

ISLAM IN POLITICS AND POLITICS IN ISLAM:

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an independent consultancy
that monitors religion in Russia
and around the world



ИНФОРМАЦИОННО-КОНСАЛТИНГОВАЯ КОМПАНИЯ



**ISLAM IN POLITICS AND
POLITICS IN ISLAM**

ISLAMIC SOCIETY IN 2021 RUSSIA: STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS

This annual report was developed by Religion Today, an independent expert company that provides consulting and monitoring services in relation to the religious situation in Russia and abroad. This is the third annual issue of the report.

The first issue was devoted to the crisis of modern Orthodox Christianity and delineated the events of 2018-2019 that had a destructive effect in the global Orthodoxy. The second issue, Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the Global and Regional Context, represented an analytical digest of actions leading to legalizing the ecclesiastical schism in Ukraine and the role they played in global politics.

This new, third annual report is groundbreaking in its focus on the 'Islamic factor' that many – primarily, foreign – forces attempted to use as a destabilizing element in politics to achieve their strategic goals in the global arena.

The dynamics of global events clearly points at the tendency to utilize religion to disrupt political processes. The latest evidence of that is the EuroMaidan in Ukraine and the following systematic attack on the Russian Orthodox Church, reinforced by the Western aggression towards Russia.

FOREWORD

The Muslim community in Russia that since the earliest post-Soviet days had already been split both organizationally and structurally, in 2021 endured yet another defragmentation episode that was caused by muftiates fighting for control over Muslims across Russian regions.

The first section of Religion Today Annual Report #3 is devoted to internal problems of Russian Muslim institutions. It delineates crucial structural changes in the Russian

ummah, rivalry between muftiates, and new long-term partnership and strategic alliances between key Islamic leaders of Russia.

The second and third sections of the Report explain how milestone events that happened in the global Muslim community throughout 2021 influenced the Russian ummah. In particular, we will analyze the strengthened position of Turkey that presents itself as a center of the pan-Turkist Muslim state unity, and the reaction of Russian Muslims to the transformative changes of the political regime in Afghanistan.

DEEPENING ORGANIZATIONAL SCHISM OF THE RUSSIAN UMMAH, INTERNAL STRUGGLE, AND REGIONAL RESTRUCTURING

The schism that first appeared in the Islamic ummah of the country in the post-Soviet times, continued to grow through 2021. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (SAM RF) spearheaded the process when it suffered significant losses in 2021 when it forfeited around 750 parishes in Bashkortostan, 5 parishes in Ivanovo oblast, and 150 parishes in the Asian part of Russia.

The SAM RF chose to combat this negative trend by expanding the sphere of its influence in the regions where the organization did not use to have any member communities. Thus, on May 17, 2021, the SAM RF founded an affiliate five-parish mukhtasibat in Mari El (with Farid Shageyev serving as its head). On December 1, 2021, a similar mukhtasibat with three parishes was created in Chuvashia, presided by Fanis Safiullin. At the moment, two other mukhtasibats are being established in Dagestan and Krasnodar Krai. In all these cases, the SAM RF co-opted communities that used to belong to other muftiates – first of all, those previously affiliated with the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims (CSAM); the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (SAMR), the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan, the SAM of the Republic of Adygea and Krasnodar Krai. The only goal of these changes is to increase the number of regions with the SAM RF presence. Formally, the mukhtasibats continue to grow, though de facto they only host 3 to 5 parishes. At the

plenary meeting of the SAM RF on September 23, 2021, it was announced that the institution consists of 28 regional SAMs (mukhtasibats), though the overall number of mosques within these units does not exceed 350.

This expansion of the SAM RF to the regions that used to have no communities subordinate to mufti Ravil Gaynutdin caused an upsurge of public discontent that was most clearly visible in Muslim protests of September 2021 in the north Caucasus. What happened was that mufti Ravil Gaynutdin confirmed the appointment of Sagidguseyn Guseynov as the imam of the Central Mosque of Kizlyar after the latter decided to abandon the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan and submit to the SAM RF. Although the change in jurisdiction had not been confirmed by the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation, it turned out that a lot of Muslim clergy in the region were eager to abandon Akhmad Abdullayev, the mufti of Dagestan. It became obvious on November 23, 2021, when mufti Ravil Gaynutdin met with the delegation from the Dagestan clergy consisting of Sagidguseyn Guseynov, the imam of the Central Mosque of Kizlyar; Magomedibir Omargadzhiyev, president of the Islamic university named after imam Ash'yari, Khasavyurt; Shuayb Gasanbekov, imam of the Central Mosque of Derbent; Magomed Ramazanov, director of the Islamic educational center of Kizlyar; Magomed Magomedov, vice-director of the Islamic educational center of Kizlyar; and Gasrat Akhmedov, PR assistant chairman of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the South Dagestan, sheikh Isamudin Efendi. It is obvious now that these religious leaders of the Republic of Dagestan are most likely to enter the SAM RF mukhtasibat-to-be of Dagestan.

