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## SEEKING A PLACE FOR ISLAM IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

### INTRODUCTION

The past twenty years have seen the growing influence of Islam in the Russian Federation and other post-Soviet countries characterised by thriving Islamic trade and education, the construction of mosques and Islam awareness campaigns. Islam is no longer linked only to historical Muslim regions and it does not follow the traditional models either. The Muslim communities have undergone significant changes owing to demographic trends and migration. While the Russian ethnic population is on the decline, the Muslim population in Russia is growing exponentially. These demographic developments might pave the way for Islam to become a major religion in the country.

Given the current trends in its economy, Russia will have to look for new sources of economic growth. In the Asian Century, it is turning to emerging markets due to economic and political conflicts with Western nations. Cooperation prospects might help Russia break its partial isolation caused by the U.S. and EU sanctions and bring overall alleviation. The Russian foreign policy vectors can be clearly seen in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East, where Russia is taking advantage of the region's proximity and is promoting its active diplomacy. Recent developments show that Moscow has to and wants to acknowledge an increasing role of Islam in the political and social life of the Russian Federation.

Nevertheless, there are tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims at different levels stemming especially from the conflicts in the North Caucasus, rising nationalism in Russian Muslim families, the growing number of migrants from the Central Asian countries, historical residues, the tense relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey as well as international and domestic terrorism. Anti-immigrant, anti-Caucasus and implicit anti-Muslim sentiments have increased feelings of alienation among many Russian Muslims. In addition, promotion of moderate Islam is threatened by the attraction of radical Islam, which appeals mainly to its young adherents. Muslims in Russia have been the part of its historical legacy too long to be regarded as foreigners. Their population is just too large to be overlooked. It is necessary to clearly and pragmatically formulate social, cultural and religious needs of Islam in the country. This,

however requires understanding the origins of the contemporary relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims in the country.

Islam in post-Soviet Russia is a complex issue, which can be explored from religious, political, cultural, ethnic, social and security perspectives, at different levels (local, regional, national and international) and in terms of different historical periods. It has been studied, for example, by A. Malashenko (*Islam in Central Asia* (1994), *Russia and Islam* (2007), *My Islam* (2010), *Russia's Restless Frontier: The Chechnya Factor in Post-Soviet Russia* (2003)), Galina M. Yemelianova (*Routledge Handbook of the Caucasus* (2020), *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (2002), *Radical Islam in the Former Soviet Union* (2009), *Muslims of Central Asia: An Introduction* (2019)), R. Silantiev, A. A. Ignatenko and V. O. Bobrovnikov. An unbiased study of post-Soviet Islam requires a careful examination of its development during the Soviet era, which has already been carried out by A. Bennigsen (*Islam in the Soviet Union* (1967), *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: a revolutionary strategy for the colonial world* (1970), *Muslims of the Soviet Empire. A Guide* (1986), *The Islamic Threat to the Soviet State* (1983)) or S. A. Zenkovsky (*Pan-Turkism & Islam in Russia* (1960), *Russia's Old Believers* (1970)). Islamic studies in Russia have been conducted independently of oriental studies since 1991. The issues concerning Islam in contemporary Russia have been explored also by Arabists, such as R. G. Landa, A. A. Kudryavtsev and C. M. Prozorov, who specialise in challenges in the Middle East and North Africa as well as global Islam and its politicization in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The essence of the relationship between ethnic minorities in Russia and Islam is based on the fact that this religion has survived for centuries characterised by coexistence as well as conflicts and repression. The book titled *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union* (2005), which brings together fifteen of the West's leading scholars on this subject, provides a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the history of religion in the Soviet Union in general, tracing the anti-religious persecution of Stalinism and its liberalization in the Gorbachev era. In his book titled *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (1994), John Anderson provides the first systematic overview of church-state relations in the Soviet Union and analyses the role of religion in the post-Soviet future. The bureaucratic view of religion in the Soviet Union is presented in the extensive collection of annotated texts from the newly opened archives – *Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader* (1996) by F. Corley, which includes documents from the KGB, the Central Committee, the Council for Religious Affairs and other authorities. The collection of essays written by international scholars called *Religion, Conflict, and Stability in the Former Soviet Union* (2018) presents a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary view on religion and its impact on the stability of the former Soviet republics.

