

THE FIRST INDEPENDENT MAGAZINE ABOUT EVENTS IN THE CAUCASUS

WORD

DOSH

GUEST



ISSUE #14

CONVICTED FOR... HER ETHNICITY

For eight and a half years
Zara Murtazaliyeva was pressured
to confess to a false accusation, but she resisted

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

A remarkable event took place at the Grozny offices of the Inter-regional Non-governmental Organization *Caucasus Initiative Center* — the presentation of Zoya Svetova's book *Finding the Innocent Guilty*, as well as a meeting with Zara Murtazaliyeva, the inspiration for the book's protagonist. Zara spent eight and a half years in a penal colony in Mordovia as a result of fabricated charges of terrorism. She was released on September 3 of this year.

She was only 20 years old when she was sent to prison. Throughout those years, various human rights activists busied themselves with her fate: the book's author Zoya Svetova, HRC *Memorial* council member and director of *Grazhdanskoe Sodeistvie* Svetlana Gannushkina, the well-known psychologist Natalia Nelidova and many others.

The event was attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations, members of the creative and scientific intelligentsias, journalists, as well as simply readers of *DOSH* magazine, the pages of which shed light on Zara's situation all these years.

In an emotional presentation, the famed Chechen actress Zulai Bagalova remarked that "Zara served time for every Chechen woman who could have found herself in a similar situation."

"Thank you for facing this difficult journey to its end with honor," the actress could not contain her tears addressing Zara. Everyone who spoke after Bagalova adopted the same emotional tone. They expressed their admiration for the tenacity of this young woman who, enduring the heaviest of trials, neither gave in to bitterness nor lost her capacity for kindness and compassion.

Speaking about the conditions in the colony, Zara noted that her

rights were infringed upon ceaselessly, even during the eight-hour-long sleep accorded her by law. According to her, in all the years she spent at the colony, not one Chechen woman was granted probationary early release.

"It is precisely against the Chechens that, by arrangement from above, the most ludicrous reports are written with the goal of denying early release," she added. By way of example, Zara cited a report claiming that she allegedly violated regulations by being inside without head covering — an utter absurdity given that such a requirement does not exist at all within the colony's regulations.

Murtazaliyeva found it regrettable that Chechen Republic NGOs afford insufficient attention to prisoners' rights. At the same time, Zara and her mother, Toita, thanked all those who supported the convicted, innocent woman and helped her during her incarceration.

Zoya Svetova, attending over video link, noted that "the Chechen people should be proud of Zara, who remains not only unbroken by prison but, to the contrary, seems all the stronger and wiser for it." However, she did not fail to point out that "this was a terrible tragedy for a young woman, for her mother and their entire family."

According to Svetova, each time that she visited Zara in the Mordovian colony, the most difficult thing for her was having to part ways: "I would leave and she would remain alone there, in that horrifying reality."

Today, a new phase of life has opened itself before Zara Murtazaliyeva. She must decide what she will do in the future — finish her higher education, find a job or help those who find themselves in her situation.

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By slandering Cherkesov as a recidivist and drug addict, Putin further stoked the nationalists' anger. Aslan's relatives are of the opinion that the Prime Minister's unceremoniously proclaimed position predetermined the trial's result long before the verdict was pronounced. Svetlana Gannushkina, Director of the *Grazhdanskoe Sodeistvie* committee, agrees: "After Putin's speech I instantly knew what the trial's result would be, and I was right." And yet it would seem that the story of this crime, in no way differs from any other mundane drama. The young men got into it. Had a fight. Started shooting. Such confrontations are not rare. Especially in a country like Russia, which, according to official UN data, is among the world leaders for annual number of committed crimes.

MAIRBEK VATCHAGAEV AN UNTHEATRICAL PART FOR A FORMER ACTRESS

Why was Said Afandi al-Chirkawi killed?



The death of people of such stature as was Said Afandi's always reverberates throughout society — this is precisely what those who guide the assassin's hand want. The enemy seeks to deal the most palpable blow: he looks for a target whose demise will be painful for many and having found his victim descends upon him without hesitation.

Death found Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi at his home, giving as per usual, audience to his followers. A woman asked to see the sheikh, and the bodyguards let her through since this was an everyday occurrence. The

visitor turned out to be Alla Saprykina, or Aminat Kurbanova as she was known by her married name. A Russian by nationality but born in Dagestan, she had graduated with honors from Dagestan State University's Faculty of Culture and had briefly worked as an actress in the Russian theater in Makhachkala. Having converted to Islam she married Marat Kurbanov, whose brother Renat was at the time a member of the armed resistance.

Following Renat's death, Marat became emir of Makhachkala for a brief time but was killed at the beginning of January 2010. According to Dagestan MVD data, on August 28, 2012, posing as a visitor, his widow entered the house of Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi in the village of Chirkey in the Buynaksky District and set off an explosive device loaded with bearing balls, which had been affixed to her waist. The force of the explosion was only equivalent to a few grams of TNT, but that was enough to kill the sheikh and six other visitors, including a child. One other person was taken to the hospital.

However, among all the details of this case there is one peculiar and disquieting fact: according to the Republic of Dagestan's police version of events, Aminat Kurbanova had already killed herself in a suicide bombing on May 4,

2012! Either the facts had not been properly verified in the past (but at any rate no one ever tried to refute them), or the Dagestani police have gotten mixed up and do not know themselves who blew up or where. One way or another, no one has managed to die twice yet.

Besides, this is hardly the only riddle tied to the demise of Said Afandi. This, in many ways extraordinary, person never hid from anyone. Almost daily, he would receive dozens and at times hundreds of people who sought blessing or counsel to their never simple questions from the lips of the famous sheikh. Had he wanted it, he could have had a palace in Makhachkala — his wealthy devotees would have happily furnished him with a luxurious life — but he was humble and lived far away from the bustle of the capital. The sheikh did not seek riches. He was born in 1937 in the village of Chirkey. Here he spent his childhood, here he matured and here, having turned 32, he decided to dedicate himself to Islam.

The village of Chirkey had been flooded at the beginning of the 70s for the building of the the Chirkey Dam, and its inhabitants had been resettled closer to the plain where they were allotted land and built houses. To this day this is where the village of Chirkey is located, and this is where the sheikh lived,

remaining forever among his fellow villagers.

That was during the Soviet era, a time of militant atheism when the kind of choice the sheikh had made placed a person instantly at a disadvantage. He was forced to familiarize himself with Islam in secret and penetrate the secrets of Sufism with the aid of his ulama (mentors), knowing surely that in the view of the Soviet authorities he would always remain outside of the law. But the regime that had pursued him in his youth fell in due time, while he himself rose to become sheikh of two tariqas: of the Naqshbandi and the Shadhili. Those who had been his persecutors were the first to rush to express their reverence for him and, having become murids (followers), tried to atone for their transgressions before the same Islam they had disavowed in accordance with CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) policy.

The 74-year-old Said Afandi was one of twenty Sufi sheikhs in Dagestan and the first among his peers. He attained this status by means of hard work and yet not without the aid of the wealthy, who had elected him their spiritual mentor. There were many who did not like this. They accused him of representing the interests of the authorities, but no one could compete with him in the numbers of murids — and this was a consequence of nothing but his own merit and the trust that the common people placed in him. To have tens of thousands of active murids among a population of three million speaks for itself.

The sheikh's funeral, which turned into a silent protest against the blasphemous murder, vividly illustrated how many people were ready to heed the call of this person. No one could imagine that in the hours following the demise of Said Afandi, 150 to 200

According to the Republic of Dagestan's police version of events, Aminat Kurbanova had already killed herself in a suicide bombing on May 4, 2012! Either the facts had not been properly verified in the past (but at any rate no one ever tried to refute them), or the Dagestani police have gotten mixed up and do not know themselves who blew up or where. One way or another, no one has managed to die twice yet.

thousand mourning murids would descend upon his native Chirkey.

The more murids one has, the more enemies one has — such is the reality of our grim life. But who needed the sheikh to die? Perhaps the Salafists? What good would that do? What would they achieve? Perhaps, with his demise, no one will follow in his footsteps? Or, at least, the number of followers will wane? Of course not. Perhaps, this act was intended to demonstrate the power of the Salafists? Of course not. I would say that the sheikh's death was least advantageous for the Salafists — especially since, as the thousands of articles written about this demonstrate, almost everyone is inclined to suspect their hand in this evil.