However, this was not the end of the SAM RF moving to the South of Russia. The muftiate of Ravil Gaynutdin has been striving to transfer the communities of Sochi and Krasnodar under its jurisdiction, though Kuban has historically belonged to the SAM of the Republic of Adygea and Krasnodar Krai. On September 13, 2021, the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus (CCMNC) issued a statement condemning the 'destructive actions' of the SAM RF aimed at factionalizing Muslims of the north Caucasus (though Krasnodar Krai does not formally belong to North Caucasian Federal District of the Russian Federation, this region through the SAM of the Republic of Adygea and Krasnodar Krai itself has traditionally been under the sphere of influence of the CCMNC.) However, at the plenary meeting of the SAM RF of September 23, 2021, Damir Mukhetdinov, Gaynutdin's first deputy, stated in

no uncertain terms that Kuban belongs to the South Federal District of the Russian Federation. He emphasized that in the past Muslim communities of the region aligned with the Russian Council of Muftis – and that the SAM RF as its successor expects to see them under its jurisdiction. Finally, he claimed that the whole country is under the domain of the SAM RF. Thus, mufti Ravil Gaynutdin and his team questioned the tacit division of the Russian Muslim ummah into the “Tatar” and “Caucasus” parts.

However, despite the growing number of mukhtasibats – and, consequently, the growing influence of the SAM RF, Ravil Gaynutdin’s muftiate inadvertently creates tension in the region where both muftiates and secular authorities frown upon the emergence of the new player in the Muslim community.

The Republic of Tatarstan presents an illustrative example of such tensions. There, in April 2021 mufti Ravil Gaynutdin accused Kamil Samigullin, mufti of the SAM of Tatarstan, of being a member of ‘the Turkish sect Ismail Aga’ and called for censuring religious Islamic publication of Khuzur Publishing House (Kazan). The written complaint to President of Tatarstan Rustam Minikhanov had no effect: no Russian mufti supported Gaynutdin, and Tatarstan authorities ignored his letter altogether. Mufti Kamil Samigullin is considering a retaliatory move: he plans to merge the Kazan Islamic Institute, the Russian Islamic Institute, and the Kazan madrasa Mukhammadia into the Islamic University Mukhammadia with the SAM of Tatarstan being the only founder (the Russian Islamic Institute has the Russian Council of Muftis together with the SAM RF among its founders.) Thus, the only educational institution in Tatarstan supervised by the SAM RF is going to be the Bolgar Islamic Academy that in January 2021 underwent a change in management: Aynur Timerkhanov from Kazan replaced Ufa resident Daniyar Abdurakhmanov as the acting rector.

Talking about recent achievements of the SAM RF, one can point to it being the only muftiate in Russia that dared forge a close relationship with the Vatican. At the behest of the SAM RF, Moscow on March 3, 2021 hosted a presentation of the Russian translation of *Fratelli tutti* (“all are brethren”), encyclical by Pope Francis widely known in the Christian circles. The event was attended by Apostolic nuncio of the Vatican in the Russian Federation; the chairman of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation; the ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in Russia and other public officials. This event that took place in the capital of Russia was quite unique: it was the only time that the works of the Pope

of Rome were published at a Muslim publishing house and prefaced by a Muslim clergy, deputy chair of the SAM RF Damir Mukhetdinov. It should be noted that Ravil Gaynutdin’s muftiate is the only one in Russia that can boast establishing an interfaith dialogue with the Catholic church. The rest of Russian muftiates commonly resorted themselves to formal meetings with the Catholic establishment during the latter’s visits to the Russian regions, fearing displeasure of the Russian Orthodox clergy. At the same time, Ravil Gaynutdin as far back as in 2005 organized a meeting titled “Islam and Christianity: A Path to dialogue,” and invited representatives of the Catholic church to the event. Gaynutdin also spoke quite highly of the Vatican II Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

In the 2021, the SAM RF made another attempt at interfaith dialogue with Catholics: both the chairman of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Prefect of the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot took part in the Seventeenth International Muslim Forum From Ecological Preaching to Ecological Thinking.