The authors of this paper found valuable sources of information in publications dealing with the liberalisation process during the period of Gorbachev's perestroika, which encouraged national self-determination and opposition to Soviet rule among Central and Eastern European countries and Soviet nations. These were, for example, the publications written by M. R. Beissinger (*Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (2002)), R. Keeran and T. Kenny (*Socialism Betrayed: Behind the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (2010)), W. Slater and A. Wilson (*The Legacy of the Soviet Union* (2004)).

The religious revival in Russia currently poses several challenges, including especially the establishment of religious identity principles, ensuring integrity of national values, seeking new logic and philosophy in national politics and tackling the threats related to religious radicalism. Political connotations of the religious factor in the Russian Federation imply identification of new meanings and phenomena that intersect with religion, politics and the society (Mchedlova, Kofanova, 2020: 8–9). This will require a cause-and-effect analysis of Islamic awakening. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the post-Soviet revival of Islam in the 1990s. We formulated the following hypotheses in order to achieve this purpose:

1. Islamic radicalisation in post-Soviet Russia was caused by external factors.
2. The political developments in the Russian Federation in the second half of the 1990s were characterised by restrictions on religious freedom and consolidation of federalism.

We used qualitative data in our research as most of our sources were scientific publications. That is why had chosen the qualitative research method. Having collected the sufficient number of information sources focused on the examined topics and issues, we analysed and sorted the obtained data, which we used for drawing our conclusions while utilising an inductive approach. We tried to confirm or reject our hypotheses after studying historical literature, scientific papers, official documents and legal regulations, which were written in English, Russian, Czech and Slovak languages.

Not only did the religion, “the opium of the people” according to Karl Marx, survive the forced secularisation of the society in the former Soviet Union, but after its dissolution it also provided an alternative ideological cornerstone for formulation of new ideas. Religion was used as a key instrument for self-determination of post-Soviet nations in the turbulent political environment of the 1990s.

### **FROM THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION TO THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL**

The Soviet era was characterised by anti-religious propaganda, which denied religious organisations the right to legal capacity and property and separated religious activities from all aspects of political and social life. In addition, the regime restricted or banned a large number of traditional activities performed by religious groups, such as study clubs, Sunday schools and charitable activities. The Muslim community in the USSR, which was divided into four areas on the national and geographical basis, had to face the fierce atheist propaganda and undergo checks of compliance with religious laws. However, these general trends were interwoven with the periods of relative tolerance, especially due to external threats and the fact that the Soviet Union used Islam and Muslims for its foreign policy goals. Even though Islam in the Soviet era was weakened in cultural and religious terms, there were several factors that helped this religion survive, including the periods when anti-religious propaganda was less vigorous, the limited benefits provided to Soviet Muslims, moderate local governments and strong historical roots and traditions.

Although Gorbachev was determined to continue the anti-religious campaign, the Soviet government’s attitude towards religion, including Islam, began to change after

implementation of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. This change was brought about by several factors: (1) the fact that economic reforms would not have been possible without democratisation of the political system, including the religious sphere, (2) the passive criticism of the USSR's policy towards religion coming from intellectuals and clergymen, (3) the freedom of religion used as an instrument of receiving political support for reform programmes as well as (4) the foreign policy aspects, such as the Helsinki Final Act (Hunter, 2004: 38).

The year 1990 saw the enactment of several laws on protection of press freedom, freedom of conscious, freedom of assembly and religious liberty. The Law on Freedom of Conscious and Religious Organisations and the Law of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic on Freedom of Worship considerably differed from the regulations on religious affairs adopted in the Soviet era. The fundamental principles of these laws were later consolidated in the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation.

Freedoms associated with *glasnost* revealed ethnic and religious discrimination of Soviet citizens. In addition, they prompted the dynamics that, combined with other factors, led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which Russian President Vladimir Putin described as the greatest geopolitical disaster of the last century. The collapse of the USSR meant that, in 1991, Soviet Muslims ended up in different political subjects represented by new independent states. Muslims in Russia were separated from larger groups of their fellow believers in Central Asia and Transcaucasia and subsequently transformed into a Russian religious minority. In the early 1990s, all Muslim regions of the former Soviet Union underwent different forms of the Islamic revival.

