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ISLAMISM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: APPEARANCE, CONFLICT WITH TRADITIONS, MEASURES AGAINST

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Abstract

The article reveals the content of the concept of “Islamism” as religious and political extremism in the North Caucasus, which specifically manifested itself through Islamic trends such as Salafism and Wahhabism. These trends in the region were not previously known to the peoples inhabiting it. In Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, representatives of these movements sought to “purify” local Islam from errors, creating conflict situations, bloody clashes, proving their innocence. Islamism is defined as religious and political extremism, whose supporters commit crimes against people, hiding behind the slogans of Islam. These provisions are in no way correlated with the essence of Islam. Attention is paid to considering the features of the penetration of Islamism in the region. It is shown that the dogmatic basis of Islamism and its ideological and political orientation are anti-people, anti-state, religious extremist in nature. The causes of contradictions, conflicts between Muslims, adhering to local Islamic traditions, often associated with the values of Sufism and Salafi-Wahhabi ideology and practice, are examined. Conflicts are associated with social transformations that have taken place in the country, the democratization of Muslim institutions in Russia, publicity, and pluralism in public opinion. In these social conditions, Islamic movements began to penetrate from Muslim countries, pursuing not so many humanistic goals as radicalizing the public consciousness of Muslims. The essential factor in the implementation of preventive measures is the need to mobilize the values of traditional ethnic culture, including the values of local Islam. Historical values can be used against religious-political extremism.

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Keywords: Islam, Islamism, religious extremism, Wahhabism, Sharia, traditional values.



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1. Introduction

Islamism, as religious and political extremism in Russia, hiding behind Islamic slogans, has its characteristics of occurrence, functioning, various forms of manifestation. The actions of Islamist actors were pronounced asocial, extremely radical. The concept of "Islamism" in this publication is considered as religious and political extremism, focused on counteracting the prevailing political, legal, cultural reality, religious values, claiming to replace it. Religious and political extremism among Muslims of Russia arose under the guise of Islamic slogans. Islamism called on Muslims to political activity, aimed against historically established ethnocultural traditions, traditional clergy, secular authorities. Islamism sought to subordinate all public life in the regions where Muslims live to Sharia. The carriers of these ideas in the regions where Muslims live in Russia were various Islamic organizations. These organizations included Salafi-Wahhabi groups (Jamaats), followers of Hizb ut Tahrir organizations, Habashids, and other groups. These groups existed and were active in Moscow, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Dagestan, and other Russian regions with a Muslim population. Islamists disoriented the indifferent young Muslims who were passive in social processes. Their activity in the North Caucasus has an asocial character and directly destabilized the social, religious, and political situation.

2. Problem Statement

In the North Caucasus, religious extremist manifestations were directly associated with the activities of Wahhabi groups, Jamaats, which intensified on the eve and after the collapse of the USSR. As noted by Dobaev (2014), the process of politicization and radicalization of Islam took place in the North Caucasus in the early 90s and was connected with the ideology of neovahhabism. Of course, Islam itself was not radicalized, but political groups that set the goal of political activation of Muslims, directing their activities against historical traditions and the existing state system. At the same time, they deftly operated Islamic slogans, posing as true followers of Islam from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the righteous caliphs. Wahhabi (Jamaat) groups in the early 90s in the North Caucasus began to take shape under the influence of Kebedov, who created an Islamic center (called Wahhabi) in Dagestan. About 700 young people from Dagestan, Chechnya, Karachay-Cherkessia, and other regions were trained in "pure Islam" in this center. In the village of Pervomayskoye in the Khasavyurt district of the Republic of Dagestan, Kebedov created the publishing center "Santlada." This publishing house has published a lot of Islamic literature, including "Wahhabi literature." The peculiarity of this literature is that it explains the essence of "pure" Islam and its incompatibility with traditional regional values, including Islamic ones. Per Russian law, a significant part of this literature was recognized as extremist.

