# Ethnic Divisions, Politics and Vahhabism in the Post-Soviet North Caucasus[*]

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*This paper presents new evidence from a 1999 survey among 500 25–26 year olds in Vladikavkaz, capital of North Ossetia, and a survey of forced migrants who were entering North Ossetia from Chechnia in 2000. The paper seeks to explain how and why Islamic fundamentalism is able to contribute to the destabilisation of the present-day North Caucasus despite the fundamentalists being extremely small proportions of the populations in all the region's republics.*

*Key words:* ETHNIC DIVISIONS, FORCED MIGRANTS, ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM, NORTH CAUCASUS

## Introduction

In the West, and in Moscow also, Islamic fundamentalism tends to be viewed as a threat, moreso than ever since September 11 2001. It is associated with political destabilisation, and economic and social regression, as in Iran and Afghanistan, and international terrorism.

In the North Caucasus the main Islamic fundamentalist tendency is Vahhabism. Its followers believe that only their movement will be able to unify and stabilise their region, and deliver economic prosperity. They believe that the evidence of history is clearly on their side, and, within their own region, they are in fact offering one of the more plausible solutions to the predicament of all the peoples. We shall see, however, not only that this solution has little support among the populations in the region, but also that there are very few Vahhabis. Here we offer an explanation as to why, despite this, Islamic fundamentalism can still be sufficiently influential to be terrifying. In developing our argument we draw upon two new bodies of evidence: first, a 1999 survey of 500 young people in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia, one of the North Caucasian republics, and comparable evidence from parallel surveys among the same age group in Moscow and Dneipropetrovsk; second, an interview survey in 2000 among 50 forced emigrants from Chechnia.

### The Muvahhids in Arabia

Vahhabism has its origins in mid-eighteenth century Central Arabia. Its founder was Mohammed Ibn Abd-al Vahhab. Hence the term Vahhabism, though in Arabia his followers have always been called Muvahhids (adherents of unity).

Eighteenth century Arabia was splintered into numerous emirates, all of which, at that time, were threatened either by the Ottoman Turks or the Iranians. The emirates needed to unite in order to survive, and Vahhab and his followers urged unity. Vahhab branded the Turks and Iranians as unfaithful and proclaimed a jihad (holy war) against them. Vahhab and his supporters sought to cleanse Islam in Arabia of "pagan vestiges" such as magic and sorcery, and also so-called "novelties" such as the cults associated with revered tombs in some oases. Anything that divided Islam was opposed. Vahhab censured luxury and demanded total observance of Islamic commandments including five-fold daily prayer, pilgrimages to Mecca, and the prohibition of usury, prostitution and sodomy (Mengin, 1823).

Central Arabia's emirs were not immediately sympathetic to these teachings, but one, Mohammed Ibn Saud of Darija, formed a holy alliance with the teacher. Darija thus became the centre of Muvahhidism (Rihani, 1928). Missionaries were despatched to make converts. Adversaries were terrorised. Converts were welcomed in Darija where they were generously clothed and fed; a policy towards converts which continues to the present day.

As a result of all this, Darija became a centre of political power which united several emirates (Niebuhr, 1780). Unity was then extended to other regions of Arabia including the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina which, ever since, has enabled the Saudi leaders to claim a kind of world pre-eminence within Islam. By the end of the eighteenth century the son and successor of the original Muvahhid ruler, Abd-al Aziz, had repelled the Turks and invaded Iran. Religious unity had therefore fulfilled its political promise.

Following Vahhab's death, Arabia's emirs appropriated spiritual as well as political power. The religious Muvahhids were confined to roles as judges and dogma teachers (Philby, 1922; Wallin, 1854). Thus decadence spread throughout the region. At any rate, this is the interpretation of history favoured by present-day believers. The Darija-based state was eventually smashed by invading Turks and Egyptians. In the nineteenth century there were attempts to establish a second Saudi state under the old politico-religious banner, but this state failed to regain its predecessor's territory and might.

However, Muvahhidism underwent a renaissance after 1910. This was against a background of European entry to the region (Dickson, 1950). Europe sought trade, and especially oil, which made some men rich, but the introduction of the motor car led to the collapse of the bedouin's main occupation, namely camel breeding (Raswan, 1937). The backlash was a renewed search for unity in order to repel the unfaithful, their artifacts and their culture. Independent emirs and sheiks were interned by the Sauds. Preachers were once again sent into Arabia's villages. New rural "colonies" were thereby established, some of which became new hotbeds of Muvahhidism. As formerly, converts were rewarded, this time with allowances from the Saudi treasury. Thus, in the 1920s, Saudi-Arabia became a single kingdom which has endured up to our present time.