Lifted restrictions on religious beliefs, more intense religious activities and contacts between post-Soviet Muslims and the rest of the Islamic world as well as increased funding were all the factors that contributed to Islamic awakening. The revival resulted in the opening of new mosques in post-Soviet Russia. In the 1980s, there were only 179 functioning mosques in the Soviet Union. Their number had risen to more than 5,500 by 1998, 2,000 of which were in Chechnya, 1,670 in Dagestan, 1,000 in Tatarstan and 400 in Ingushetia (Akhmetova, 2013: 57–60). Even though the data on the number of reopened or newly built mosques vary, research clearly shows their increasing trends (Ramet, 1993: 40–41; Hunter, 2004: 34, 69–70; Yemelianova, 2002: 137–138; Halbach, 2001: 94). The 1990s also saw the rise in the number of imams. For example, in Tatarstan, there were only thirty religious leaders in the late 1980s. Ten years later, this republic had approximately 5,000 imams with various titles.

Growing religiosity was noticeable also in culture and education. The revival resulted in the opening of new religious schools, Islamic universities and institutes (Bobrovnikov, 2006: 14), such the Islamic University *'Al-Fatih* in Kazan, the Open University of Islamic Culture in Moscow, the Islamic Cultural Centre in Moscow, the Moscow Institute of Islamic Civilisation, the religious-cultural centre Medina based in Nizhny Novgorod and the Voluntary Muslim Centre Oruzba in the Volgograd region. The number of Islamic publications grew as well, including Ekho Kavkaza, Islamsky Vestnik, etc. The awakening of Muslims was also accompanied by an increasing number of Hajj pilgrimages (Alexseev, Zhemukhov, 2017: 13–33), an upsurge in conversions to Islam (Sweet, 2016: 21–34) and a growing influence of Muslim religious and political leaders. Indeed, the Islamic resurgence was also characterised by the emer-

gence of Islamic political organisations and parties, including the Islamic Revival Party operating in Astrakhan, Makhachkala, Cherkessia and Grozny, the Union of Muslims of Russia based in Moscow and Makhachkala, the Islamic Cultural Centre in Moscow, the popular movement Muslims of Russia in Saratov, the movement called Muslims of Tatarstan based in Kazan, the party *Ittifaq*, the Islamic organisation *Al-Islamiyya*, the Islamic Democratic Party and the Islamic Party of Dagestan, the Islamic Nation and the Islamic Path both based in Grozny, Chechnya (Yemelianova, 2016: 112).

In addition, the post-Soviet era was characterised by the administrative and institutional fragmentation of Muslim institutions. Spiritual Administrations (*Dukhovnye Upravleniya*) were official governing bodies for Islamic activities in the Muslim republics of the Soviet Union, including the Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan based in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), the Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of European Russia and Siberia based in Ufa (Bashkortostan), the Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus in Makhachkala (Dagestan) and the Spiritual Administration for the Muslims of Transcaucasia in Baku (Azerbaijan). Not only did the collapse of the Soviet Union cut ties between these bodies, but it also resulted in further conflicts and fragmentation. Consequently, there were two main competing groups – The Russian Council of Muftis, which was founded in Moscow in 1996 and led by Ravil Gainutdin, and The Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia and European Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was established in Ufa (Bashkortostan) in 1992 and headed by Talgat Tadzhuiddin. According to the Committee on Religious Associations, the total number of regional Muslim organisations in the Russian Federation had reached 4,140 by the end of the year 2000 (Hunter, 2004: 51). The decentralization of Islam in Russia, which reflected ethnic, cultural and geographic diversity of Russian Muslims, was partly a logical consequence of its democratisation and of a growing rivalry between Muslim leaders for political and religious power and influence.

From a geographical perspective, Russian Muslims were concentrated mainly in the Volga-Ural region and the Northern Caucasus. Studies have shown that both regions had to face different political and religious challenges as they had diverse ethnic groups, different Islamic traditions as well as their history. For example, the Volga Region was more urbanised and industrialised than the Northern Caucasus in both Tsarist and Soviet eras. A lot of non-Muslim communities, mainly the ethnic Russians, also settled in these industrial urban areas. As a result, the Volga Region was undergoing the growing secularisation. The residents of Bashkortostan and Tatarstan adhered to the *Hanafi* School (*Madh'hab*), one of the four traditional major Sunni schools of jurisprudence, while the Muslims in the Northern Caucasus were the followers of the *Shafi'i* School and the Sufi brotherhoods. The Hanafi School was dominant also due to the fact that Islam had spread to the majority of Muslim regions in the Russian Federation from Central Asia. Imam Abu Hanifa was born in Central Asia, where he spread his teachings. On the other hand, the Northern Caucasus was shaped more by intellectual and religious movements from the Arab World. After *perestroika*, Russian Muslims began to follow other forms of Islam, which were not traditional for the Muslim regions in the Russian Federation. After the dissolution of the USSR, these regions underwent politicisation and radicalisation of Islam or rather the spread of its

untraditional interpretations often referred to as Wahhabism<sup>1</sup>, Salafism<sup>2</sup>, Fundamentalism<sup>3</sup> and Islamism<sup>4</sup>.