These are religious groups that differ from the traditionally traditional Sufi fraternities in the region. Sufis adapted to local customs, traditions, ethnocultural characteristics. However, they should, from our point of view, be attributed to the Islamists. Islamism, as a religious and political movement, is not Islam in any way. Islamism orientates a Muslim not to mastering the essence of Islam, its spiritual, moral, humanistic, peacemaking values. Islamism directs people to a strictly political position, often radical, realized through the use of violence carried out under the guise of Islamic slogans.

3. Research Questions

The most prominent Islamist tendencies were identified in such Muslim regions of Russia as Dagestan, Chechnya, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia. It was here that on the eve of and after the collapse of the USSR, a rapid revival of Islam took place. Young people and the older generation began to perform Islamic rites in large numbers, attend mosques, the construction of which was widespread on a large scale. Islamic newspapers and literature were printed, educational institutions opened (primary, secondary, higher). Ordinary Muslims, wealthy people, philanthropists supported this process. In Russia and its regions, the number of Muslims performing Hajj to Mecca increased sharply. With these general processes of the revival of Islam, Salafi, Wahhabi movements began to penetrate the North Caucasus, the Volga region, and the Urals, whose representatives presented themselves as the bearers of "pure Islam." In the course of public discourse between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, disputes, contradictions, and conflicts began to arise. Often conflicts resulted in clashes and bloodshed. These conflicts were observed in Dagestan, Chechnya, Krachaevo-Cherkessia, Tatarstan.

Wahhabis had foreign support, had greater financial capabilities than traditionalists. The Wahhabis were youth-oriented and, politically, dogmatically, were more attractive than traditionalists. At first, the process of "Wahhabization" was slow, its successes among Muslims in the North Caucasus were modest. However, non-traditionalists, being active, involved young people in their circles (jamaats), often from dysfunctional families. The offensive nature of the Wahhabis in Dagestan, Chechnya, led to conflicts between supporters of Sufi Islam and the bearers of "pure Islam." In 1991–1995 in Dagestan, in the Kizilyurt, Kazbekov districts, and the city of Makhachkala, many armed clashes occurred between Wahhabis and representatives of traditional Islam (Akayev, 2004).

After the events of August 1996 in Chechnya, military courts were created, staffed exclusively by Wahhabis. In Chechnya, Wahhabi ideas penetrated thanks to the supporters of Wahhabism, who found themselves in the power structures of the regime. They took radical measures: they dismissed secular courts, created Sharia courts, carrying out appropriate legal proceedings on their basis. The Wahhabis persistently sought to Islamize the whole life of the Chechens and build the Sharia republic. However, these artificially imposed processes did not receive mass support because the majority of the population opposed it. Nevertheless, the radicals persistently imposed a line of Shariahization of the Chechen population. The part of the youth that was indifferent to the spiritual, religious, political processes that found themselves marginal after the collapse of the USSR was particularly affected.

Prosecutor of the Republic of Dagestan Yarialiev (2002) writes about the processes of active "Islamization" of Dagestan and the participation of Wahhabis in them: "... in 1992–1996, with the participation of Islamic sponsors (international Islamic organizations), about 40 mosques were built in Dagestan, 16 mosques and five were repaired Madrasah, which spent 1 million dollars. 12 higher, 136 secondaries and 203 primary religious, educational institutions were opened in the republic, where 14 thousand children and youth studied annually." Kisriev (2007) characterizes the religious and political situation that developed during the described period as follows: "In Dagestan, two irreconcilable Islamic trends — Wahhabi and Tariqatis — were very clearly identified during re-Islamization. Their activity, determination and confrontation among themselves reached the most extreme degrees and, in the end, a bloody climax – the August-September war of 1999. "

The Wahhabis carried out activities in Dagestan, imposing "true Islam," the author cited considers it a re-Islamization. However, in reality, this situation reflected the clash between Sufism, traditional for the region, of the Islamic movement, and the Islamic movement, previously unknown for this region, which was popularly called "Wahhabism." The traditionalists rejected the ideology and practice of Wahhabism when they tried in every possible way to impose them, believing the former to be not true Muslims.