Organizational schism in the Muslim ummah remains a burning issue for the Central Spiritual Administration of Muslims as well (the head of the CSAM is mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin.) In May 2021, several communities that used to belong to the Regional SAM of Mari El (the jurisdiction of the CSAM) transferred to the SAM RF and formed a mukhtasibat. However, the most acute loss the CSAM suffered with the transfer of the Regional SAM of the Republic of Mordovia (17 communities altogether). This has been an ongoing process since 2020 when Talgat Tadzhuiddin decided to replace his subordinate, Mordovia mufti Zyaka Ayzatullin, with Rafael Manyurov. The latter enjoys significantly less popularity among the clergy of the Regional SAM of Mordovia. When Zyaka Ayzatullin decided to transfer the Regional SAM of Mordovia under the jurisdiction of the CSAM, he faced resistance from the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation that refused to acknowledge Mordovia muftiate as an independent and centralized religious organization, preferring to leave it under the jurisdiction of the CSAM. The Directorate of the Ministry of Justice for Mordovia proclaimed illegitimate the emergency meeting of the Regional SAM of Mordovia where it was decided to get from under control of Talgat Tadzhuiddin – as it did with the rest of the organization’s decisions. As a result, the Mordovia muftiate was left in limbo: on the one hand, the Regional SAM of Mordovia held a meeting

where it was decided to secede and keep Zyaka Ayzatullin as the head of the muftiate; on the other – these decisions have no power in the eyes of local authorities, and CSAM is unable to settle the conflict.

It was Talgat Tadzhuiddin who took it upon himself to resolve the issue. On June 16, 2021, he arrived at Saransk to hold a second, this time legitimate in the eyes of the CSAM and the local authorities meeting of the Regional SAM of Mordovia, to reinstate Rafael Manyurov as its head. At the time, many Mordovian imams were ready to attend the meeting, since they acknowledged the authority of mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin – however, they were dissuaded by the team of Zyaka Ayzatullin. That – and the reservations they had about Rafael Manyurov, whom they did not want to see as their superior. As a result, the meeting was a flop: it failed to secure a quorum, and mufti Tadzhuiddin had to leave empty-handed. On June 23, 2021, the Regional SAM of Mordovia held yet another meeting where it adopted a new charter as a muftiate independent of the CSAM and led by newly elected mufti Damir Bikinin. However, the Mordovian government refuses to acknowledge either this meeting or the new mufti.

It seems that the main challenge mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin is facing in Mordovia is his inability to find an alternative to mufti Rafael Manyurov; to find support in another candidate that would be accepted by the clergy of the RSAM of Mordovia. As a result, the issue of mufti legitimacy in Mordovia has remained unsolved until this day.

In December 2021 the Eurasian Association in support of Islamic Education (EAIE) was founded in Ufa. Its membership includes: the CSAM of Russia; the Russian Islamic University (Ufa); the SAM of Kazakhstan; the Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak; the SAM of Kyrgyzstan; the Tajik Islamic University named after Abu Hanifa; the muftiate of Belarus; and the international research center named after imam Al-Tirmidhi Artur Suleymanov, rector of the Russian Islamic University of the CSAM, was appointed chairman of the EACIO. Muhammad Tadzhuiddin, Talgat Tadzhuiddin's son, has been leading efforts on creating the organization since 2019 with the main goal of strengthening the position of the Russian Islamic University (CSAM) in the post-Soviet territories. What is curious is that other Russian Islamic institutions of higher education, e.g., Bolgar Islamic Academy, are yet to enter this new entity. It is possible, however, that these universities has not been invited on purpose, if Talgat Tadzhuiddin wants to push higher education institutions under his control into management positions.

In the past 2021, the North Caucasus and the Volga region host a number of congresses of regional muftiates, where local muftis get re-elected, facing no competition.

Thus, on March 15, 2021, the eighth congress of Kabardino-Balkaria Muslims took place in Nalchik, and there Khazratally Dzasezhev, the acting mufti of the region, in the absence of other candidates was elected chair of the regional Spiritual Administration of Muslims. Thus commenced his third term as the head of the regional ummah: Dzasezhev has been preceding over the SAM of Kabardino-Balkaria since 2011 and had won in two prior re-elections.

On March 16, Cherkessk saw the tenth congress of Karachay-Cherkessia Muslims. There, acting mufti Ismail Berdiyev was re-elected for the ninth time. He has been in office since 1991. It should be added that Berdiyev since 2003 has been holding the post of the chair of the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus and with high likelihood will be re-elected for that position as well.

On March 17, 2021, the ninth congress of the North Ossetia-Alania Republic Muslims took place – and there, too, the acting chair of the regional SAM, Khadzhimurat Gatsalov, mufti of the republic since 2011, won the election that had only one candidate. For him, it signified the start of his third term.

On April 12, 2021, during the eighth congress of the Tatarstan Muslims Kamil Samigullin gets re-elected for his third four-year term (he has been occupying the position of the mufti of the republic since 2016.)

All these cases suggest the level of certainty regional mufti must feel as heads of local spiritual administrations. The mere fact that they get re-elected without any competition signifies the lack of real contestants in the regions – and the good relations that muftis enjoy with their local authorities.