At first, Islamic radicalisation did not seem to be a domestic threat to the emerging post-Soviet Russia. The sense of relief came with the end of the Soviet-Afghan War, which had brought back the memories of the previous Russian Muslim conflicts, independence of the Central Asian countries and the benefits of religious freedoms. There was a general opinion that Islamic extremism was an issue in developing countries and that it did not pose any threats to Russian secularised Muslims, adherents to one of the “traditional religions” in Russia. However, the Muslim communities in the country were being influenced by several factors at the same time:

1. The developments in the Muslim World in the 1970s resulted in the emergence of political Islam, which was an alternative to Western and Soviet models of socio-economic and political development. Consequently, it had the potential to fill the vacuum created by the ideological chaos after the fall of communism.
2. In the meantime, Russia was experiencing an economic depression, which brought about deteriorating economic conditions. Poverty, unemployment, the decline in production, ongoing corruption and the absence of any prospects of improvement all made various versions of Islam appealing.
3. In addition, the World Islamic Powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf began to penetrate into the former Soviet territory.
4. The restrictions on religious education in the USSR weakened spiritual education of Muslims, which made them more prone to extremist thoughts and foreign influences.
5. Increasing religious intolerance, the aforementioned fragmentation of traditional Islamic institutions, conflicts between different Muslim leaders in the post-Soviet era and the refusal to acknowledge pluralistic approaches and practices in Islam all contributed to the strengthening of the movements mentioned above.

Domestic and foreign Muslim activists called for practising Islam in its pure form and pointed out the doctrinal weaknesses of local Islamic beliefs and rituals. Soviet imams, who avoided tackling political issues, were confronted by Salafists, who were ready to face major socio-economic and political challenges and who condemned local and central governments as well as official Islamic authorities for their alleged incompetence and corruption (Yemelianova, 2010: 28).

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<sup>1</sup> Wahhabism is named after Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of a conservative movement of Islam, who was born in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century in today’s Saudi Arabia. His teachings later became the official, state-sponsored form of Sunni Islam in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism has many elements of Salafism and fundamentalism. It is popular in the Northern Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan.

<sup>2</sup> Salafism, also called the Salafiya movement, is a reform branch movement within Sunni Islam. The name derives from advocating the return to the traditions of the ancestors. The words “Salafism” and “Wahhabism” are problematic in Russia as they have become synonymous with violent extremism.

<sup>3</sup> Fundamentalism is defined as strict adherence to basic principles. It is regarded as an opposite to modernism. In terms of religion, it denotes movements that require literal interpretation of religious texts and their application in life.

<sup>4</sup> Islamism is a broad set of political ideologies that utilise Islam as the basis for their political and legal reasoning and demand that Muslims return to their religious roots. The term Islamism is controversial and its definitions differ.

Any attempts to generalise Islamic radicals would face methodological issues, such as the ambiguity of the terms “Islamism,” “militant Islam” or “radical Muslims.” In addition, it should be noted that those who consider themselves advocates of “pure Islam” or “true Islam” do not form a homogenous group. The degree of radicalism among followers of various branches of Islam was different and each group was driven by different motives and reasons for their dissatisfaction with the government. What is more, Russian politicians and the academic community “divided” Islam in such a way that “traditional,” “official,” “moderate” or “domestic” Islam was opposed to “unconventional,” “unofficial,” “radical” and “foreign” Islam. Even though this classification was largely fictitious, this period was characterised by confrontations between the aforementioned groups. Russian authorities regarded new Islamic divisions and groups as hostile. In addition, they were presented as being the ideological basis for extremism and terrorism.

### **MOSCOW’S RESPONSE TO ISLAMIC REVIVAL AND SEPARATIST SENTIMENTS**

In the early 1990s, Moscow was facing many separatist initiatives in Russian ethnic republics. A lot of regions, including Tatarstan, Tuva, Chechnya, Yakutia, Bashkortostan and Kalmykia, called for political changes, declaring their sovereignty, enacting laws on titular languages, refusing to pay taxes, giving priority to state laws over the federal law and adopting their own constitutions. Some of the Russian Muslim communities were highly active in seeking their self-determination amidst the economic and political chaos. Lots of separatist movements in the post-Soviet era began to shift from nationalism to regionalism as well as from ethnic to ethno-confessional identities (Zhemukhov, 2018: 45).