And so we arrive at a reasonable question: what kept them (the Salafists) from killing him one, ten, or twenty years ago? Did the sheikh ever hide from anyone? No — as we already mentioned, he was open to everyone. Besides, this was the year of progress in the dialog between the Spiritual Board of Muslims in Dagestan which represents the Sufis, and the Salafists. Both sides had sought to find common ground on varying issues of Islamic theology. Said Afandi had been absent from this peacemaking process, but the popular rumors were wrong to see in this any special significance, since it was clear that without his blessing, the mufti of Dagestan would never have committed to it. After all, he too was a murid of the late sheikh.

For some reason, analysts do not trouble themselves with the fact that the

opposing side had agreed to the peace process as well. Absent its assent, the process could not have taken place. It is worth also noting that through their political wing, the *Abkhaz Sunnah Association*, the Salafists' activities in Russia are legal (the only instance of this in Russia).

And so, is it worth putting all this in jeopardy just to kill Sheikh Said Afandi? This is completely irrational — it simply makes no sense. It's true that the Salafists were not fond of him: they bestowed on him all kinds of unflattering monikers, censured many of his actions, and mercilessly criticized his publications. But not once did they threaten either him or any other Dagestani Sufi sheikh with death. The leaders of the armed underground understood that most of the Republic's populace saw Said Afandi as a saint and that consequently an attack against him could turn against the resistance movement itself.

In this sense, it is worth noting the reaction to the sheikh's death on the part of those websites that represent the interests of the Salafist armed underground resistance in the North Caucasus. Their response to the event was fairly restrained: they sufficed themselves with a mere reminder that the deceased had been a supporter of Russia's presence in the Caucasus and had prayed for Vladimir Putin's victory. The leadership of the site for the Dagestani insurgents claims that they had thousands of opportunities to kill him but did not do so. If we keep in mind that while the sheikh was alive they insulted him as much as they could, such a response to his death

leads us to suppose that they too were surprised by this event.

Was his death then perhaps favorable to the authorities? For some reason, certain analysts decided that the agreement signed in May 2012 in Makhachkala between the Spiritual Board of Muslims in Dagestan and the Salafists was some kind of private arrangement that concerned only its participants. As if today in Dagestan it is possible to do anything against the wishes of the state agencies, much less organize such an enormous undertaking behind their back — bringing the Salafists and the Sufis to a single table. Only the naïve can suppose that the authorities were not participants (even if in a backstage capacity) in this reconciliation between the two currents of Islam. Contemplating the sheikh's murder, they would have to prepare not for reconciliation, but for a possible disturbance in social stability, as well as a long search for Sheikh Said Afandi's replacement, which would have been particularly difficult in an unstable situation.

Furthermore, the loyalty of the republican authorities was predetermined by their closeness to Sheikh Said Afandi's order. The people in power had exchanged their CPSU membership cards for the green taqiyahs of the sheikh's followers back in the 90s of the 20th century. But power would not be power if it did not somehow make use of this death. Having barely received the news of Said Afandi's murder, the President of the Republic of Dagestan, Magomedsalam Magomedov, suddenly announced the need to "create youth militias that, acting on the orders of and in conjunction with law enforcement agencies, will conduct internal security operations aimed at punishing these bandits."

The creation of such militias under the command of the head of the Republic

would create forces that would be subordinate not to the federal center (as is the case with MVD forces), but to local authorities, which would allow them to be used to solve local issues — one of which would be the strengthening of the reigning clan system. That is, we see in this a desire to play upon the sheikh's death in order to effect a new structure for securing personal interests within the Republic. But this could not have served as sufficient reason for the authorities to make an attempt on Said Afandi's life.

It may be that it is worth searching for his killers among the sheikh's competitors — that is, among the adherents of Sufism? Hypothetically, yes. But in reality, any sheikh fully comprehends his historical mission and therefore understands that actions of this sort will evoke not only social indignation, but will lead to the entire Sufi order's departure from the political arena. It is unlikely that one of the twenty currently active sheikhs in Dagestan could even for a moment consider such a method of disposing of a competitor.

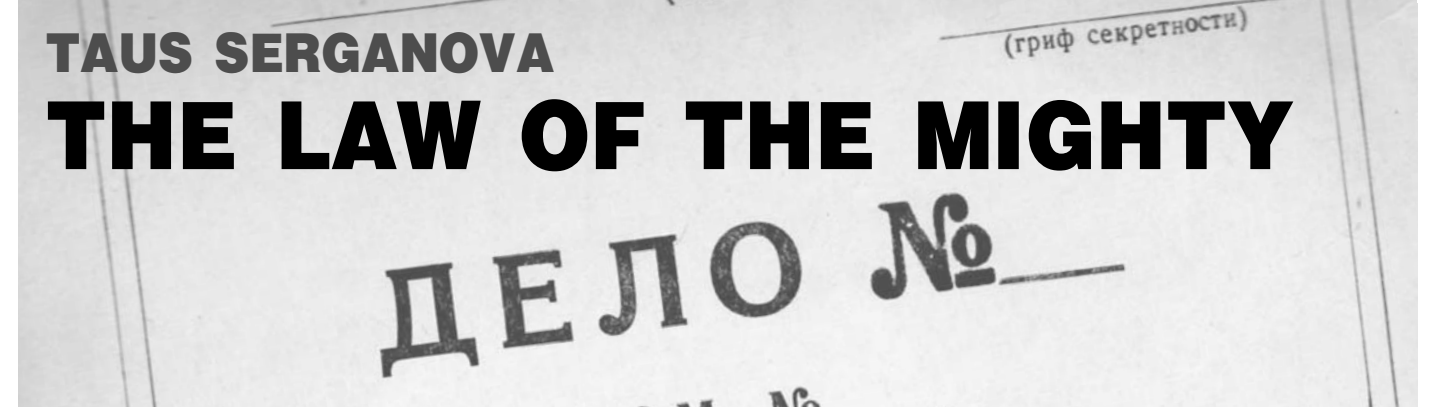
Then who did this? Let us not forget when posing such a question that this is not the first assassination of a sheikh in Dagestan. To this day no investigator has any idea of who killed Sirajuddin al-Huriki (al-Tabarani) in the autumn of 2011. Who was interested in these deaths? Why did Dagestan, in just one year, lose two of its most powerful sheikhs? Sirajuddin al-Huriki was one of the absolute authorities in Southern Dagestan. In other regions of the Republic he was second only to Sheikh Said Afandi al-Chirkawi whose influence (particularly among the Avarian part of the population) was unprecedented.

The departure of both sheikhs ushers in a struggle among their murids over the spheres of influence, and this in turn will lead to a weakening of Sufism

both in the face of the Salafist onslaught and Moscow's measures to discredit Islam. As soon as the authorities begin to support this or that sheikh, society at large grows suspicious of him. This response is a result of the fact that the authorities remain unpopular and do not inspire trust among the citizenry. The consequence of this will be a weakening of the local clan structure which relied on the authority of the Sufi brotherhood to a well-known degree.

And yet, in spite of the horrible outlooks that every analyst and journalist promises for Dagestan, I don't see enough reasons to discuss a serious aggravation of the situation in the Republic due to the death of Said Afandi al-Chirkawi. Of course changes within the Sufi community are inevitable, but only experts in this field will be able to determine what exactly these will be — and even then not right away but with time. On the whole, it is not worth assuming that the sheikh's demise will become a new turning point in the history of Dagestan. Attempts on the part of especially zealous members of the Sufi order to take it out on the Salafists are possible, but society as a whole will not support them in this. The vengeful murids will have to come to terms with the fact that the only way to draw a line under this affair will be to unequivocally determine who stood behind the sheikh's murder.

The problems of Dagestan did not emerge only yesterday. They are thousands of years old. In many ways they are the same even today, when Dagestani society is undergoing formation under modern circumstances. This society, which has given the world not a few great names, will prove even today that it is more ethical, reasonable, and noble than those who planned its destabilization.



In the views of many experts studying the North Caucasus region, the socio-political situation in Dagestan is at the edge of a precipice. Basically every day, Russian society sees stories in the mass media of explosions, attempted killings, and murders occurring in the Republic. But behind these news lie the lives of regular people, victims of criminal acts. Their attempts to turn to the law for succor bear no results. And then they are left with only one thing — to give voice to what is happening to them.

Truly fearsome stories happened this year for two Dagestani families. In both cases the fathers sought to protect their daughters, the honor of their family. They turned to law enforcement and tried to resolve their problems through traditional institutions, but neither the former nor the latter had any effect. In both cases the laws were ignored — both judicial and human ones.

The first story began with 14-year-old Saida agreeing to get into the car of a

classmate who supposedly wanted to talk to her. This was in the village of Karabudahkent. The daughter's father Magomed-Nebi Nazhmutdinov, a private security officer, relates the following:

"Saida is my eldest daughter. This past May her behavior changed abruptly: she became closed off, sitting alone in her room for hours and avoiding joint meals. In general she didn't want to go anywhere, aside from maybe school sometimes, but even then she'd come





up with reasons not to go. My wife and I would ask her what was happening but she claimed queasiness.