In early-twentieth century Arabia the Muvahhids insisted on absolute observance of Islamic rules. They adopted a distinctive dress, the white turban, and restricted contact with the unfaithful. They forbade eating with, and even greeting them (Nallino, 1939). The legitimacy of the Saudi state has always had a religious base. Hence its enforcement of Islamic commandments. Even in the late-twentieth century Westerners were still (occasionally) being flogged, usually for alcohol offences. There have been some blatant departures from strict fundamentalism – the adoption of "Western" cars, radios, guns, aeroplanes and so forth – and the Saudi rulers cannot claim to eschew luxury. Nevertheless, their legitimacy is unlikely

to face a powerful internal challenge while the kingdom remains united and basically Islamic, and excludes what are now regarded as the main symbols of Western culture such as alcohol and "naked" women. The Muvahhid "project" in Arabia has evidently (at least in believers' eyes) succeeded in delivering security to the people, and lifting them out of their earlier poverty.

### Vahhabism is the North Caucasus

During the twentieth century Vahhabism spread from Arabia into other near-east and middle-east countries, to Indonesia, to Central Asia and to the Caucasus. The teachings were taken into the latter region by missionaries from Arabia, Jordan and Pakistan. In the Caucasus the aims of Vahhabism have been the same as in Arabia: to create a unitary, centralised Islamic state which will be able to withstand its enemies. This strength has been regarded as dependent on internal unity. So in the Caucasus the aim of Vahhabism has been to unite all the peoples – different ethnic groups in the Caucasus rather than the separate emirates in Arabia.

Vahhabism has been present in the Caucasus since the 1920s, but under Stalin and his immediate successors the movement was suppressed ruthlessly. This changed in the 1980s with the advent of glasnost, and barriers to the propagation of the faith all but disappeared in most of the region with the lifting of Soviet power in the 1990s.

In the present-day Caucasus the influence of Vahhabism is out of proportion to the relatively small number of believers who live strictly according to the teachings. The influence of the movement in the North Caucasus has been magnified by some of its peoples' affinity with Islam, but even moreso by the political and economic conditions in the 1990s and subsequently. Daghestan is generally regarded as Vahhabism's main hotbed in the region. Here around 10 percent of the population are estimated to believers. The second main hotbed is said to be Karachai-Circassia, but here there are estimated to be no more than 300 Vahhabis. In North Ossetia there are no more than 40, but approximately 20 percent of the people "think of" themselves as muslims.

All of these republics are multi-ethnic. Daghestan is a land of high mountains and deep gorges, and contains at least 30 main ethnic groups (some divided into sub-ethnicities). There would be even more ethnic groups in Daghestan had there not been some mergers: between the eight former groups who are now Avars, the four who are now Lezgins, and the three who are now Kumyks. These particular mergers have been aided by pre-existent linguistic similarities (Lavrov, 1958; Volkov and Sergeeva, 1995). Karachai-Circassia is the home of just four main ethnic groups plus Russians most of whom are of the Cossack sub-ethnicity (Government of Karachai-Circassia, 1998).

Vahhabism aims to unite all these ethnicities. It insists that religion is above and must take precedence over ethnic, national and tribal divisions. The entire population in the North Caucasus is currently searching for unity. The region desperately needs a new cement. People fear the consequences of their divisions, especially in the absence of Russian power. They fear that unless unity is achieved warfare will engulf the region, as it has on so many occasions in the past, and in recent times in Chechnia, in Georgia (in Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and in Nagorno Karabakh. All the ethnicities have historical memories, and some have twentieth century experience, of exterminations and ex-patriations. Vahhabism has a particularly strong appeal where these fears are most intense. For example, in Karachai-Circassia most Vahhabis are Karachais, a people with memories of deportation under Stalin. In Daghestan the Nogais region is a particular hotbed of Vahhabism. Kumyks (from the mountains) were settled on the Nogais plain by Stalin. Chechen Akins have now returned to what they regard as their land. The situation is explosive.