Muslims’ attempts to face Russian aggression and seek the self-determination have a long history. As a matter of fact, the relations between Russia and Islam as cultural and political entities and the relationships between Russians and Muslims were colonial. They did not change even in the Soviet era despite universalist aspirations of the socialist system. Russian Muslims agitated for self-determination whenever the domestic political landscape allowed them to do so. This happened also between 1905 and 1907 and between 1917 and 1921. In both periods, Muslims’ attempts to gain autonomy or create a real federal system were thwarted by the authoritarian rule of Tsarist Russia and later by the communist totalitarianism. Muslims tried to achieve a certain degree of independence again in the period between 1986 and 1991. The rise in nationalist sentiments was accompanied by increased Muslim awareness – the core component of the collective identity. The awakening of the Soviet Muslims’ political consciousness revealed the potential of Islam for mobilisation against existing power structures. The aforementioned political parties played a significant role in this process.

Tatarstan and Chechnya were the most ambitious Muslim republics as far as the struggle for regional autonomy is concerned. The initial dynamics of their political independence were driven by secular and nationalist rather than religious demands. Despite the disputes over the Tatarstan’s status, the Yeltsin administration and the Shaimiev’s cabi-

net agreed on the negotiations that resulted in a series of bilateral agreements signed in 1992 and 1993, which covered the political and economic areas (Moukharimov, 1997: 220–223). After the Yeltsin's consolidation of power in Moscow and the ratification of the 1993 constitution, both parties extended these treaties in order to reach a complex agreement on the relations between Tatarstan and the federal government, the result of which was the first power-sharing treaty signed in February 1994 between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan (*Treaty Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tatarstan...*, 1994). As a result, the religious factor in Tatarstan never became dominant and the central government once again gained control over a Muslim region. The same, however, did not apply to Chechnya.

In November 1991, Chechnya declared independence and General Dzhokhar Dudayev became the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The Kremlin decided to launch a military intervention in order to restore its federal authority. A. P. Tsygankov claims that Yeltsin's failure to respond to Chechen declaration of independence in 1991 and the largely political decision to intervene in late 1994 resulted in a long and bloody confrontation. Yeltsin's decision to occupy Chechnya was an attempt to divert attention of the public away from his promises about improving or, at least, maintaining the standard of living of ordinary Russians (Tsygankov, 2016: 98).

The First Chechen War fought from 1994 to 1996 ended in a fragile armistice and the withdrawal of Russian troops. Although Islamic sentiments in Chechnya before the military intervention in 1994 were not particularly deep, Dudayev turned to Islamic ideology in order to mobilise national resistance and gain international support for Chechen independence.

The radical Chechen opposition later used the ideological and material resources, the foreign jihadi fighters offered to strengthen their position against the moderate Chechen president. This moral and financial foreign aid was made conditional on adherence to political Islam and its Wahhabi interpretation. Even though the appropriateness of the uncompromising Islamic worldview can be understood against the background of the brutal behaviour of the Russian forces during the First Chechen War, there was a logic of expediency behind the adoption of radical and political Islam by Chechen warlords and politicians. Despite the import and spread of militant Wahhabi ideas, majority of the North Caucasus population continued to follow Sufism. Many customs of fundamentalist Islam directly contradicted the traditions that regulate Chechen society. We can state that there is a conflict between the two main branches of Islam in the Northern Caucasus: Sufism linked to the official clergy and government, and Salafism which is gaining more and more supporters among young people (Wilhelmsen, 2005: 35–59; Falkowski, 2016: 1–8).

Islam and its extremist versions put down deep roots in Chechnya's domestic policy and Islamist extremism, driven by deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, spread into other regions of the Northern Caucasus, especially into Dagestan. By the mid-1990s, Muslim congregations had spread beyond Dagestan and Chechnya into Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and the Muslim regions of Stavropol Krai (Bobrovnikov, 2001: 29).

D. Trenin and A. Malashenko claim that Islamisation of the Chechen-Russian conflict was simply a response to existing circumstances and conditions and any external



factors were of minor significance. Domestic developments in Chechnya led to foreign involvement, which came in useful to Russian political leaders as they could blame external powers for their own mistakes. The Chechen-Russian conflict resonated (and continues to resonate) in the rest of the Muslim world. Even though it cannot be compared to the conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan or Iraq, its isolated character does not mean that it has been a minor issue. Not only did the fighting in Chechnya spark the Islamic revival in the neighbouring regions, but it also shaped its political and confrontational dynamics. As a result, the Islamic factor became a crucial factor in the instability in southern Russia and the entire Caucasus region (Trenin, Malashenko, 2004: 79–80).