In the Republic of Ingushetia, there regional ummah suffers from the issue of dual power and judicial collapse. This is also the only region nowadays without a registered muftiate. The Spiritual Muslim Center of the Republic of Ingushetia (this was the official title of the Ingushetia muftiate) was liquidated in 2019 due to a conflict between the mufti and the then-head of the Republic Yunus-bek Yevkurov. This, however, did not stop the SMC of the RI from functioning as a muftiate. After mufti Abdurakhman Martazanov (1954-2020) died of coronavirus, Isa Khamkhoyev, who used to be the mufti from 2004 till 2019, was elected a new mufti. After Makhmud-Ali Kalimatov rose to power in 2019,

his and Khamkhoyev's relations stay chilly: neither openly criticizes the other one, and yet there is no observable partnership between the secular and the spiritual leadership of the republic. On top of that, though Khamkoyev was elected mufti, his muftiate does not yet exist as an official, centralized religious organization. Taking advantage of this circumstance, former head of the Directorate of Religious Affairs at the Administration of the head of Ingushetia Akhmed Sagov in 2021 started to present himself as the chair of the Spiritual Administration of Muslim of the Republic of Ingushetia – though formally and legally such an organization is not registered. Despite that, it is Sagov who is invited to all events held by the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus as the leader of Ingush Muslims. Before him, it used to be Khamkhoyev who would be invited to such functions. In essence, there is double power and judicial collapse in the republic: both Khamkhoyev and Sagov, elected by their supporters, lead organizations that legally do not exist, and both organizations claim to be the true muftiate of the republic. This internal strife seems to cause no discomfort for the secular authorities who pointedly show no preference for either leader.

The organizational schism is still present among Crimean, majority Tatar, Muslims. The peninsula that rejoined the Russian Federation in 2014 has two muftiates: the SAM of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol (mufti Emirali Ablayev) and the Central SAM of Crimea Taurian Muftiate under the leadership of mufti Ruslan Saitvaliyev. The latter rules over just nine communities and could not pass registration according to the Russian legislation because of interference from local authorities who preferred a much larger SAM of the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol that boasts many more mosques. Registered on February 16, 2015, it includes 262 at the day.

This state of affairs in the Crimean ummah predates the annexation of the peninsula: Ablayev's muftiate was founded in 1992 under the name of the Sam of Crimea; while Saitvaliyev's one has existed since 2011, when it functioned under the name of the Spiritual Center of Muslims of Crimea). Akhmed Tamim, Kiev-based mufti of the SAM of Ukraine and member of Al-Ahbash Sufi group, created the latter muftiate to strengthen his position in the Crimean Peninsula. Given that historically Crimea was leaning towards the Salafi movement that Emirali Ablayev was quite tolerant towards, a newly emerged, Kiev-based Sufi muftiate could pursue the goal of changing the situation in the peninsula. Regardless, the influence of the Spiritual Center of Muslims of Crimea (SCMC) at the day was modest at best.

When The Russian Spring blew through Crimea and ultimately led to the peaceful reunion with Russia on March 18, 2014, opened the possibility of changing the distribution of power in the Muslim community. The SCMC welcomed the peninsula entering the Russian Federation and adopted an openly pro-Russian position, while the SAM of Crimea took its time and waited. Seeing Ablayev's hesitations, on August 21, 2014 Ruslan Saitvaliyev held a founding congress where transformed the SCMC into the Central SAM of Crimea Taurian Muftiate and managed to get nine communities on board. A little later, on February 16, 2015, Ablayev re-registered his organization as well, managing to grow it by two constituent subjects of the Russian Federation: the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Since then, the SAM of Crimea and Sevastopol has been integrating into the Russian legal system, re-registering its subordinate parishes. Since Ablayev de facto controls the overwhelming majority of the parishes in the peninsula, Crimean authorities choose to support him and not Saitvaliyev's Taurial Muftiate – and hence the latter has not yet managed to register his organization.

The rivalry between the SCMC and the SAM RF is yet to result in a decisive victory. While the SCMC managed to gain influence over the SAM of Bashkortostan (the largest of the regional muftiates that used to belong to the Russian Council of Muftis) and the SAM of Crimea and Sevastopol, the SAM RF launched a blow to SCMC in the Republic of Chuvashia, where it won over mosques in Cheboksary and Urmayevo village and thus created its own mukhtasibat in the area.

In the Russian Far East, the Muslim community experienced the increased influence from Dagestan. There is observed an ongoing process of "Dagestanization" of the whole Far East muftiate that exists as a part of the SAM of the Asian part of Russia (SAM APR). In February 2020, imam of one of Magadan parishes, Dagestan native Ramazan Aliyev was appointed mufti the Far East by decree of the SAM APR Nafigulla Ashirov had another appointee, Tatar Damir Ishmukhamedov, whom he stripped off his clergy status after the SAM APR Qadiyat of Primorsky Krai had been liquidated in 2013. After that, the position stayed vacant for a while. When Aliyev moved from Magadan to Khabarovsk, he took this role and got down to building the muftiate of the Far East under the jurisdiction of the SAM APR. It must be noted that the muftiate of the Far East itself is not registered as a centralized religious organization – which does not stop it from pursuing vigorous activities in the region.