"Three months before that she had been betrothed to and was spending time with her fiancé. My wife and I thought she was experiencing anxiety due to this. One day, coming back from my shift, my wife told me that our daughter was refusing her engagement. I called my brothers and my in-laws to discuss the situation. In the end, giving in to Saida's wishes, we returned the presents that the groom's family had given and broke off the engagement. But even then her depression did not pass.

"Coming home late one night, I struck up a frank conversation with my daughter. I began to ask her what the problem was, what was happening with her. She cried a long time. Then she revealed that one day (this happened in 2010) a guy in her school, from an older class, with whom she'd simply been friends, asked to speak to her in his car. Once they were alone, he forced her to have sexual intercourse with him. Later he told his friends about it, who, threatening her with disclosure and shaming, began to force her to have depraved sexual relations with them too. One of them made a video and blackmailed her with it. In total, for almost a year, the girl was raped by eleven people, both

upperclassmen and adult men. There were instances of gang rape as well. And all of them are our fellow villagers.

"I turned to the Regional Department of Internal Affairs. The senior detective admitted my complaint. The investigator conducted a preliminary examination of my daughter. The next day, eight people were detained, but after two hours of examination all were let go, supposedly for the duration of the investigation. Forensic investigations were conducted, but we have not been told their results to this day. In August we received a refusal to reopen the criminal proceedings due to a lack of evidence. One of the rapists even came to us with threats. They had managed to destroy the evidence in time. They were given the opportunity to do so since some of these bastards have relatives among the current and former law enforcement agents. Having influential relatives, they do not deign to reckon with the law.

"Wherever I turned I was told that I 'should have kept a closer watch over my daughter'; no one, they'd say, beat her or forced her. [Although, according to Saida, every time she'd refuse to submit to her rapists, they would beat her.] 'Let her marry one of her rapists and the problem will be solved...' I wrote to all levels, local and federal: the Prosecutor's General Office of the Russian Federation, to the Investigatory Committee and the Civic Chamber, but my pleas for consideration were all sent back to the local law enforcement authorities. It was like a closed loop. I understood that no one was going to punish the rapists and turned to the Human Rights Center *Memorial*, to a human rights attorney, to the *Mothers of Dagestan for Human Rights* organization, as well as others.

"The rapists and their relatives are spreading dirty rumors about my fami-

ly. We are shamed by these scoundrels. I have nothing left to lose. I will not back down — neither money nor threats will stop me!"

I spoke to Saida, a delicate young girl. It was incredibly hard to listen to her tell of those horrendous weeks and months of blackmail, threats, beatings and rape. Saida is afflicted not only with post-traumatic stress — the horror that she lived through has left its mark on her physical health as well. She attempted to kill herself by swallowing medicine. The dose was a high one but the doctors pumped it out. There are psychologists working with her, but as of now results are scarce. "I want to leave here, forget everything, if it's possible, start another life. I don't want my children, if I have any, to grow up in Dagestan. It's like I died here, there's an emptiness in my soul, nothing's left," Saida tells me, crying.

The protagonist of the second story is Zainap Gasanova, a 15-year-old inhabitant of Buynaksk who has just finished 9th grade. It started when a classmate took a picture of her with his cell phone and later threatened to edit the picture in an obscene way and publish it on the Internet. The girl was not even 14 years old then.

"I was in the eighth grade. He was in the eleventh. He threatened me and forced me to bring him money at his beck and call. My mother was in charge of distributing pensions; he knew this. Then he told his friends and I started bringing them money too. This lasted about a year. I was hoping that after the ninth grade I'd leave school and they'd leave me alone. I didn't tell anyone because I was scared."

When Zainap's mother, Aizanat, noticed the missing money, she first thought that it was a mistake made at

her work — that she was being disbursed an insufficient sum. When Zainap secretly took the last amount — by then the growing shortfall already exceeded 350,000 rubles — the girl's father, Murzabek Gasanov began to suspect his daughter. He forced her to confess and relate everything from the beginning. During the day he worked at a plastic-window company; at night he worked as a night watchman to support the family. Following Zainap's confession, her father went to the Alievs — the parents of Azamat, the young man who had initiated the whole scheme. He asked whether Zainap had given him any money. He received more than a confirmation: with an insolent smirk he was told that "the money had been hard-earned, and not by Azamat alone."

From then on things unfolded at a blistering pace. Following the Alievs' dirty innuendos, the girl was taken to a hospital and examined. Zainap was untouched. The father was incredibly outraged by the blackmail, but he was angry with his daughter too. In a rage he threatened to all but kill her for not instantly telling her parents about the threats.

Afraid of her father, Zainap ran away from home to stay three days at her friend's house. Her parents searched for her. On the fourth day she called her maternal aunt Naida, who took her home with her.

The father again went to the blackmailers and told them that in three days they were to return the money. But they simply laughed in his face: who was he, a simple worker, to demand anything of them? After all, the bully's father, Nabi Aliev (according to other sources, his stepfather) worked for law enforcement and was sure of his impunity.

In three days, Murzabek came to the Alievs, supposing that they would return the money after all and end the entire affair. However, this time too he was mocked and insulted. And he, having initially tried to resolve the conflict peaceably through the elders, understood that the Alievs weren't even thinking of returning anything but were interested only in humiliating him. On July 14, Murzabek walked into the Alievs' yard and shot Nabi, the father or stepfather of Azamat. The bullet slew the man and hit his wife, Djamilya, the young man's mother, who at that very moment had been spewing further insults. Earlier, she had come to the Gasanovs' house to utter threats and had spread dirty rumors about the daughter and wife of Murzabek — and here's what all that led to.

Afterward, Murzabek returned home to say goodbye to his family, asked his wife to leave with the children, and headed to the police to surrender. But on the way he was overtaken by the Alievs' relatives. According to witnesses, Murzabek was shot not by Azamat but his neighbor, Rasul. However, the police never even spoke with this man. To avoid a blood feud, everyone acted as though it had been the son who had avenged his father.

Two months have gone by. During this time the wife of the murdered Murzabek and her children have been beleaguered with threats. The widow was forced to leave first for Makhachkala and from there even further to a Russian city. The husband's relatives blamed everything that had happened on the daughter and mother, while the law enforcement agencies squashed the investigation. Zainap's testimony about the blackmail and the threats — evidence of the fact that Murzabek had tried until the very end to resolve the issue peaceably — has vanished.

It's been two months since Zainap has seen her mother and brothers. The girl is in a horrible condition psychologically; she holds herself responsible for the death of her beloved father, as well as for the tragedy as a whole.

For me, everything that has happened to Saida and Zainap is evidence of the fact that in this region where in the past any insult to a loved woman — daughter, mother, sister, wife — was harshly dealt with and where the offender — let the offense have been a mere word — was subjected to imminent punishment, everything is now becoming possible and tolerable. Both fathers were trying to protect their daughters and sought remedy from all written and unwritten laws, but encountered the same cynical silence from both the official authorities and society. One, defending his daughter's honor, died bleeding out before dozens of people; the other, on his lonesome, is trying to break through a mute wall of general apathy on the part of precisely those who must help the victims of crimes, reinstate justice, and punish evil. Even the relatives, both in the first case and in the second, have turned away from the people who are close to them — who have been visited by calamity.

I asked Saida and Zainap why they had not told their parents or relatives about what had happened to them right away. Both girls replied that they had been afraid of disclosure, that they did not want to upset their father and mother. Both girls hoped that their fellow villagers and classmates who were mocking them, would come to their senses after the first or second time and cease to torment them. The girls did not want to believe that the interdictions and traditions that they themselves had been raised in could so easily be flouted by others — by those who live and act by the law of the mighty.

MARET ELDIEVA, TAUS SERGANOVA A SECRET WAR AGAINST THE PEOPLE?

Inhabitants of Ingushetia gather in the offices of the MASHR organization to tell *DOSH* correspondents about the extrajudicial killings of their relatives.



"On the basis of the aforementioned, I request your cooperation in the defense of our constitutional rights and the initiation of an objective investigation into the murder ... the search" — such are the closing words in all of the complaints submitted by the inhabitants of the Republic of Ingushetia as of late.

The prevailing opinion among human rights advocates is that the head of Ingushetia is not the worst of the current republic heads in the North

Caucasus. However, the events of the last two months, as well as the public responses to them on the part of Yunus-Bek Yevkurov — to say nothing of the anxiety and fear for their loved ones that most of the Republic's inhabitants' are currently experiencing — force us to doubt the accuracy of this long-standing assessment.