Islam was not a key driving force behind Chechnya's struggle for independence. During the Russian-Chechen conflict, however, it became the major unifying factor and later the cornerstone for nation building. Chechnya's increasing Islamisation widened the political and cultural gap between Grozny and Moscow, which lessened the chances of reaching a mutually acceptable compromise that was unlikely also due to Russian-Chechen antagonism stemming from bitter historical experience (Stalin's deportation of Chechens to Central Asia in 1944). On one hand, the conflict increased extremism in Chechnya and other regions of the northern Caucasus. On the other hand, it intensified anti-Muslim sentiments (anti-Caucasus in particular) and Islamophobia in other parts of Russia. As a result, the public began to support the consolidation of centralised control over the restless regions and strengthening of the central government.

In the late 1990s, Kremlin started to shift its previous political and economic reforms towards political centralisation and state capitalism. In a new political landscape, Vladimir Putin decided to restore the federal authority. In May 2000, he introduced a new system of seven<sup>5</sup> enlarged federal districts. He also appointed the presidential representatives for each district and entrusted them with monitoring the activities of the federal bodies and the implementation of federal politics (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation N 849..., 2000).

The Russian government introduced a conceptual differentiation between home-grown ("good") and foreign ("bad") extremist Islam in order to contrast violent actions without demonising Russia's entire Muslim community, making the latter a matter of national security and later the basis for Russian security and foreign-policy doctrines. This strategy affected Russia's relations at different levels. It was primarily a political view of the events that occurred in Russian Muslim regions in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russia's official centralising attitude towards different forms of Islam was aimed at winning Muslims' loyalty to the Russian Federation, tackling the negative effects of the developments in the Northern Caucasus and maintaining control over religious issues (Arnold, 2012: 217).

Facing the emergence of new religious movements and radicalisation in the 1990s, Russia enacted the 1996 "Law on Non-Commercial Organisations" and the 1997 "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations," which restricted religious practices that had been tolerated until then and enabled law enforcement authorities to use their preferred methods of addressing radicalisation. The laws imposed further

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<sup>5</sup> Today, the Russian Federation is divided into eight federal districts, including the Crimean Federal District, which was established after the controversial annexation of Crimea.

regulations regarding the registration of religious organisations in the Russian Federation. Each organisation had to prove that it had existed as a religious group for at least 15 years in order to be registered with the government. However, these regulations marginalised individual religious movements and forced them to move underground (Iliysov, 2020: 18). Doctrinal preferences of particular Muslim communities and their attitudes towards the Russian Orthodox Church often determined their ability to obtain a legal status. In order to maintain their official status, the Muslim communities had to join one of the state-approved umbrella organisations, which were predominantly identified with the Sunni branch of Islam and its *Hanafi Madh'hab* in the Volga-Ural region and the *Shafi'i Madh'hab* in the Northern Caucasus.

In August 1999, Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev and his supporters invaded the neighbouring Russian Republic of Dagestan in order to create the Chechen-Dagestani Islamic nation. In the autumn of the same year, the country was also shaken by apartment bombings in Bujnaxsk (Dagestan), Moscow and Volgograd (Rostov Oblast), which killed over three hundred civilians. Islamic radicals in Chechnya were blamed for the attacks.<sup>6</sup> This allowed Russian political elites to frame the war as a counterterrorist operation and mobilized support of the Duma, mass media and public opinion. What first appeared to be a small regional skirmish led to the deployment of the Russian army. Even though the Chechen separatist movement was suppressed by the Second Chechen War and the Russian government headed by Putin claimed its victory in March 2000, the hidden war continued. In October 2003, mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, who was supported by Moscow, was elected the first president of Chechnya. After his assassination in May 2004, he was replaced by Alu Alkhanov. However, real power lay in the hands of the Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, Ahmad Kadyrov's son. Pro-Russian Ramzan Kadyrov has been the President of Chechnya since March 2007.