After securing support from Nafigulla Ashirov, Ramazan Aliyev took to inviting people from his region to fill in positions in the muftiate of the Far East. On April 16, 2021, Magomed Gitinov was appointed mufti of Khabarovsk Krai of the SAM APR. On June 28, 2021, Yusup Abdulmuslimov, former rector of the Dagestan Islamic University named after sheikh Muhammad Arif who got his PhD from the Bolgar Islamic Academy, became the head of the Education Division of the Far East SAM APR. To work at the muftiate of the Far East, Usman Shamsuyev, member of the Education Division of the muftiate of Dagestan for Kizilyurtovsky District, was invited as well. Nafigulla Ashirov in a way benefits from this “Dagestanization” of his thirteen communities in the Far East: during the 2010s the SAM APR kept losing its ground. It is then that the Qadiyat of Primorsky Krai in Vladivostok was liquidated (2013); as well as the only registered community of the Sakhalin (2015). The CSAM and the SAM RF were gaining support in the Far East, and it meant that the SAM APR could become a spent force in the region. At the same time, Ashirov found it challenging to manage his parishes while spending most of his time in Moscow. By appointing Ramazan Aliyev with his go-getter mentality and broad connections – including those in the ummah of Dagestan – has proven to be a fortunate decision. Aliyev, in his turn, reaps benefits for his prior employer, the muftiate of Dagestan: while this muftiate on paper manages mosques within the region, the geography of its spiritual influence has a much wider reach. Today most of Dagestan clergy and laymen are, to a different extent, murids of the mufti of Dagestan, Sufi sheikh Akhmad Abdulayev. It is of interest that the name Aliyev chose for his organization is not the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Far East, but the Muftiate of the Far East, in parallel to the Muftiate of the Republic of Dagestan.

Having strengthened the Muftiate of the Far East with the Dagestanian presence, the SAM APR has gradually entered a conflict with the CSAM. The evidence for their tension can be seen in events related to the mosque of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk where on June 28, 2021, deputy imam Almir Gaynetdinov was beaten by Khizri Tagirov, an activist from the Dagestan community. The latter was helped by Usman Shamsuyev. Though the incident was swept under the rug, it clearly indicated the risks associated with the ongoing “Dagestanization” of the Far East, the region with traditionally strong presence of Tatar clergy.

INCREASING PROMINENCE OF TURKISH INFLUENCE ON THE MUSLIM POPULATION AND TURKIC REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Turkey has been increasing its religious influence on Russian Muslims throughout the whole post-Soviet history of the country. Its prominence is the most obvious in regions with dense Turkic population – in particular, in the Volga region. Mainly this influence has been maintained through supporting multiple Sufi organizations in the Russian Federation, including Nurcu* (*organization banned in Russia as extremist); Hizmet; Haqqani, Topbashiya, Ismail Aga, Qadiriyya, Suleymancilar, and many others. Such groups differ in scope and nature of their activities. Thus, Hizmet, led by infamous Fethullah Gülen who fled to the USA, established a network of Turkish lycees in Russian regions; with the most dense coverage in Tatarstan (8 lycees) and Bashkortostan (4 lycees). Suleymancilar has been following in Hizmet’s steps that opened several boarding schools.

Nurcu* attempted to organize a network of clubs devoted to studying works by Turkish theologian Said Nursî (1877-1960) whose death led to his organization splittin into seven branches. So far, Russia has been infiltrated by only three of them: that of Mustafa Sungur Yeni Asya (or New Asia), and Hizmet.

It should be noted that the Russian law enforcement does not distinguish between the three branches: they all are considered parts of Nurcu* that in 2008 was labeled as extremist in Russia. That is why Hizmet (followers of Gülen) are perceived as equivalent to Nurcu* though their leader has reworked teachings of Said Nursî and thus his movement is acknowledged by some scholars as a branch of so-called Western Sufism rather than Sufism in its original form. One must also keep in mind that Turkish authorities have different views on Said Nursî and Fethullah Gülen. The latter has been living in the USA since 1999 and is widely considered to be the head of the failed Turkish coup of 2016. Therefore, Ankara considers his organization an extremist one and calls it “terrorist organization of Fethullah followers,” or Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü (FETÖ). This is why books by Said Nursî that the Russian government included into the list of extremist materials, are freely published and sold in Turkey, and the memory of Sad Nursî is revered by the authorities of his motherland.