There are two wings in the present-day Vahhabi movement in the North Caucasus. "Radicals" advocate open warfare against all non-Muslims. The "reformist" wing has far more supporters. It is led (spiritually) by the Imam of all Russia who advocates a "jihad" via a 20 year programme of propaganda (teaching, interpreting the Koran, and distributing literature) and building mosques.

Vahhabism (the reformist tendency at any rate) is legal in the Russian Federation. Despite this, the entire movement was declared illegal by the President of Chechnia in the mid-1990s. Previously Chechnia had not been among the hotbeds of Vahhabism. Rather, it was the leading example of divisions leading to conflicts between ethnic and sub-ethnic groups that the rest of the Caucasus feared. Vahhabism's prohibition in Chechnia had exactly the opposite to the intended consequences. In 1998 a military unit that had converted to Vahhabism attacked government forces. The rebels were quashed and formally disbanded, but in practice they simply dispersed to villages, became a cause celebre among Vahhabis throughout the region, and have subsequently received constant support from Daghestan.

Reformist and radical Vahhabis all have the same objective (unity) for the North Caucasus. Their leaders adopt traditional titles: they are emirs and sheiks (the emirs' subordinates). They are all working towards the Islamicisation of the entire region and the creation of a single Islamic state covering the entire territory. They are critical of mainstream Muslim clergy for (allegedly) ignoring the Koran and Sunna, and for their digressions from sharia (Islamic law). Sharia justice in the Caucasus can be truly medieval. In 1998 the kidnappers of a Daghestan girl were burnt alive (as stipulated by sharia). Vahhabis are against tobacco, alcohol and drugs. They favour large families and forbid contraception and abortion. They are against invasion by Western culture, but, as in Saudi-Arabia, they are willing to use its artifacts like guns.

Calls for a return to Islam's fundamentals and the creation of an Islamic North Caucasian state are combined with vitriolic criticism of the existing state system. Neither Moscow nor the region's own governments are able to deliver even physical security. Politics and public administration are condemned as bedevilled by bribery and corruption. The break-up of the centrally-planned Soviet economy has cost most people their livelihoods. Poverty has become widespread. The situation in the North Caucasus since the 1980s has been analogous to the predicament of Saudi-Arabia's bedouins following the collapse of camel breeding earlier in the twentieth century.

Vahhabism is seeking basically the same solution to the problems of the North Caucasus that worked in Saudi-Arabia earlier-on. It seeks to unite the entire North Caucasus under the teachings of Islam, and to create an effective centralised government for the region which will deliver security and prosperity.

The members of the movement who have become preachers and convert-seekers, and who live in accordance with all the commandments, are still extremely small in number, but their influence, the scale of their at least acquiescent support, can be far greater. As applied earlier-on in Saudi-Arabia, converts are treated generously with modest (certainly in Western terms) financial gifts. The Vahhabis' critics sometimes explain conversions in these terms. Maybe this applies to some of the Russians in the region who have converted to Islam, and who have then become Vahhabis. However, this overlooks the appeal of the message to people for whom, it appears, there is simply no other solution to their own, or their region's, problems.

**Young people in Vladikavkaz**

None of the Caucasian republics are uniformly, or even overwhelmingly, muslim. Like the Balkans, the Caucasus has a specific kind of religious geography. Specific settlements and

regions converted to Islam centuries ago, sometimes willingly, but more often coerced by the Turks. Subsequently the relevant populations have developed as distinct ethnic, or sub-ethnic, populations. Other settlements and regions have always been mainly (orthodox) christian. During communism the ethnic Russian populations expanded everywhere. Some of the less compliant local groups were removed (to Siberia). Nowadays the christians and muslims throughout the region are most likely to be the so-called "ethnic" varieties, meaning that they do not balance in the theology. During 70 years of communism religious belief and practice declined. So nowadays both christians and muslims are mostly bearers of the historically transmitted cultures rather than religious in the everyday sense. In most cases their religiosity is comparable to that of "ethnic christian" atheists in Western Europe.

Vahabbism is capable of destabilising the region despite, rather than on account of, most people's religious beliefs. According to the results of our 1999 survey of 500 25–26 year olds (the principal aim being to discover how young people were being affected by the reforms), roughly two-thirds of the population of Vladikavkaz, capital of North Ossetia, is Ossetian by nationality. Just over a quarter of the respondents were ethnically Russian (see Table 1). According to official statistics, roughly a fifth of the Vladikavkaz population, and around a third of the Ossetians, are muslim (usually only in the ethnic sense). In the parallel surveys that were conducted simultaneously in Moscow (capital of Russia) and Dneipropetrovsk (a major Ukraine city), the levels of regular church and mosque attendance were similar to the level in Vladikavkaz, and in other cities in the Caucasus, Eastern, Central and Western Europe (see Roberts et al., 2000): between 7 and 11 percent were attending at least once a month. Vladikavkaz was certainly not a seething hotbed of Vahabbism or any other kind of religious movement.