The provocative campaign of Basayev and Khattab to the mountainous Dagestan in early August 1999 led to the second war in Chechnya, the beginning of military battles of the federal forces with the Wahhabis, and then the military structures of the Maskhadov regime. This provocation was by the fact that Bagautdin Kebedov, along with Wahhabis, was negotiating with the Dagestan authorities. The authorities of Dagestan promised to allow him creating Sharia rule in the Tsumadinsky district. An example is the activity of Dargins in Chobanmahi and Kramahi. Two weeks later, Kebedov and his armed detachment, consisting of Wahhabis, were surrounded by troops and police demanding to disarm. There is an armed clash, Kebedov calls Basayev on the phone and insists that he come to their aid and save them from destruction. Addressing Basayev, B. Kebedov declared: "On the day of judgment before Allah, I will testify: when we, Muslims, Dagestanis were killed, that you, the Chechens, did not come to help."

The traditional Chechen clergy opposed a provocative campaign in mountain Dagestan, and Mufti of Ichkeria Kadyrov also strongly opposed it. Kadyrov called on President Maskhadov to condemn the provocation of Basayev and Khattab, to prevent their return to Chechnya. The federal authorities also demanded such actions from him, but he rejected this position.

In September 1999, the military, socio-economic, political, spiritual, and cultural stabilized in Dagestan, the Chechen Republic. Stabilization of the situation led to the fact that decisions were made at the state level to suppress the activities of extremist and terrorist activities of Wahhabi groups that were entrenched in these subjects of Russia. Federal forces began to squeeze Wahhabis from Dagestan to Chechnya, the military fortifications of Wahhabis in the cadar zone were utterly defeated.

From the 2000s, purposeful activity against the manifestations of extremism and terrorism has been carried out in the Chechen Republic. The bearers of extremism were Islamists in the person of Wahhabi, Salafi Jamaats, who were Islamic groups. They oriented young people to extreme forms of political, extremist activity. Extremists and terrorists believed that their struggle against official power, traditional clergy is part of the worldwide jihad against kufr. Such an orientation during the Dudaev-Maskhadov regime led to the fact that a small part of the youth was socially, politically, ideologically disorganized. Part of the youth was involved in extremist and terrorist organizations. The goal of these organizations is to create a Caucasian caliphate from sea to sea.

Ultimately, this led to tragic consequences, military operations, and colossal destruction in Chechnya. The stabilization of the political situation in the Chechen Republic required not only the restoration of the destroyed but also the implementation of a system of ideological measures. The system of ideological measures is based on the mobilization of the values of the ethnic culture of Chechens, national customs and traditions, historically existing traditional religious values – the Head of the Chechen Republic A.-Kh. Kadyrov paid considerable attention to both the socio-economic and spiritual revival of Chechen society. Thanks to his activities, it was possible in a short time to form republican

authorities, enter the legal field of Russia, and resume the work of medical, cultural, art, educational and scientific institutions. In 2003, a referendum was held in Chechnya. At a referendum, Chechens voted to join Russia, which helped stabilize the political and legal situation. He did a lot to strengthen the position of the traditional clergy, elders, attaching great importance to their role in preserving and popularizing the traditional values of multinational Chechen society. Kadyrov paid particular attention to this in his religious and political activities. Thanks to him, the traditional Islamic, Sufi, and national-cultural values of the Chechens were mobilized and reproduced in Chechnya in order to counter the manifestations of radical Islamism, the bearers of which were Wahhabis and Salafists in Chechnya.

Akkieva (2009), analyzing the causes of the Islamist attack on the security forces in Kabardino-Balkaria, identifying their social roots, noted the presence of unemployment, lumpenization, lack of jobs for young people with a salary that could satisfy average human needs. In its analysis, measures are proposed that could to avoid such excesses is, first of all, this purposeful activity of the state to overcome unemployment among youth, close cooperation of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims with authorities. The intensification of educational activities among the population, exercising caution in the use of the term "Wahhabi" since under it, can bring "a classical Muslim sense" (p. 29).