Meanwhile, Russia views translations of works by Gülen as extremist as well, and followers of both Fethullah Gülen and Said Nursî are considered as belonging to the same organization, Nurcu*. Because of that, it is at times quite challenging to find which one of the two branches certain members of the Russian ummah belong to.

Turkish lycees were closed in Tatarstan in 2008, while everywhere else – in Shuvashia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Astrakhan, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, and Bashkortostan – it happened much earlier, at the very start of 2000s. Such lycees were part of the international school network of the Hizmet movement. In 2017, Turkish consul general in Kazan Turkhan Dilmach welcomed the closure of the lycees, saying that ‘the Russian authorities got access to the educational institutions that had been skillfully used to recruit new members for the organization in question.’

However, the crackdown on Turkish lycees did not mean that Hizmet would stop its operations in the Russian Federation. Thus, in 2006 Prism was founded: a cultural and educational fund that had the Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan (RIIK) faculty as its members. The fund, liquidated in 2012, had as one of its founding members Gabdrakhman (Albert) Naumov, who taught at the RIIK, served as an imam of the local Al-Iman mosque and sat at the Ulama Council of the SAM RF. In secret, Naumov held meetings for Gülen’s followers. On November 2, 2021, Naumov was convicted for 6.5 years in prison for organizing a Nurcu chapter in Kazan (please keep in mind that all followers of Gülen are deemed Nurcu members in the Russian Federation).

It used to be that only Russian translations of Islamic religious activists could be considered extremist in Russia, in 2021 there appeared a precedent when there was banned a book published in a foreign language. In Naberezhnye Chelny at the end of 2021 there was a court hearing on 47 titles by Said Nursî that were published in various series, including some publications in Turkish (altogether, there were 163 publications). These works were confiscated from seven Naberezhnye Chelny inhabitants that attended meetings organized by Nakiya Sharifullina. The latter was connected to an investigation on founding a Nurcu* chapter and had previously been prosecuted twice for distributing books by Nursî that had already been labeled as extremist.)

In November 2021, the leader of another Nurcu* chapter was arrested. Vladimir Katnov, thirty-six years old lecturer from Kazan State Technological University, was tried together with two members who had been recruiting university students of Muslim origins into the organization.

While Nurcu* is labeled as an extremist organization in Russia, other Sufi organizations from Turkey are acting in the Russian Federation legally. It’s only Topbashiya, with its spiritual leader being sheikh Osman Nuri Topbash (the organization is also called Erenköy at times), that has experienced certain issues, since many of the books written by their spiritual leaders and translated into Russian are deemed extremist in Russia. Publishin house Sad, the one that had been translating and publishing his books in Russia since 2005, was liquidated after its head Aydar Khabibullin was arrested and then convicted for extremism in 2012. After his release, Khabibullin left for Turkey. However, even this formal condemnation of books written by the Turkish sheikh did not mean that his followers would stop their activities in Russia.

The organization itself is not considered extremist in the Russian Federation. The most active member of this society is one murid of the sheikh, imam of the Kazan Mirgaziyan mosque by the name of Abdurrauf Zabirov. In 2012-2016, he used to hold the position of the mufti of the United SAM of Penza oblast. He has authored multiple theological and historical-theological books in both Russian and Tatar, including Contemplations (Tafakur) on man, the Quran, and the Universe (2014); Encyclopaedia of Islamic norms and rules in the light of the four Madhhab (2016), Regulations on trade and economic relations in Islam (2019), Muhammad, Allah’s favorite messenger (2020), and The Ottoman state (2021.)

Other Turkish Sufi organizations function within the Russian Federation quite legally, although they do not venture into the Volga region, with the exception of Haqqani (their spiritual leader is sheikh Mekhmen Haqqani). Their positions are especially strong in Bashkortostan, where they are led by Salavat Kildin, former first CEO of Bashkortostan State TV and Radio Broadcasting Company and the head of the Directorate for the State Supervision over communications and informatization in the Russian Federation for the Republic of Bashkortostan.

Suleymancilar got its name after Turkish sheikh Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan. Akin to Hizmet, they opened several boarding schools in Russia: in Kazan, Nizhny Novgorod, Naberezhnye Chelny, Maykop, and Oktyabrsky. Nowadays, only one of them, Educational Center named after Ahmed Hadi Maksudi, located in the capital of Tatarstan, is still operating. Suleymancilar continues to enjoy popularity among the Muslim clergy of the CSAM and many of the faculty of the Russian Islamic University in Ufa – who, however, do not flaunt their affinity for the organization.