The recent murders in Ingushetia are stunning in the criminals' barefaced contempt for the law and their seemingly arbitrary inhumanity. Everyone

involved in them should have been punished severely — that's what law enforcement agencies are for after all. Instead we are witnessing those who have sworn to represent and defend the law, treat the RF Constitution in an utterly despicable manner. For simple citizens this is an unarguable sign that everything is permitted and that excess reigns across all levels of power and society. No one believes any longer in the leadership's proclamations of noble goals such as "the war against terror and the insurgency"

because more and more innocent people are falling victim to this war.

On August 19 a terror attack at the funeral of local police officer Ilez Korigov in Malgobek killed seven police and wounded an additional fifteen people to varying degrees of severity. The name of the suicide bomber, Khamzat Aldiev, was reported in mainstream media as well. After some time the news announced that the regime was initiating counter-terrorism operations in Malgobek and later that a special-forces raid had been conducted. The Interfax dispatch read as follows:

"A large scale special-forces raid in Malgobek and the Malgobeksky District of Ingushetia resulted in the liquidation of three insurgents who had organized the terror act at the funeral in Malgobek. A few more have been detained." In turn, a source from within the Republic's law enforcement agencies reports that "this morning, in the village of Sagopshi and in Malgobek, [Spetsnaz forces] encountered armed resistance during an attempted arrest of suspected members of armed opposition groups. Three bandits were killed in the course of the shootout." According to the source, these men plotted and participated in the August 19 terror attack against the funeral of the police officer in Malgobek. An agency source added that a few more insurgents were arrested in private residences during subsequent special-forces raids. The identities of those killed and arrested are being established. The source clarified that "there is information to the effect that all of them were part of one armed gang, which was committing armed assaults against law enforcement agents in the Malgobeksky District."

Later on, the last names of the "liquidated bandits" were released:

Merzhoev, Kurskiev, Evloev, Bekbuzarov. Though now, their number had somehow grown to four. Relatives of the slain men claimed that the security-service agents had acted illegally, executing completely innocent people.

Our next trip to Ingushetia was related to exactly these events. We met with the friends and relatives of those whom the authorities had declared insurgents. First of all with the mother of Khamzat Aldiev — Lyuba Aldieva, an inhabitant of the village of Arshty. This is what she told us:

"I found out about the Malgobek explosion from my brother, who lives in Kemerovo; he'd heard about it on the news. We were preparing for Eid al-Fitr and hadn't turned on the television in a few days. I could not believe that the dead man was my son. My son couldn't do harm to anyone at all.

"The head of the administration, Bayali Akiev, called and said that there is already a photo of a fragment of the dead man's head, but that in his opinion it didn't look like Khamzat. I also didn't recognize my son in the photo.

"They invited me and my eldest son to the village school. All of the authorities from Magas and all over the District were there. They claimed that there was an explosion in Malgobek, that the deceased was Khamzat Aldiev, 34 years old. They didn't provide his patronymic. My son is only 25 years old. The same day we went to the morgue, but I could not go in — I did not feel well. My son went in, but he did not recognize him: there was no similarity — the size of the leg, the shape of the ears, the head, none if it matched up. The dead man's features were entirely Slavic. Many people are saying that the suicide bomber was a Russian fellow who had adopted Islam and the name Khamzat Eldiev. They



Khamzat Aldiev

took my DNA but did not provide me with the results of the forensic analysis.

"On the third day, government representatives showed up from Magas, told me that the deceased was not my son, and hastily apologized to the village. The people expressed their outrage that our young people are always being accused of all the crimes. I don't know if it's related, but soon thereafter they finally finished the road leading to the village.

"I had two sons taken from me in 2010 under the pretext that they were the insurgents' alleged accomplices. They demanded a bribe of \$2,000 and finally, after six months, let one of my sons go after a suspended sentence. Before that they took another one of my sons, Mairbek. We found him six days later — the young man had been tortured horribly — they turned him into an invalid. Following this he went abroad; later he called Khamzat and asked him to come. Khamzat finally agreed to leave and began getting the documents to do so. He spent six months going to the Army Recruiting Office for papers like it was his job. He never got them. Supposedly the FSB didn't permit it. Then, they brought the corpses of eighteen young men to the village. Maybe all these experiences changed something in my son's mind.

Marriage photo of Ilez and Faina Merzhoev



"Khamzat started going to school during the beginning of the First Chechen War, in 1994. After school he went to an academy, and after that he went to study at the Humanitarian Institute. He really wanted to get into the military university, but we didn't have the \$6,000 they wanted for admission. He left the Humanitarian Institute in his third year, since he considered it impossible to get a quality higher education there. He'd earn money working construction. He even went to Tskhinvali. He knew how to do everything.

"In 2011 during Ramadan something happened to him: he became withdrawn, grim, and frequently started going to Sleptsovsk. He went there on August 27 and spent the night at his brother's. We haven't seen him since. The very next day we contacted missing persons, but just in May of this year found out from the District Department of the Interior that he had 'gone into the forest.' They told us that he was with the insurgents: supposedly they'd found a phone with his photograph. I saw the photo and recognized him. But we don't know who took it, nor where or when it's from. "Khamzat was always very law-abiding and fair. The locals, the head of the administration included, vouched that

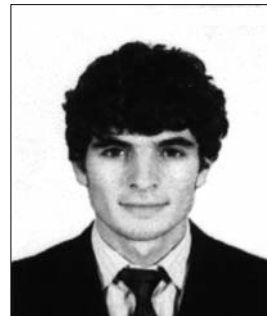
he could not commit an act of terror. After all, they knew him — he'd grown up before their eyes.

"Many have left our village; there are almost no young people left. The ones that remain have nowhere to go and nothing to leave for.

"I want very much for him to come back, if he is in 'the forest.' I don't know where he is. Let him surrender to the authorities, let them try him if he is guilty. For our family this is a calamity — we've lost our happiness, the sense of meaning in our life."

Our second meeting was with the relatives and fellow villagers of Ilez Merzhoev. "On August 28 around 6 in the morning," the neighbors explain, "an armored personnel carrier pulled up to 28 ul. Shkolnaya. We heard a lot of noise: swearing, shouting. Everyone went out to the street but the security-service agents would not let anyone come near; they kept yelling that they would kill anyone who tried to get closer." They explain that, to begin with, everyone including Ilez's little sister was brought out of the house which the agents searched, checking its every corner. Then they demanded to see their passports. After that, they ordered Ilez to follow them into the

Abdurakhman Kurskiev



house. In response to the neighbors' and relatives' indignant questions, they were told that he was needed as a witness. "So we remained outside the gate. We weren't allowed into the yard, but we saw everything: how they forced Ilez's wife, daughter, and parents to stand back, how they led him into the house. ... While we were standing there waiting in ignorance, another one of our neighbors came running up and told us that it had been reported on TV that Ilez had been killed! Of course we were in shock because Ilez at that moment was still alive. We could even



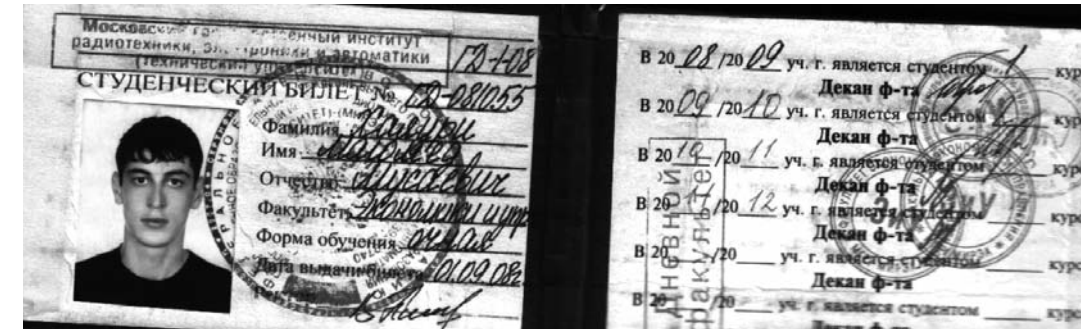
Ibrahim Bekbuzarov

hear his screams: 'What are you doing, the operation's over!' We pushed toward the gates again. Again they didn't let us in. Two or three muffled shots came from the house. After that we heard one of the security-service agents say on the phone, 'It's not him. ... This needs to be squared away somehow.'"