**Table 1. Nationality**

|           | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|-----------|----------|--------|---------|
| Russia    | 94       | 27     | 19      |
| Ukrainian | 4        | 2      | 79      |
| Ossetian  | –        | 65     | –       |
| Other     | 6        | 6      | 2       |

**Table 2. Labour Market Outcomes**

|            | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|------------|----------|--------|---------|
| Succeeding | 37       | –      | 6       |
| Getting-by | 35       | 48     | 58      |
| Floundering| 29       | 52     | 36      |

Economic conditions in Vladikavkaz were harsher than in either Moscow or Dneipropetrovsk. In addition to the collapse of the communist economy, the Caucasus had suffered economically from the general political disintegration and breakdown of law and order. We have classified the samples of young people into three broad groups according to their achievements in the labour market (see Table 2). Those described as "succeeding" were in full-time jobs and were earning in excess of $100 a month (using the prevailing market exchange rates). Those who were "getting by" were earning just $50–100 per month in their full-time jobs. The group described as "floundering" were either earning less than $50 in their full-time jobs, or were employed part-time, just casually, or unemployed. Over a half of

the Vladikavkaz sample fell into the floundering group. Economic conditions were extremely difficult. However, while lagging behind Moscow, the Vladikavkaz respondents' self-assessed material well-being was not inferior to the level recorded in Dneipropetrovsk, and the same applied to the respondents' consumer assets (cars, PCs, VCRs and satellite TV connections), and to their participation in leisure-time activities (see Tables 3, 4 and 5). Within the latter we can see clear evidence of the muslim-influenced culture in the North Caucasus – levels of tobacco and alcohol consumption were much lower than in the other two areas.

**Table 3. Self-assessed material situations**

|      |   | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|------|---|----------|--------|---------|
| Good | 1 | 17 | 5  | 5  |
|      | 2 | 49 | 47 | 26 |
|      | 3 | 21 | 19 | 30 |
|      | 4 | 11 | 24 | 26 |
| Poor | 5 | 2  | 4  | 13 |

**Table 4. Possessions**

|                  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|------------------|----------|--------|---------|
| **Has the use of:** |       |        |         |
| Car              | 40 | 21 | 15 |
| PC               | 39 | 9  | 8  |
| VCR              | 76 | 59 | 30 |
| Satellite/cable TV | 8 | 8  | 2  |

**Table 5. Leisure activities**

|                          | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|--------------------------|----------|--------|---------|
| **Participates at least once a month** |   |        |         |
| Play sport               | 51 | 40 | 38 |
| Bars, cafes, restaurants | 40 | 29 | 27 |
| Nightclubs, discos       | 32 | 24 | 21 |
| Cinema, theatre          | 32 | 10 | 13 |
| Watch live sport         | 7  | 18 | 9  |
| Smoke                    | 43 | 27 | 42 |
| Drink alcohol            | 56 | 21 | 43 |
| Church                   | 7  | 11 | 11 |

There is further evidence of muslim influence, but equally of pan-Caucasian traditions, in the Vladikavkaz sample's family behaviour and values. The 25–26 year olds were less likely than their Moscow and Dneipropetrovsk counterparts to be married or cohabiting, or to have children, and they were also less likely to have moved-out of their parents' homes (see Table 6). This was not due to local housing shortages. Rather it reflects the Caucasian norm of living in multi-generation households. It is perhaps noteworthy that although they were

less likely to have already become parents, the young people in Vladikavkaz who had done so were actually more likely to be single parents than the young parents in the other two regions. The other evidence of cultural distinctiveness is that in Vladikavkaz there was more support for patriarchy – the husband acting as the key decision-maker in the family – and more opposition to equally-distributed housework, than in Moscow or Dneipropetrovsk (see Table 7).