The most influential out of all the Turkish Sufi organizations is Ismail Aga, named after the famous mosque and madrasa in Istanbul. Their spiritual leader is sheikh Makhmud al-Ufi. The reason for their popularity is that a murid of this organization, imam of the Kazan Tynychlyk mosque Kamil Samigullin in 2013 was appointed the mufti of Tatarstan. Samigullin has neither confirmed nor denied his connections to this organization. After he was elected mufti, several members of Ismail Aga were appointed to high positions. Thus, Emir Minnemullin became the mukhtasib of the Arsky district, the district of Tatarstan

with the highest mosque density (around 80 parishes). Bulat Mubarakov took the post of the qadi (the magistrate of a Sharia court) of Kazan. The Tynychlyk mosque itself turned into the Ismail Aga headquarters. However, despite the strengthened positions of the organization in Tatarstan, Ismail Aga has not accumulated significant following. Publishing house Khuzur ('peace') does not publish any translations of works written by organization members, including the sheikh himself. There is one exception, however: A Quranic exegesis Khalyam Sharif in Tatar in Russian that was drawing from Quran Majeed, an exegesis by Makhmud al-Ufi. It is worth noting Khalyam Sharif that was building upon works by Sufi sheikhs, drew criticisms from Salafis who were unhappy with its positive commentary on Sufi practice of prayer for the dead.

On November 12, 2021, Istanbul hosted the eighth congress of the Turkic Council (founded in 2009 to unite Turkish-speaking countries), was renamed into the Organization of Turkic States (OTS). At the moment, apart from Turkey it has as its members the countries of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, with Turkmenistan and Hungary serving as observer states). In 2020, Ukraine expressed the wish of joining the international organization as a member state as well.

Thus, the pan-Turkic political ideology found its manifestation in the form of an international organization led by the heads of the member states that consider themselves to be primarily Turkic populations. So far there has been no response to the event from the Russian Muslim clergy of the Turkic descent. To a large extent, that is due to the desire of Russian muftis to follow the government lead in their reactions to international events. Since Moscow made no official comments regarding the foundation of the international Turkic state organization, Muslim clergy also chose to withhold their opinions. That, and the Russian media have expressed generally negative attitudes towards the new pan-Turkic formation led by Turkey: in their view, it is Ankara's way to declare its geopolitical aspirations to leadership in Central Asia and South Caucasus, and a potential threat of increased Turkish influence in Turkic enclaves in the Volga region, Crimea, and several other Russian territories.

TALIBAN* GAINING POWER IN KABUL AND RUSSIAN UMMAH REACTIONS TO EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

On August 15, 2021, the international community was blindsided by the thumping victory of radical Muslim movement Taliban* in Afghanistan (*banned in the Russian Federation as a terrorist organization). The organization captured Kabul, the country's capital, facing no resistance; president Ashraf Ghani and his pro-Western supporters fled the country, and Taliban formed its own government and local executive authorities. Recalling the previous time when Taliban* ruled in Afghanistan in 1996-2001 and turned the country into an Islamist stronghold that attracted many Muslim extremists from other states, many experts express concerns that now under the rule of Taliban* Afghanistan could again destabilize the region that would threaten a number of post-Soviet republics.

It should be kept in mind that Taliban* supporters do not follow Salafism (the Wahhabi, radical and banned branch of Islam). They belong to the Hanafi religious/legal school and Ash'ari system of belief – the same as many Russian Muslims who inhabit the Volga region, Crimea, and various parts of the North Caucasus. At the same time, Taliban* supporters are closer to Sufi Deobandi movement that is nowadays popular among Pakistani and Indian Muslims. Their coalition Salafi Al-Qaeda* organization (*banned in the Russian Federation as a terrorist organization) was circumstantial rather than deeply spiritual and long-lasting, since Taliban* followers are not close to Salafis ideologically.

At first, Russian Muslim clergy faced the news of Taliban* takeover with silence. This could partly be explained with the hesitation of the Kremlin in congratulating Taliban* or celebrating their victory. The events were regarded as a fait accompli, and the government that Taliban* formed – as the only real power in the country. It was only on September 20, 2021, that the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (with mufti Albir Krganov) issued a lengthy statement on the events in Afghanistan that expressed neither glee about the regime change, nor condemnation of Taliban*. The blame, however, was placed with the US, and Krganov suggested starting an international investigation of the country's war crimes in Afghanistan.

At the same time, Afghan affairs were discussed in the Russian ummah in Tatarstan alone, and that was in regard to the issue of so-called Afghan Tatars: descendants of those who settled in the Middle East as long ago as in the thirteenth century, in the era of the Mongol invasion and the foundation of the Mongolian Empire under Genghis Khan. These descendants are only tangentially related to modern Tatars of the Volga Region and are not Turkic linguistically. They speak Dari, and their culture is quite dissimilar from that of Kazan Tatars. However, since 2000s they have been attempting to self-organize and forge relations with Kazan along the lines of sharing the common Tatar heritage. The organization uniting the Tatar diaspora in Afghanistan is The Afghan Council of Tatars, headed by Makhdum Abdallah Mohammadi, deputy of the lower house of the Afghan parliament from the province of Samangan.