Undoubtedly, the solution of socio-economic problems in society, especially the overcoming of unemployment, the creation of broad conditions for the employment of young people, their involvement in socially useful, creative, well-paid work, orientation toward creativity, the formation of legal awareness, familiarization with moral and humanistic values, values traditional culture, including Islamic, the implementation of a continuous dialogue of different cultures. It is these factors that can significantly minimize asocial manifestations in society, including extremist ones.

For example, with the support of the Head of the Chechen Republic R.A. Kadyrov, a "Unified concept of spiritual and moral education and development of the younger generation of the Chechen Republic" was developed. It set the goal of spiritual and moral education, and development of the younger generation based on the values of humanism, morality, spirituality, application of the traditional values of the Chechen ethnic group. The authorities of the republic, the clergy, representatives of secular and religious educational institutions, the public, scientists, writers, and journalists, with a view to its practical implementation, periodically conduct significant work with rural and urban youth, with schoolchildren and students.

Such events are held in each subject of the North Caucasus Federal District. Authorities, intellectuals, and clergy take active part here, who conduct conversations, round tables, lectures, conferences with schoolchildren, students, and working youth. These events are aimed at clarifying the essence of extremism and terrorism; they reveal the humanistic, peacekeeping content of Islam, which does not accept violence. It is explained to young people that the ethnocultural traditions of the peoples of the North Caucasus contain significant spiritual and moral potential that can be successfully mobilized to counter manifestations of extremism and other antisocial phenomena.

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to identify sociocultural factors that determined the emergence and spread of Islamism in the North Caucasus during the period of democratization of Russian society, Islamic revival,

the democratization of Muslim religious institutions associated with the liberation of society from the influence of communist ideology and its collapse.

5. Research Methods

The goal and the tasks achieved are realized through the application of classical scientific methods of analysis, comparison, generalization, synthesis of more facts, carrying out a content analysis of the press, electronic resources. The system-structural analysis allowed for a holistic vision of the problem.

6. Findings

The article analyzes the concept of Islamism, which manifested itself in the North Caucasus in such forms as Salafism, Wahhabism. Supporters of Islamic organizations, hiding behind Islamic slogans, committed violence, carried out extremist and terrorist activities. The authors see the reasons for these phenomena in the destruction of the system in which the peoples of the North Caucasus lived; the creation of an unstable economic and political situation in Russia and its regions; the external influence of Muslim Islamist centers in order to radicalize Muslims and use them to create Sharia enclaves (for example, the Caucasian caliphate) with the existence of "pure Islam." All this led them to conflict with regional religious traditions, opposition to Islamism by supporters of local Islam, and their support by the federal center of Russia. The experience of confronting traditionalists with Islamists today requires careful study and development of new preventive measures to counter extremism and terrorist manifestations.

7. Conclusion

In 2014, the quasi-state organization ISIS-IS (DAISH) was formed, carrying out acts recognized by the international community as a terrorist, calling on Islamist-oriented youth to join the world jihad. In the Middle East, there was active opposition to this organization. At this time, in the North Caucasus, authorities intensified their opposition to Wahhabism. Organizations of power and traditional clergy are activating among young people an interest in traditional ethnocultural values.

Young people, deceived by religious slogans, Islamist projects, were sent to this organization from the republics of the North Caucasus Federal District for jihad, many of them died. We are talking about 500 Caucasians who died in this war (Akayev & Salgiriev, 2017). This organization leaders did not conceal that one of their goals was to "liberate" Chechnya and the Caucasus from the Russian "occupation." For these purposes, they planned to carry out terrorist acts in Russian cities in order to spread fear and panic among the population. In the North Caucasus, authorities, the public, and the clergy did significant work to stop the activities of Daesh supporters in the North Caucasus, its impact on youth, and expose the ideology and practice of Islamism. Moreover, today, it is fundamentally vital to implement preventive measures against the influence of radical, extremist ideas and relevant practices to counter the influence of Islamism, in its various manifestations, on youth and students (Akayev, Nanaeva, & Vagabova, 2017). Here the application of the common efforts of both scientists and practitioners is necessary.

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