The relatives related how a black package and a shovel were carried into the house — how Ilez's mother started screaming at the security-service agents, demanding that no packages be brought in and that her son be released. Then there was a minor explosion in the house. An "ambulance" drove up, followed closely by representatives from Ingush law enforcement agencies. Even when Ilez was taken away, everyone wanted to believe that he was alive: "We looked over both the corpse and the scene. There wasn't a lot of blood. We were convinced that he was being tortured and that he died from cardiac arrest. He had heart problems since childhood and had undergone artificial valve replacement surgery. Looking over him, the signs of torture were really evident — there were many cuts on his body. He was already dead when they shot him. Well, and the explosion too was manufactured for the cover-up, which, basically, is what they ended up doing."

When the "ambulance" had left, those who remained encountered a terrible scene: both the house and the outside were in complete chaos — furniture, windows, the car in the yard — everything had been destroyed. The witnesses came to the conclusion that the security-service agents had done this on purpose to simulate resistance. We got the chance to discuss this story with many people, and everyone in one voice assured us that the young man had done nothing. He was an only child, sheltered from everything: his parents wouldn't let him take so much as a step away from them. They had dedicated their entire lives to their son.

When it comes to the murdered police officer, Ilez Korigov, everyone also says that he was a fair, law-abiding person. Merzhoev and Korigov knew each other. Ilez Merzhoev had been



deeply distressed by Korigov's death. The officer's relatives are convinced that Merzhoev, contrary to the official version of events, was not involved in his death. Most of the young people say that if Ilez succumbed to such a fate, then the rest of them have long since nothing to live for and, possibly, the young people will have to begin leaving the Republic en masse.

The same morning's killings of Abdurakhman Kurskiev, Ibrahim Bekbuzarov, and Abubakar Evloev followed basically the same script. The only difference was in the details. Security-service agents drove up to the Kurskiev house around six and a half o'clock in the morning. A voice yelled through the megaphone: "Your house has been mined! Come out with your hands up!" Kurskiev's older brother told us how the search was carried out and how everyone except for Abdurakhman was led away to a neighboring street. In his words, as he was leaving, he could see his little brother stripped naked with his hands raised. Officially however, Abdurakhman was "liquidated while resisting." "How can a naked person offer armed resistance?" asks the older brother.

Ibrahim Bekbuzarov was killed in the same way. The only difference was that a woman was giving the orders. Ibrahim was separated from everyone, stood up against the wall and photographed. Ibrahim's father was forced to hold a small, spherical video cam-

era. All the rooms were searched. Out on the street, security-service agents watched the search on a computer monitor. Two to three agents remained in each room. The explanation was that this was required for a repeat search. They said that they would take Ibrahim as a witness and led him inside the house. After a while, nine to ten discrete shots from an assault rifle sounded from the house. Representatives of local security agencies let his relatives know that he had been killed. Ibrahim's uncle, Isa, died of a major heart attack upon seeing his nephew's corpse. Another distinguishing detail in this case was the marauding on the part of the security-service agents: the agents conducting the search took with them valuables worth 164,000 rubles.

Information concerning the murder of Abubakar Evloev also mentions marauding. A very serious discrepancy in the father's story is the presence of a man in civilian clothes firing into the air and yelling, "Allahu Akbar!" — yet, their son had been killed in his bed, wearing nothing but swimming trunks. In addition to this, the security-service agents hit Abubakar's mother with a buttstock and beat up his brother Zurab who tried to defend his mother, all the while swearing at everything and everyone. Nor did they forget to grab the dead man's watch and 110,000 rubles from the house. Abubakar's brother — a Malgobeksky District MVD agent — was killed by insurgents in 2009. According to

neighbors, he was posthumously awarded the Order of Courage. In their opinion, Abubakar could not have been involved with the insurgents, nor with an act of terror. All of the witnesses spoke of the security-service agents' unacceptable behavior: unprintable language, insults, beatings, marauding and so on.

Our third meeting took place with relatives of Magomed Khayauri. According to the official version of events, Magomed Khayauri, born 1991, was killed on July 28, 2012 along with Artur Karsamauli and Islam Tachiev, on the premises of the Ingush State University, at the following address: ul. Demchenko, Ordzhonikidzevskaya Stanitsa. Dozens of eyewitnesses told us how security agency officers burst into the university's yard and shot all three young men, who had been calmly sitting on a bench, at point blank range. They then finished each one off with a confirmation shot to the head. The witnesses also told relatives that the corpses were quickly changed into camouflage fatigues, photographed, and videotaped. The parents, Musa and Madash, spoke of how Magomed was the only son in a large family. The family's entire life revolved around him. The sisters (there were six of them) could not get enough of their brother. In 2008 he was admitted to the on-campus section of the Moscow State Institute of Radio Engineering, Electronics and Automation. He was a registered permanent resident in Moscow.

Musa found work in Moscow and moved there to stay close to his son. Magomed came home from Moscow the day before his murder.

According to Madash, the relatives managed to retrieve the body from the morgue only after signing a written statement confirming that they had no objections to the closing of the crimi-

"On the basis of the aforementioned, I request your cooperation in the defense of our constitutional rights and the initiation of an objective investigation into the murder ... the search..." — such are the last words in all the complaints submitted by the inhabitants of the Republic of Ingushetia as of late.

nal investigation into the murder of their children. They had also been threatened that the corpses would not be returned but transferred to Rostov-on-Don, if they failed to sign everything that was required. "We were forced to sign," admits the mother. Three hours of red-tape, tears and despair preceded the corpses' return. "On Wednesday, August 1, Magomed's father was called on the phone from the institute and informed that Magomed was to immediately appear for an interview for a position in the State Archive of the President of the Russian Federation. It's unlikely that such a offer would be extended to a person who had ignored his studies and performed unsatisfactorily," Madash explains through her tears, "Artur also finished university in Moscow and returned to the Republic very recently to find work. It had been almost a year since either one had been in Ingushetia." Musa says that he will look for the guilty parties and seek their punishment. He does not intend on backing down because he has "nothing left to lose."

We also met with Aslan Agiev, whose son had been abducted. His tale was no less depressing.

Born in 1988, Ruslanbek was an obedient, caring son. He worked as a private security agent for the Malgobeksky District MVD. On August 23 he was on his way home after a shift. Witnesses to the incident told Aslan that Ruslanbek

was already nearing the house when a silver Lada Priora with license plate number "106-District-06" pulled up beside him. Three armed persons in camouflaged uniforms attempted to put him into the car, but the young man resisted and a fight ensued. A fourth man emerged from the car to help the kidnappers. Ruslanbek lost consciousness from a blow to the head and the criminals managed to drag him into the car. "I addressed a complaint to the MVD, the FSB, and the prosecutor's office, about the abduction of my son. I met with Yunus-bek Yevkurov, the head of the Republic, who promised to oversee the search personally, but I have no information about the location of my son or his kidnappers." An aging teacher, Aslan tried to think of a possible reason for the kidnapping but could think of nothing.

"On the basis of the aforementioned, I request your cooperation in the defense of our constitutional rights and the initiation of an objective investigation into the murder ... the search..." — such are the last words in all the complaints submitted by the inhabitants of the Republic of Ingushetia as of late.

Yet based on the testimonies from our interviews, the situation is such that these requests frequently reach the very people who are involved in the crimes.

P.S. During the writing of this piece, more troubling news reached us from Ingushetia, concerning the murder or "liquidation" of Khabilyaev and Gardanov. Razaudi Khabilyaev was killed on August 30 in his home, located in the Nesterovskaya Stanitsa on ul. Isaeva. According to his wife, Leila, Razaudi didn't even get the chance to get up from the couch — he was shot on the spot. According to the official version of events, Khabilyaev was killed while resisting arrest. Razaudi's father, Khamzat Khabilyaev sent statements to the Human Rights Center *Memorial* and the prosecutor's office for the Sunzhensky District of Ingushetia. Relatives maintain that their son Razaudi was not resisting at all. Moreover, on August 31, Khabilyaev's corpse had been driven to the outskirts of the village and videotaped there by the security-service agents. The killed man left behind him six underage children. According to the villagers, Khabilyaev did back-breaking work in order to support his family: he transported livestock, gathered buckram to sell, and did not hesitate to take on manual labor.



The murdered Razaudi Khabilyaev and his young widow with their six children



Alikhan Gardanov with his children



Alikhan Gardanov was killed in Ordzhonikidzevskaya Stanitsa during a Spetsnaz raid. The mother of the murdered man, Aishat claims that her son drove a gypsy cab and supplemented his income as a watchman at a commercial center in the central market of Ordzhonikidzevskaya Stanitsa. She submitted statements to the head of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, to the Republic's prosecutor, to the Human Rights Center *Memorial*, to the human rights organization *MASHR*, and to Amnesty International. The mother of Alikhan Gardanov requests support in the defense of the constitutional rights of "her family, and the clearing of the good name" of her son. Further, she requests the initiation of a criminal investigation into the murder of Alikhan Gardanov.