In 2021, Afghan authorities officially acknowledged local Tatars as a separate nationality (altogether, there are 15 nationalities acknowledged in Afghanistan) and permitted them to identify as Tatars in documentation, which led to increased interest towards them from Tatarstan. It is especially relevant nowadays, in the light of the informational campaign around the census in Russia that was postponed from 2020 to 2021. Kazan is seeking to high Tatar visibility in the world; however, boosting the numbers with the help of Afghan Tatars is highly unlikely: it is yet to be determined how many members of the Tatar diaspora there are in the country.

Contacts with Afghan Muslims are maintained through the Charity Patriotic Muslim Fund (with Rustam Khabibullin being its CEO) founded in 2018. The NGO provides humanitarian help and builds bridges between Muslims of both countries, among other things through the Tatar diaspora of Afghanistan – notably, the Fund initiated this connection even before Taliban* came to power. Religious affairs in the Fund are handled by former imam of the Kazan Kazan Nury mosque Rustem Zinnurov. In 2019 he took a trip to Afghanistan together with Rustam Khabibullin, where he gave a sermon at the Abdul Rakhman mosque of Kabul. The Fund managed to open an office in Afghanistan; the office is headed by Mukhammad Yusuf Shinvari.

Kazan Mirgazyan mosque, led by imam Abdurrauf Zabirov, has also started to provide similar support to Afghan Muslims through the World Congress of the Tatars.

Such humanitarian diplomacy initiated by one of the Muslim NGOs of the Republic of Tatarstan nowadays represents the only channel of cooperation between Russian Muslims and their Afghan fellow believers – and that support is targeted towards the local Tatar diaspora.

CONCLUSIONS, GENERALIZATIONS, AND FORECASTS



Challenges that are facing the Russian ummah nowadays create a whole array of problems of both religious and state-building nature for modern Russia. Many of them are either already conflict-ridden, or create possibilities for new conflicts to emerge.

The organizational split of the Russian Muslim community into competing factions is the most prominent and characteristic feature thereof. Mutual rivalry often leads to accusations being thrown back and forward, and this creates breeding ground for radical Muslim movements that are atypical for the Russian Islam: thus, when a mufti insists on removing an imam with an ideological stance diverging from that of the muftiate from the office, he can transfer his mosque under the jurisdiction of a different muftiate. This trend can be observed in the rivalry between the CSAM and the SAM RF; the SAM RF and the SAM of Tatarstan; the SAM RF and the SAMR; the SAM RF and the Muftiate of Dagestan; the SAM RF and the CCMNC. The traditional division of the Russian Islamic ummah into the “Tatar” and the “Caucasus” parts this year has been put into question by political decisions of the SAM RF and the SAM APR.

One of the characteristic features of the Russian ummah is the presence of phantom muftiates: those regional spiritual administrations of Muslims that are not registered officially and cannot be found on the Uniform State Registry of Legal Entities, but de facto operate: it is the Muftiate of the Far East, the Spiritual Center of Muslims of the Republic of Ingushetia, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Republic of Ingushetia, and the CSAM of Crimea Taurian Muftiate. While the latter made at least some attempts to get registered, the rest seem to not even aspire to do so and are completely content with the current state of affairs, by the look of it.

The growing commitment of the ever-larger part of the Russian Muslim clergy to various foreign Islamic centers of the Near and Middle East paves the way for corresponding ideological branches of Islam, including radical ones, to spread within their muftiates and mosques.

Muslim loyalty to various Islamic movements – from those traditionally present in Russia to most atypical – plays an important role in breeding internal strife within the ummah. Conflicts emerge between Salafis and Sufis, as well as Sufis that belong to different organizations. The Turkish influence has been growing in the post-Soviet sphere, which raises the question of the nature of Ankara’s ‘soft power’ as a factor influencing Muslims both in Russia and in the former Soviet republics.

Taliban’s* rise to power in Afghanistan and its desire to turn the state into an Islamic emirate suggests that the country could become a magnet for Russian Islamists that would flock to Afghanistan to undergo ideological training – as well as cause mass refugee migration to Russia, should Taliban* take over neighboring countries in Central Asia. Such forecasts, however, are as of now hypothetical in nature: Russian Muslim clergy chose to not react to the regime change in Afghanistan, looking to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide guidance, and the latter provided little response to the change in power. Stand-alone contacts between Russian and Afghan Muslims are as of now maintained through humanitarian aid provided by an NGO – and such contacts are far from sufficient to grant conversations on Taliban* influence on the Russian ummah.

* *Organizations recognized by the legislation of the Russian Federation as prohibited*



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