**Table 6. Family and housing circumstances**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Own place** |  |  |  |
| Single | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Married/cohabiting | 8 | 3 | 3 |
| Couple and Kids | 13 | 7 | 14 |
| Single parent | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| **Family dwelling** |  |  |  |
| Single | 47 | 64 | 35 |
| Married/cohabiting | 13 | 6 | 10 |
| Couple and Kids | 12 | 9 | 27 |
| Single parent | 3 | 6 | 7 |

**Table 7. Family values**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Who should take key decisions:** |  |  |  |
| Husband | 37 | 58 | 44 |
| Wife | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Jointly | 60 | 40 | 54 |
| **Agree or strongly agree that men and women should do equal housework** | 52 | 38 | 54 |

**Table 8. Migration**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **State that it is possible or very possible that will migrate:** |  |  |  |
| Within country | 8 | 24 | 16 |
| to another country | 9 | 21 | 14 |
| **Agree or strongly agree:** |  |  |  |
| want to go to the West | 21 | 35 | 19 |

Our questions indicated a higher propensity to migrate from Vladikavkaz than from either of the other two areas (see Table 8). In Vladikavkaz the young people were more likely to regard it as possible or certain that they would quit their home region, and to express a desire to work in the West. This was not because they were particularly pro-Western or unpatri-

65

otic. Quite the reverse. A higher proportion of the Vladikavkaz respondents were prepared to fight for their country than in either of the other areas (see Table 9). This begs the question of exactly which country they would fight for, and who they expected to fight against. These details could not be addressed adequately in a questionnaire that was designed for use in three different parts of the former USSR. However, it is clear from the samples' other responses, and from our wider knowledge about public opinion in North Ossetia and other Caucasian countries, that most young people in Vladikavkaz envisaged that any fighting would be to defend the Russian Federation. They were more likely than their Moscow and Dneipropetrovsk counterparts to believe that the disintegration of the USSR had entailed too many disadvantages, more-or-less equally likely to favour closer relations between CIS countries, and less likely to seek closer relationships with the West (see Table 9).

**Table 9. International relations**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Prepared to fight for country** | 40 | 54 | 28 |
| **Views on break-up of USSR:** | | | |
| Good | 7 | 7 | 11 |
| Not sure, pros and cons | 72 | 48 | 53 |
| Too many disadvantages | 21 | 45 | 36 |
| **Favour closer ties with:** | | | |
| Other CIS countries | 79 | 79 | 87 |
| West | 76 | 66 | 85 |
| Yugoslavia | 44 | 45 | 38 |

**Table 10. Personal safety**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Feel threatened** | | | |
| **Daytime** | | | |
| City centre | 23 | 33 | 20 |
| Where live | 22 | 37 | 26 |
| **Night** | | | |
| City centre | 29 | 41 | 41 |
| Where live | 34 | 43 | 47 |

**Table 11. Politics**

|  | Moscow % | Vlad % | Dneip % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very/quite interested in politics | 20 | 30 | 20 |
| **Voting intentions** | | | |
| Specific party | 23 | 29 | 16 |
| Not sure | 55 | 41 | 61 |
| Definitely will not vote | 22 | 30 | 23 |

The higher propensity to migrate from Vladikavkaz would have been due partly to the especially difficult economic conditions, but the young people knew that there were similar difficulties in most places where they were able to settle legally. The specific problems of living in the North Caucasus owed more to the exceptional political and civil disintegration. Throughout the former communist world, people comment on the higher crime rates, and how their towns and cities have become less safe. These feelings were more pronounced in Vladikavkaz than in Moscow or Dneipropetrovsk (see Table 10). Expressed interest in politics was higher in Vladikavkaz than in either of the other two areas, and a higher proportion supported, and intended to vote for, a specific political party. Conditions were tending to politicise Vladikavkaz's young people. But Vladikavkaz also had the highest proportion who had definitely decided not to vote for anyone (see Table 11). They had given-up on politics.

Had they believed that the strategy was likely to succeed, then, as in Chechnia (see below), the majority in Vladikavkaz, christians and muslims alike, would almost certainly have backed local politicians who would have collaborated with Russia in restoring order to the North Caucasus. But Russia was manifestly failing, and was probably unable, to achieve this. This is the North Caucasian context wherein small minorities have been able to mobilise wider (though still minority) support for their preferred solutions to the region's problems.