Since Russia fought the First Chechen War in order to restore constitutional order in its territory, it was presented as a domestic affair. The Second Chechen War, however, was portrayed as Russia's struggle against international Islamist terrorism. In the late 1990s, the majority of the former Soviet Muslim republics and Russian autonomies adopted new legislation to counter extremism and new laws that restricted the rights of religious communities. In 1997, the Dagestani Parliament, supported by Moscow, banned Wahhabism on its territory. In 1999, it enacted another anti-Wahhabi law, which was adopted also in other Muslim autonomies of the Northern Caucasus. These laws created a legal framework for further suppression of religious or other anti-government movements. The anti-extremist legislation in Russia included the Federal Law on Countering Extremist Activity, which was passed in 2002. The anti-Wahhabi and anti-extremist legislation allowed for the prosecution of those who criticised federal or local governments in Muslim autonomies. For example, the Federal Law on Countering Extremist Activity banned extremist or other non-traditional Islamic organisations, which were not controlled by muftiates, as well as Wahhabi literature, periodicals and other media (Bobrovnikov, 2006: 20). Even though the Russian constitution recognised political pluralism, the 2001 Federal Law on Political Parties pro-

<sup>6</sup> However, there are suspicions that the bombings were carried out by the FSB as a pretext for legitimizing the war and a means of increasing Putin's popularity before the presidential campaign.

hibited the creation of political parties on the basis of professional, racial, national or religious affiliation.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks considerably changed the attitude of the international community towards Islamist terrorism. Moscow used the U.S. led anti-terrorist military campaign in Afghanistan to present its own fight against Islamist opposition as Russia's contribution to the Global War on Terrorism. In its counter-terrorism struggle, Moscow implemented a series of legislative and military measures against Chechen opposition groups. To defend its heavy-handed counter-insurgency campaign in the Northern Caucasus, Russia linked the Chechen rebellion directly to (Islamic) terrorism, thus covering ethnic and nationalist sources of the conflict with political "extremist" motives (Merati, 2020: 113). This resulted in securitisation of Islam, the return of Soviet xenophobia as well as the expulsion of Islamic missionaries and teachers from Russia. The central and regional security forces began to infiltrate into local communities in order to compile the watch lists of active and passive Muslims, which reminded of the practices used in the Soviet era. Pro-government media were spreading anti-Islamic sentiments and promoting Islamophobia in the entire Russian society. Official periodicals reported on arrests of local "Islamist terrorists" and their alleged links to al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups and organisations based in Turkey, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Syria and even in Western Europe. Salafism was portrayed as a destructive philosophy, which was not suitable for home-grown post-Soviet Muslims (Yemelianova, 2010: 29).

Putin's ultimate ambition was to reverse the fragmentation and erosion of state power connected with Yeltsin's rule and centralise the authority and power in general. As a result, he proposed extensive changes aimed at consolidation of presidential powers and counter-terrorism<sup>7</sup>, which also resulted in abolishment of direct gubernatorial elections and the adoption of new procedures for appointment of governors. The regional autonomy was increasingly restricted and the republics such as Tatarstan, which gained a high degree of independence in the 1990s, were forced again to comply with federal laws and regulations. Putin's rise to power and his ambitions to address Islamist radicalism and terrorism largely depended on repressive measures – military force, centralised power, authoritarian incumbents – and the political landscape that was much less tolerant of international actors and their influence on domestic politics. However, the question arises whether these official actions taken against radical Islam as well as the *de facto* suppression of any Islamic practices were not counterproductive. Islam was an attractive alternative to the existing political, economic and spiritual stalemate caused by perennial economic problems, high unemployment rates, omnipresent corruption of political and administrative bodies as well as the crippled democracy. Despite the heavy-handed crackdown, Islamic extremist groups partly managed to maintain their organisational structures. Nationalism and separatism in the Northern Caucasus pose enormous challenges to Russia. The question whether the centralised power and repressions can help Moscow address these issues warrants further research and discussion. Any attempts to minimise Islamist threats will be ineffective unless they involve understanding of social and ideological issues.

<sup>7</sup> Other terrorist attacks during this period include the 2002 Dubrovka theatre siege in Moscow and the 2004 Beslan school siege (North Ossetia).