DOSH presents the latest tragic story in its regular rubric "Looking For Them And Waiting For Them" — about the people who disappeared during the two wars in Chechnya. Beginning in DOSH Volume 4 (30) 2010 and continued in all subsequent issues.

The Seventeenth Story

A pain impossible to endure

Mikhazha Magamadova and Esita Sakhabova are two women who until 2002 did not even suspect each other's existence. Both lived in Chechnya, raised their children and did house-work. Their paths never crossed. Now they meet each other often, call one another and wait together for their sons who vanished on the same fateful day. That day, a great grief descended on eleven Chechen families, uniting them for a long time to come.

The Central Market in Grozny was one of the busiest places in Chechnya. People from all corners of the Republic would come here, some to make purchases, some to hear news of relatives, some to sell goods, some to find work. A few ended up here because they needed to change buses to get to a different district or village. Perhaps it was this large amount of people that was one of the causes for the frequent sweeps of the Central Market. On July 30, 2002, another such sweep took place.

It started suddenly, precisely at half past one in the afternoon. As always, the sweep was accompanied with gunfire, cursing and the groans of the wounded. Machine gun bursts thundered from the bus station along ul. Chernyshevskogo. Eleven people were wounded and taken to an unknown location. These people had come to



Rustam Sakhabov



Abu-Bakar Magomedov

the market for various reasons and from various places. From his parlor window Umar Amaev, a photographer born in 1956, witnessed how Abu-Bakar Magamadov was wounded and tossed into a *Gazelle* van. Amaev explained that there had been three *Gazelles*, two white and one blue. He memorized their license plate numbers and watched as eleven fortuitous victims, suffering from the chaotic shooting, were thrown into the vans.

Abu-Bakar had been traveling from Argun to Nikolaevskaya Stanitsa in the Naursk District. He was in Grozny to change buses and was wounded as he crossed the street to get on the bus. According to witness accounts, federal forces were shooting at anyone they saw without discrimination. Moreover, they also tried to retain the wounded in view — they would shoot the lightly wounded in the legs, so they could not get away.

From his parlor window Umar Amaev, a photographer born in 1956, witnessed how Abu-Bakar Magamadov was wounded and tossed into a *Gazelle* van. Amaev explained that there had been three *Gazelles*, two white and one blue. He memorized their license plate numbers and watched as eleven fortuitous victims, suffering from the chaotic shooting, were thrown into the vans.

The photographer had seen and remembered too much. He too ended up among those who had disappeared without a trace. Amaev was taken from work exactly eleven days later during another sweep. The yellowed sheets bearing the surnames of the eleven vanished men remain to this day with their relatives, but another name should also be appended to the list — that of the photographer who paid so dearly for his watchfulness.

Mikhazha does not conceal her pain as she relates her fate. They had a family of many children — seven boys and three girls, with two pairs of twins among them. They lived like everyone else until the war started. The year 2000 brought many sorrows to their family: at first two sons were arrested near Komsomolsk and sent to prison. Then, in August, 15-year-old Kharon died. The loved ones endured the loss painfully. On the day of his death (August 7, 2000) Argun suffered heavy bombardment. Many houses were destroyed and a torn power line fell on the youngest boy, Alman (born 1991). Kharon rushed to the boy, grabbed him, and was thrown to the asphalt by a powerful electrical discharge. He died almost instantaneously; his little brother had to have his arm amputated. Alman, though handicapped, remained living. The family thought that after such a misfortune, new ones would pass them by without harm. And then Abu-Bakar disappeared...

Esita begins her story by explaining that Rustam went around in dark glasses — his eye had been amputated due to a fragment wound. The poor woman relates through her tears how

they lived through the first war and how at the outset of the second they went to Ingushetia. They tried to rent an apartment there. People seemed sympathetic at first, but a soon as they saw her husband, Ilyas (who suffered from an active and evident form of tuberculosis), they were immediately refused. In the end, the sick man, his wife Esita and their three children were forced to return to Grozny. They lived in a cellar. In 2000, Ilyas died after heavy suffering.

But the family's misfortunes did not end there. Esita recalls how Rustam would run off to play soccer with soldiers in the yard of School Nr. 26 and how he would return triumphant after a scored goal. Then tragedy struck — following yet another bombardment, a small fragment wounded Rustam in the eye. Doctors performed an amputation. Rustam was ashamed of this injury and wore dark glasses. On the day of his arrest, her son had collected 500 rubles in unemployment for the preceding few months. Esita added another 300 rubles to this sum, and Rustam went off to buy footwear. That was how he ended up at the Central Market among the abducted eleven.

Handing me a sheet yellowed by time, Mikhazha told me, "Publish the whole list!"

I am fulfilling her wish — the list is reproduced below without emendation.

For these eleven families, the meaning of life after that day became waiting. The pain is unbearable. The first few years they would meet up daily, then every other day — now their meetings are ever rarer and not even everyone shows up. Many are ill. Some, unable to cope with the lack of news, pass away: like the parents of Khasi Bashayev who was arrested at a checkpoint on February 18 along with two other drivers.

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Mikhazh Magomadova and Esit Sakhabova (right to left)

1. Umar Ozdamirov, born 1962
2. Rustam Sakhabov, born 1979
3. Abu-Bakar Magamadov, born 1971
4. Alkbazur (Ali) Magamadov
5. Eli-Ali Chekalaev
6. Supyan Chabaev, born 1964
7. Zaindi Apiev, born 1971
8. Adam Eskiev, born 1971
9. Ruslan Ismailov, born 1954
10. Mikael Abdulkhabziev
11. Aslan Murdalov, born 1970

The Eighteenth Story

They only saved the wounded



Khasi Bashayev

When one tells stories of what took place in various settlements around the Chechen Republic — stories which clearly echo each other in their stunning and monstrous inhumanity — it sometimes seems like it makes no sense to repeat oneself. And yet, at the same time, each differs so greatly from another that one is petrified by all the diverse ways in which cruelty can manifest itself. If in the preceding story eleven people were abducted at a market, in the presence of witnesses, then here the tale will concern three young men who disappeared at the sadly-infamous post of San Sanych, located between the villages of Duba-Yurt and Chiri-Yurt. It is a post that every local inhabitant has heard of before.

The Shatoysky District was flooded with refugees. When the endless bombing and artillery fire began, the refugees headed to Aslambek Sheripov village. The thinking was that this place was rarely bombed — someone had even heard that this village would not be bombed at all. So people from all the surrounding villages made their way there. However, the war caught up with them, depriving some of hope and some of life.

On February 17, 2000, the village was bombed for a number of hours. When the bombing ceased, airplanes began to circle overhead, at the lowest possible altitude. Machine gun fire followed shortly thereafter. The aftermath was terrifying — more than fifty dead and as many wounded, the majority of them women and children. The villagers still recall that day, which brought so much death and destruction, with tears. There were neither doctors nor medical supplies. Many expired from loss of blood. It was impossible to evacuate the wounded or bury the dead: the entire District and the road leading to it were under never-ending bombardment and gunfire. Plus, there was no gasoline.

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They buried the dead at night, wary of further airstrikes. It was decided that the wounded had to be evacuated whatever the cost, though it was not clear how to do this. The head of the Khalkeloi village administration,

Abdurakhman Davletukayev, spent all of February 18 at the regional center, trying to get written permission to evacuate the suffering. Simultaneously, an appeal went out across the district for those who had transportation and gas to come and help remove the wounded. On February 12, around ten o'clock in the morning, a column of buses and several passenger cars set out from the village. The administration heads for the villages of Aslambek Sheripov and Khalkeloi accompanied the wounded. In this manner, the column reached the fateful post.