### Chechens' views

In September 2000 the North-Ossetian Centre for Sociological Research conducted a small-scale study at the checkpoint between the Chechen Republic and the Mozodokski district of North Ossetia-Alania where 50 Chechens were interviewed (Dzutsev, 2001). They were all crossing the border (out of Chechnia) and were in possession of forced migrant certificates (issued by the Russians). They were people whose dwellings had been destroyed and who were escaping from the fighting in their republic. They had good reasons to distrust Russia. So despite having the legal right to settle anywhere in the Russian Federation, and despite the likely material advantages of doing so, only a fifth wanted to leave Chechnia indefinitely.

The 50 respondents in this study cannot be treated as a representative sample of Chechens. Even so, their views on the political situation in Chechnia, and preferred solutions, can perhaps be treated as indicative. Only 12 percent wanted Chechnia to become a completely independent state. It is true that another 20 percent favoured Chechnia being split with the lowlands remaining in the Russian Federation, while the highlands (where anti-Russian fighters had their bases) became independent, but 60 percent wanted the whole of Chechnia to remain within Russia. Just 8 percent wanted the people of Chechnia to be obliged to live by sharia law.

The vast majority of Chechens (as in all the other Caucasian republics) do not share the Vahabbis' aspiration. However, few of the respondents in either of the studies referred to above had any confidence in any politicians solving their region's problems. Forty-one percent of the Chechen migrants said that no politician could resolve the situation. A similar percentage said that there was no politician who truly represented the interests of the Chechen people. The politician who received the most "votes" was Gantamirov (14 percent). Khazbulatov (the Russia-appointed leader) had 8 percent and Maskhadov (the locally elected leader) had just 2 percent, like Putin. This lack of confidence in all politicians indicates the extreme socio-political disintegration in Chechnia which has accompanied the run-down of local industries and the destruction of the physical environment. Most of the Chechens feared rather than sought independence.

## Conclusion

All the peoples of the Caucasus have ambivalent attitudes towards Russia. On the one hand, in the eyes of devout Muslims, the (orthodox christian) Russians are unbelievers who must be repelled and eventually either converted or defeated. Historically, and up the present-day, Russian power in the region has been experienced as oppressive and divisive. Czarist and communist policy in the region, and in Central Asia, was to divide and rule. On the other hand, the periods of relative peace and security that the North Caucasus has experienced have been due to Russian power and protection. And Russian language is one of the few links between all the ethnic groups (christian and muslim) throughout the region. If present-day Russia could deliver peace and prosperity to the region, the influence of Vahhabism would surely subside.

For practical purposes, Russia has just two options in the region. First, it could make Chechnia (up to now the main site of opposition to Russia's rule) independent, in which case Chechnia's neighbours would demand protection behind a "Chinese wall", a military cordon sanitaire. This solution would probably be favoured by world opinion. Russia would be less exposed to criticism for human rights abuses. The problem is that this solution does not appeal to most Chechens, nor to most of the other peoples in other parts of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus. Russia's sole other option is to try to bring the situation in Chechnia under direct control. This has been Putin's policy. The problem here is that the solution is not working, and, from the interview findings presented above, it would appear that few Chechens (or members of other populations in the region) believe that it will work.

Maybe the economic problems in the North Caucasus that have followed the break-up of the USSR are no greater than in many other parts of the Russian Federation, but the loss of security, the constant threat to all the people's lives and property, is distinctive. Muslims, even the so-called ethnic muslims who have never previously worshipped, and, indeed, whose families effectively lapsed many, many years ago, may be persuaded to believe that there is an Islamic solution to their problems – a solution which has already worked for muslims in other countries. Maybe, as a matter of plain fact, political stability and physical security if not economic development are more likely to be delivered through a single North Caucasian state, an Islamic state, than under present conditions – a multitude of ethnic groups situated on the lawless periphery of a decaying Russian empire.

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*Članak predstavlja nove činjenice koje se temelje na anketi iz 1999. godine. Anketa je obuhvatila 500 osoba dobi 25–26 godina u Vladikavkazu, glavnome gradu Sjeverne Osetije, te prisilne migrante koji su došli u Sjevernu Osetiju iz Čečenije tijekom 2000. godine. Cilj je članka objasniti kako je i zašto islamski fundamentalizam u stanju doprinijeti destabilizaciji današnjeg Sjevernog Kavkaza usprkos tome što fundamentalisti predstavljaju veoma malen dio populacije u svim zemljama u regiji.*

*Ključne riječi: ETNIČKE DIOBE, PRISILNI MIGRANTI, ISLAMSKI FUNDAMENTALIZAM, SJEVERNO KAVKAZJE*