## CONCLUSION

The dissolution of the USSR and its institutions resulted in one of the most dynamic periods of religious awakening for Muslims in Russia. *Perestroika* and *glasnost* brought about rapid changes in state-religion relations. Having studied and examined the issues presented in this paper, we drew the following conclusions:

1. The weakening of the state's traditional central control over the republics and religious oppression led to the resurgence of Islam, which became legitimate thanks to the favourable domestic political environment in the newly formed Russian Federation. Islam has always been the part of Russian social and cultural life. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the opening of thousands of mosques, development of the religious education system and the strengthening of ties with fellow believers from other countries. The Islamic revival undoubtedly brought considerable benefits to Russian Muslim communities. However, it also provided the fertile soil for radicalisation. The post-Soviet era that we examined in our paper was characterised by increased nationalism in Russia's Muslim republics. The majority of population were striving to tackle daily life problems, while the new and old political elites at different administrative levels were struggling for their power and influence. The religion began to work as an ideological catalyst, but also as a political tool. Taking all the aforementioned facts into consideration, we can state that the first hypothesis has been confirmed only partially. Even though the foreign influence had an impact on the domestic developments, radicalisation was also brought about by the political situation in Muslim regions and the socio-economic environment in the newly formed Russian Federation.
2. Muslims' desire for self-determination mixed with their growing religious consciousness and the federal government's response significantly affected the development of Russian federalism and defined Russia's major challenges concerning the centre-periphery relations and its policies and attitudes toward religion. Post-Soviet Muslims were largely influenced by a conceptual differentiation between "good" and "bad" Islam. The second hypothesis has been confirmed. The Russian government's response to dynamics of the Islamic resurgence entailed, to some extent, the reestablishment of state control over religious activities and the consolidation of federalism.

The first attempts to seek the space for Islam in post-Soviet Russia after the collapse of the USSR in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century can be characterised as "trial and error." This decade presented a new demanding era of confrontation. As the resurgence of Islam continues in the new millennium, there is a hope that all involved parties have learnt their lessons from the previous era. The sooner they find new ways to cooperate with each other, the better the lives of the Muslims and the entire population will be. The longer this process is, the more lives will be lost and the more effort will have to be extended on both sides. Russia's attitude toward its own Muslim population also affects its relations with the Islamic world. Thus, it is today confronted with its own reality as well as Islam's international influence. The Russian Federation will be consolidated only if it manages to provide adequate space and tolerance towards its own Muslim minorities and respect their values and needs without losing face and the visions for its

future. We suppose that the way the Russian Federation will handle Islam's growing influence will significantly shape its future.

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## ABSTRACT

One of the main characteristics of the post-Soviet transformation was the religious resurgence. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the post-Soviet Islamic revival in the 1990s. The awakening of Islam and seeking the place for Muslims in the society significantly influenced the formation of today's Russian Federation. The authors examine the factors that influenced the role of Islam in newly created post-Soviet Russia and the federal government's response to its dynamics. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the Islamic revival after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The second chapter is focused on the Kremlin's reaction to new radical movements that emerged during the Islamic awakening and the separatist sentiments in Russia's Muslim regions. Using the qualitative research method, the authors drew a conclusion that Islamic radicalisation in post-Soviet Russia was caused by several external and internal factors. The political developments in the Russian Federation between the second half of the 1990s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century were characterised by restrictions on religious freedom and consolidation of federalism.

**Keywords:** Russian Federation, Islamic revival, radicalism, Chechnya

**POSZUKIWANIE MIEJSCA DLA ISLAMU W PORADZIECKIEJ ROSJI****STRESZCZENIE**

Jedną z głównych cech transformacji postsowieckiej było odrodzenie religijne. Celem tego artykułu jest analiza postsowieckiego odrodzenia islamu w latach 90. XX wieku. Przebudzenie islamu i poszukiwanie miejsca dla muzułmanów w społeczeństwie znacząco wpłynęło na ukształtowanie się dzisiejszej Federacji Rosyjskiej. Autorzy badają czynniki, które wpłynęły na rolę islamu w nowo powstałej postsowieckiej Rosji oraz reakcję władz federalnych na powstałą dynamikę zmian. Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części. Pierwsza część dotyczy odrodzenia islamu po rozpadzie Związku Radzieckiego. Drugi rozdział koncentruje się na reakcji Kremla na nowe radykalne ruchy, które pojawiły się w okresie przebudzenia islamu i nastrojów separatystycznych w muzułmańskich regionach Rosji. Posługując się jakościową metodą badawczą, autorzy doszli do wniosku, że radykalizację islamską w postsowieckiej Rosji spowodowało kilka czynników zewnętrznych i wewnętrznych. Wydarzenia polityczne w Federacji Rosyjskiej od drugiej połowy lat 90. do początku XXI w. charakteryzowały ograniczenia wolności wyznania i utrwalenie federalizmu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Federacja Rosyjska, odrodzenie islamskie, radykalizm, Czeczenia