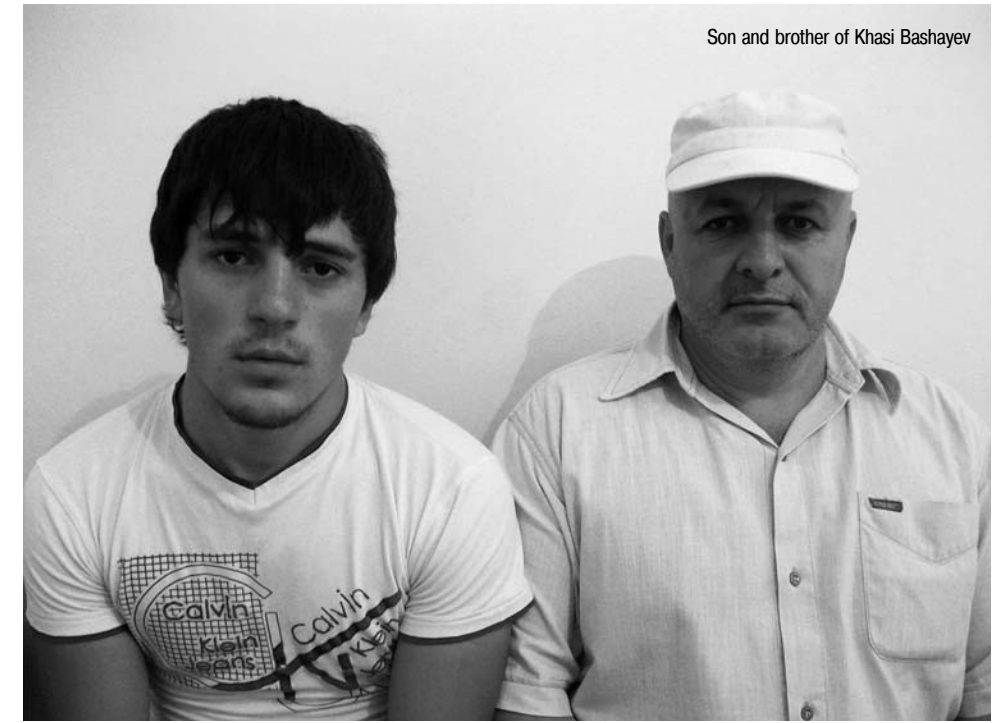
At the post they were told that two of the cars and three of the drivers would not be allowed to pass. The wounded, however, accompanied by the village administration heads, would be loaded in *Ural* trucks and taken to the Chiri-Yurt village hospital. The drivers who were denied permission to pass — Khasi Bashayev, Hussein Basnukayev and Ruslan Kaikharov — had volunteered to help evacuate the wounded. The three were neither members of

any armed groups nor involved in any illegal activity, their relatives claim. The authorities involved in the search for the missing men do not contest their assertions. Hussein had in his possession his fellow villagers' money — about 58,000 rubles — entrusted to him with the request that he bring back food supplies.

San Sanych told the worried administration heads that the drivers' documents would be checked and they would thereupon be allowed to return to the District. He even requested that gasoline be sent back from Chiri-Yurt so that the detained men could get home. Abdurakhman Davletukayev provided the gasoline. When it turned out that the men had vanished without a trace, Abdurakhman approached San Sanych and inquired about them. The reply he received was, "Officer's honor, I personally poured in the gas that you passed along, and they went home."

And so began a long and difficult search. The villagers of Duba-Yurt recognized all three men, first from descriptions and, later, photographs. They claimed with certainty that on February 20 all three were still at San Sanych's post. They had been seen sitting beside each other on a gas pipe, their hands behind their backs — most likely tied. Multiple witnesses said that Hussein Basnukayev's red *Niva* remained standing there another ten days. Military personnel would ride around in it. Almost simultaneously, relatives in Russia and Kazakhstan saw a clip on television of the young men (they recognized Khasi Bashayev) being sat in a heli-

They buried the dead at night, wary of further airstrikes. It was decided that the wounded had to be evacuated whatever the cost, though it was not clear how to do this. The head of the Khalkeloi village administration, Abdurakhman Davletukaev, spent all of February 18 at the regional center, trying to get written permission to evacuate the suffering.



Son and brother of Khasi Bashayev

copter, but this information reached Chechnya too late, when the search for the men was already underway at all possible levels.

After a while the post was dissolved, and people began to come to its former site in the hopes of finding even the slightest trace of their relatives' time there. One man noticed a tin plate sticking out of the ground. It bore a car's license number. A notice was put up at the Chiri-Yurt market that a license plate had been found. Of course, relatives recognized it. It was the license number of Khasi Bashayev's car.

The search at the site where the license plate was found was conducted alongside representatives of investigative agencies. One of the most shock-

ing discoveries was Bashayev's and Basnukayev's cars, rolled flat by a tank and buried in the earth. Beyond that, the traces disappeared. Utter obscurity. Kula, Khasi Bashayev's mother, and Khamdi, his father, did not bear their separation from their son, their endless waiting. They are no more. Zaurbek, Khasi's son, is now eighteen — he has now been waiting for his father twelve years.

I watched him as he sat thoughtfully beside his uncle Khavazhi, Khasi's brother. His eyes bear an un-childlike pain. It is as if his fate too had been rolled flat by the tracks of that tank. As if San Sanych had not only detained his father, but broken the fetters that tied Zaurbek to his childhood. The boy had matured instantly — in his eyes and soul.

These two stories, seemingly different, touch identically any heart in which compassion is living — they enrage one's reason and conscience. They birth such a feeling of protest that one has not the words to express it.



RAISA BORSHCHIGOVA A CAUCASIAN FORM OF PUNISHMENT

Aslan
Cherkesov

The Cherkesovs had barely managed to get over their legal difficulties stemming from the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of their son, when a new tragedy crashed down upon this small Kabardian family.

On June 6, 2012, exactly one and a half years after the arrest of Aslan Cherkesov, accused and later found guilty in the murder of FC Spartak fan Evgor Sviridov, the domestic mass media reverberated with the death of the convict's father. According to the

findings of the official investigation, 68-year-old Magomed Cherkesov, a gypsy cab driver, fell victim to a 23-year-old inhabitant of Nalchik, who stabbed the poor taxi driver over the latter's little old *Zbiguli*.

Let us recall what the Cherkesov family had to live through prior to this last blow. On December 21, 2011, in Moscow City Court, a unanimous jury found Aslan Cherkesov guilty in the premeditated murder of Egor Sviridov and sentenced him to 20 years impris-

onment to be served in a maximum security penal colony. The court did not take into consideration even one of the arguments put forth by the defense which had argued that Aslan had shot Sviridov in self-defense. The incident was highly publicized and led to mass disorder in the north of Moscow on December 11 of that year. Enraged masses of nationalists, numbering in the thousands, poured onto the streets and began to mercilessly beat up pedestrians resembling immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus.

To arrange a meeting with the parents of Aslan Cherkesov turned out to be a difficult task. Having bitter experience with journalists, the family avoids reporters: "What smut they poured on my son!" the convict's 65-year-old mother, Sonya Cherkesova, can barely control herself. "They were calling him a murderer even before the verdict!"

The trial which had resonated throughout the entire nation brought a sad fame to the Cherkesovs, breaking this simple family's habitual pattern of life. Aslan's relatives and friends have to this day remained in a state of shock following the verdict's announcement: "I agree that my son killed a man and must answer for that, but the punishment must be fair," cries the inconsolable mother in the small living room of her house in Nalchik. "He could not allow himself to be killed!" Sonya cannot come to terms with the judges' sentence; she is shaken by its flagrant cruelty: "A murderer who had killed an entire family in Kushevskaya Stanitsa got only twelve years — and they give my Aslan twenty for self defense!" (She is referring to the shocking murder of twelve people — among them four underage children — by an armed gang in Kushevskaya Stanitsa of Krasnodar Territory on November 4, 2010.)

The last year and a half was a complete nightmare for Aslan's loved ones. Apart from the "prejudice" that the judges evinced throughout the entire trial toward Cherkesov, the family complains of the fierce attempts on the part of society and the mass media to besmirch their son's past, depicting him as an easily provoked, Caucasian upstart whose past included multiple arrests and convictions for disorderly conduct. The family categorically denies any prior convictions, which were "imputed" to him without substantiation.

"Aslan had a criminal record for misdemeanor hooliganism, but it never came to trial and culminated with the mutual reconciliation of both parties," tells the convicted man's sister, Anna Cherkesova, who attended every hearing and proceeding. Despite this, according to Anna, the judges did not take into account the fact that the defense provided evidence of Aslan's lack of priors. She also claims that the defense was denied a request to read expert evidence in the presence of the mass media, which proved that Aslan had shot in self defense.

"CCTV footage of the Kronshtadskiy boulevard had been submitted to the court, but it was not shown at trial. The evidence of Aslan's beating was attested only 21 days after the arrest, when there were practically no traces of it left. They denied a request to have Aslan take a lie detector test," Anna can barely keep up with the infractions.

For his part, the convicted man claimed that "Detective Ostapyuk told me himself that if they'd show that footage, the maximum I'd get would be based on the statute for exceeding the limits for necessary self-defense. But you, he said, were set up from the top" ("Interview with Aslan Cherkesov," *MK Newspaper*, July 16, 2012).

Aside from the judges' biased attitude toward the defense, Anna, as a relative of the defendant, was openly threatened with reprisals by Sviridov's friends right in court. Court officers made no attempts to put an end to these threats.

