. Some of them have degraded into formalities; others do not hit the target precisely. This can be realized from the sociological survey conducted by Muslimov (2011) in Dagestan. According to its results, Dagestanis consider that the efforts of countering terrorism and extremism should be oriented towards: nurturing tolerance (26%), perfecting the power methods (18%), fighting corruption (14%), improving the legislation (14%), informing the population (12%), and searching for a confessional dialogue (6%).

These targets, according to the respondents, would give better results fighting religious radicalisation. The participants of the mentioned online discussion<sup>7</sup> on terrorism in the North Caucasus also agreed that positive political and social changes would be a more efficient method of preventing radicalisation. Such changes, according to them, would create a necessary environment for the youth to realize their ambitions. Unfortunately, until now most of the negative factors remained unattended (Sokirianskaia 2019), which diminishes other efforts by the state and NGOs.

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<sup>7</sup> The online discussion. Profilactika ekstremisma I terrorizma na Severnom Kavkaze, v poiskav idealnoi modeli. 28/02/2019. Available on [https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/forum/online\\_topics/6160](https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/forum/online_topics/6160) accessed 28/02/2019.

## Concluding Remarks

This report focused on some aspects of radicalisation in the Russian Federation. First of all, it identified and justified the focus on Islamic radicalisation in four republics of the North Caucasus (Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan), Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan. These parts of the Russian Federation are considered as the most vulnerable and susceptible to religious radicalisation.

The first part of the chapter presented the ethnoreligious composition of the state. The section referred to the statistical data that was collected during the last and previous censuses conducted in Russia in 2010 and 2002 respectively. The part highlighted that it is impossible to provide precise data due to the ever-changing composition of the population and the lack of up to date information. To balance this inaccuracy, the section also referred to the experts' opinions and considerations about the statistical results on the question: who a believer is.

The second part of the report analysed the historical context and considered the impact that it had on today's tendencies of religious radicalisation. The part briefly overviewed the expansion of the Russian Empire in the early and late middle ages and the relationship that the state built with the conquered populations. The section concluded that the historical circumstances still play a very important role in the radicalisation of the population of the North Caucasus, but they are less visible and less impactful in the republics of the Volga Muslims. The population of these territories is better integrated into the Russian Federation. Then, the section moved to the exploration of the legal frame that the state created to regulate its relations with religion. The section indicated that the main rights of the believers that the Constitution ensures does not prevent radicalisation. Neither do the laws that determine the boundaries within which the religion can operate within the state.

The third part of the report explored the reasons behind radicalisation in Russia. The part presented the ideas of experts, state officials, and the opinions of the general population. To analyse the identified reasons the part used four categories that united these reasons. The section claimed that the most influential reasons of the radicalisation in the Russian Federation are of socio-economic and socio-political background. As the presented results of the surveys and the opinions of the experts demonstrate, Russia's citizens tend to blame poor economic conditions and the state's injustice for religious radicalisation. The reasons that are rooted in cultural-ideological or personal-psychological spheres are identified in the report as less influential.

The last part analysed the methods that the state employed in the fight against religious radicalisation and its expressions in the form of extremism and terrorism. The part presented two types of methods: 1) the active counter-terrorism measures that are usually implemented by the police and military, and; 2) the preventive methods or so-called prophylactics, which allow the non-governmental sector to take part in the preventive work.

The report concluded that the measures utilized by the state are not very efficient in fighting religious radicalisation of Russia's Muslims as they either do not address the roots of it or use a very formal approach to it, which diminishes the effectiveness of the

designed measures. Socio-economic and socio-political problems, such as unemployment, low salaries, corruption, nepotism, and injustice should be addressed as the most important targets in the fight against religious radicalisation in Russia.

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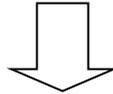
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## Appendix 1. *The legal frame*

**The Constitution of the Russian Federation** (Articles 3.4; 13.5; 14.1; 14.2; 19.2; 28; 29.2; 30.2; 59.3). These articles are designed to ensure equal rights to people and organizations, to prevent any kind of discrimination, and to minimize a possible threat to the state.



### **The Federal Laws**

(On countering the extremist activities N114-F3, 2002)

(On countering terrorism N 35-F3, 2006)

These laws provide with the definitions of extremism and terrorism and oblige the regional authorities to work on preventing terrorist and extremist activities. Their functions include: a) actions for countering terrorism and extremism; b) activities oriented to identifying and removing the reasons and conditions for extremism and terrorism [prophylactics]; c) investigation of the cases of extremism and terrorism; d) minimization or elimination of the consequences of the extremist and terrorist acts; e) designing the means of prophylactics and implementing the measures, which help to prevent radicalisation; f) control and combat the organizations and people whose activities can be classified as terrorist or extremist. Municipal entities also have rights to create their own para-military organizations that work on a voluntarily basis to help preventing radicalisation or neutralize possible extremist attacks.



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1. The Order N988. About creating the inter-institutional commission for countering the extremist activities in the Russian Federation (26/07/2011).
2. The Order N64. About some questions regarding the work of the inter-institutional commission for countering extremist activities in the Russian Federation (17/02/2016).

Doc... The Concept of Countering Terrorism (approved by president 05/10/2009).

Doc № Pr-2753 The Strategy for Countering Extremism until 2025 (signed by president 28/11/2014).

Doc № 683. The National Security Strategy until 2025 (by the order of the president 31/12/2015)

Doc № 646. The Information Security Doctrine (by the order of the president 05/12/2016)

Doc № 2232 The Concept of the Foreign Politics (by the order of the president 30/11/2016)

Doc № -1069 The multipurpose plan for countering the ideology of terrorism for 2013-2018 (the document of the limited availability) signed by president 26/04/2013]



### **Regulations of the government**

Doc N-804. On approval of the Rules for determining the list of organizations and individuals, in respect of which there is information about their involvement in extremist activities or terrorism, and bringing this list to the attention of organizations that conduct operations with monetary funds or other property, and individual entrepreneurs (06/08/2015).



### **Articles of the Criminal Code**

Article 280 (Targets public encouragement of extremist activities).

Article 280.1 (Targets public encouragement of activities oriented to breach the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation).

Article 281 (Targets sabotage activities).

Article 282 (Targets expressions of hatred and hostility, humiliation of the human dignity).

Article 281.2 (Targets activities of organizations that can be qualified as extremist).

Articles 282.3 (Targets financing extremism).



### **Articles of the Administrative code**

Article 20.29 (Targets the production and distribution of extremist materials).

Project name: Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing Together European and Asian Perspectives

Project Acronym: GREASE

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