Threats continued raining down on Mr. Cherkesov's relatives endlessly. Aslan's pregnant wife, 20-year-old Tanya, was constantly called from various numbers and threatened with reprisals not only to her but her unborn child as well: "I was afraid to

leave the house, stopped going to the court sessions, stopped working and studying, changed my number multiple times a week, but the calls still did not stop," recalls Tanya.

Following the child's birth, the young mother decided to flee the capital and settle down with her parents in another city (out of precaution, the woman asked us not to reveal the city's name), but here too she was not left alone: "Passersby would stop me on the street and ask, 'Are you the murderer's wife? Is this the murderer's son?'"

In search of a safe place Tanya moved to Nalchik to live with Aslan's parents. She does not regret her decision: "Here I can walk the streets peacefully, without fear that my son and I will be attacked by skinheads. No one judges me, everyone treats me with respect," confesses the young mother, holding one-year-old Alisak in her lap.

Practically all of Russian society mobilized itself against the Cherkesovs, from simple citizens to high ranking officials: "When I watched Putin's speech about Aslan, I was chilled to the bone. I understood that there would be no fair trial," recalls Sonya. She is referring to the then still Prime Minister Putin's visit to Sviridov's grave.

By slandering Cherkesov as a recidivist and drug addict, he further stoked the nationalists' anger. Aslan's relatives are of the opinion that the Prime Minister's unceremoniously proclaimed position predetermined the trial's result long before the verdict was pronounced. Svetlana Gannushkina, director of the *Grazhdanskoe Sodeistvie* committee, agrees: "After Putin's speech I instantly knew what the trial's result would be, and I was right."

And yet it would seem that the story of this crime, in no way differs from

any other mundane drama. The young men got into it. Had a fight. Started shooting. Such confrontations are not rare. Especially in a country like Russia which, according to official UN data, is among the world leaders for annual number of committed crimes.

But why was it that this particular crime, from day one and in such a strange manner, caused a furore in Russian society? We are confronted with the question of what does such attention tell us? Since coming to power, Putin has never, even in passing, mentioned a single instance of the violent death of an immigrant or member of an ethnic minority. And yet, according to data from the Human Rights Center *Sova*, at least 86 people were killed due to interethnic hatred in 2010.

Is it possible that the suppositions of so many analysts are true — that Putin utilizes nationalism as a way to fill a void left in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution? That he has tried to bring it under his control by creating nationalist youth factions such as *Nasbi* and *Molodaya Gvardiya* which are ready to cause disorder at the authorities' slightest beck?

However, let us return to Nalchik, to the Kabardian family, until recently unknown, whose humble pattern of life was in no way different from any other inhabitants' of this mountainous republic. These were people who were familiar with words such as "trial," "murder," "sentence," only through TV crime series: "Not even in a nightmare could I have dreamed that my son might at some point end up a topic for such programs. My son is not a criminal! The only thing he is guilty of is that he did not allow himself to be killed!" repeats Aslan's mother through her tears.

The large Cherkesov family always enjoyed the respect of its neighbors. Everyone who knows them testifies to this. Beside Aslan, his parents also raised three sons and a daughter. The oldest son died in May 2010 from a cerebral hemorrhage. The second son lives on Novgorod. Their daughter, Anna, lives with her husband in Moscow. The youngest of the family, Aslan, lived with his parents. Sonya is disabled. For two years she has been suffering from a cerebral tumor and requires constant treatment which she receives in Moscow. Aslan always accompanied her on her trips. He took care of her on the road and in the hospitals.

It was on one of these trips that Aslan met his future wife Tanya. The youths instantly fell for each other. Aslan decided to move to Moscow and settle there. At home, it was practically impossible to find work that could have helped his aging parents. It was hard enough for them after the death of their eldest son, the family's breadwinner.

Regardless whom you ask in this city, everyone knew Aslan personally. They remember him as a cheerful, friendly and compassionate young man. At the school where Aslan studied, one hears only positive and admiring recollections. "If there was anything to be done at the school, we'd call Aslan first before the others," relates the janitor who wished to remain nameless.

Aslan's former teachers at the Physical Education Faculty of Kabardian State University are also perplexed by their former student's descriptions in the mass media. "The Aslan that we know never picked fights. He was always a polite, considerate and capable student. Of course, sometimes he skipped classes as did his fellows. When he is remembered in the department, it is

always with a smile," explains Liza Sabina, senior laboratory assistant at the Physical Education department of Kabardian State University, who knew Cherkesov personally, as Aslan was a student at this university.

Along with everyone else, his teacher considers the sentence absurd: "Aslan is not the only guy in Russia who carried a gun, and a non-lethal one at that. He is likewise not the only to have killed a person in a private quarrel. There are thousands upon thousands of such incidents! It's enough to watch the crime series on TV. Sheer horror. The question is who ever received such a sentence for self-defense? It's shocking. Even maniacs and pedophiles don't get such terms. The punishment is much too harsh and unfair," the teacher says outraged.

This entire story elicits many rhetorical questions.

The soccer fan, Sviridov — a victim of a mundane fight — has been somehow elevated to the level of a martyr and transformed into a unifying symbol of the "Russian nation" in its fight against the "darkey" subjugators. His grave has become a real pilgrimage destination not only for nationalists, but many politicians as well. Is this another "hero" of modern-day Russia — like Yuri Budanov, the rapist and murderer responsible for the death of the 18-year-old Chechen Elza Kungayeva? For this cruel crime, the colonel spent only eight years behind bars but reaped the lifelong fame of a national hero...

We ask, what kind of justice can we count on, given this kind of social mindset? The old, infirm Kabardian mother no longer has anything left to do but put her trust in a higher power: "My son was tried unjustly. He became a victim of the Kremlin's dirty games. Let God be their judge!"

ABDULLA DUDUEV

CONVICTED FOR... HER ETHNICITY

On September 3, after eight and a half years in a penal colony, which she had been sentenced to by Moscow City Court Judge Komarova on a terrorism charge, Zara Murtazaliyeva was released. Judge Komarova of course might never become comfortable deciding human fate with a bang of her gavel, but everyone who followed this much discussed trial in 2004–2005 was unanimously convinced: the charges had been fabricated. And according to a pre-arranged plan at that. The frame up was incredibly primitive and clumsy. But the lack of professionalism among Russian security and legal institutions is well known, and they have gotten the hang of turning this, their woeful weakness, into a convenience. No one expects a responsible, measured approach from them, and this allows them to go about their business freely. As for truth, they have no need of it. They cannot earn the bosses' approval thereby: the main stakes here are political expediency and statistics.

And in the years of the all but Russia-wide, rabid "war on terror" the Chechens were the main statistical resource of this servile political expediency — the eternal deus ex machina of the post-Soviet authorities.

Back then, the twenty-year-old Chechen, Zara Murtazaliyeva, got unlucky both in terms of the time and place but in terms of her nationality as well. It was only due to these factors that the utterly innocent young lady was snatched and sent to a place from which people, as a rule, do not return unchanged.

However, this rule does not extend to her, to Zara. Despite the unbearable pressure placed on her and a myriad other hardships, she did not admit to a single charge leveled against her. She was unchangeably steadfast from the very first day of her detainment. Over eight and a half years, various attempts were made to make her admit to the false charges — they all came to nothing. And what it all cost her, she will tell us herself.



When did you understand that your detainment on that ill-fated day, supposedly for a document check, was not fortuitous?

When I left work, there was a car by the entryway. Four large men jumped out of it, came up to me, surrounded me, and asked me to accompany them to the squad section with them. The reason they gave was that "due to a difficult situation in Moscow, a general document check is underway for all persons of Caucasian nationality." I called my acquaintance, Said Akhmayev, in their presence and inquired as to what I should do in this situation. I received a comforting

answer: he said, "It's okay, it's the normal order of business." Considering that every Chechen was already used to close scrutiny from various agencies and that armed hostilities were underway in the North Caucasus, I too wasn't surprised by such an interest toward my person. Something else seemed peculiar to me: Said Akhmayev (I had no idea then that he was an operative) asked me to pass the phone to the men who had stopped me. That was the first alarm bell I felt going off: something weird was happening. Especially when these people started conversing with him on the phone, without even having introduced themselves, as if they were old friends. But back then I was still very young and naïve, and therefore of course only tried to drive away my dark suspicions about a person I trusted.

After your detainment, your relatives could not figure out where you were for a few days. Where were you held during this time? How were you treated? And how, finally, did you manage to tell your relatives where you were?

I was detained in Chinatown and brought to the squad section on prospekt Vernadskogo. That's where they kept me for two days. By the way, conditions in this section are horrible and unhealthy. After only a few hours, they brought in a camera crew from the *Chrezvychainoe Proisbestvie* program; they had told them that they had supposedly caught a terrorist. At this point it became clear that this was a prearranged plan and that the agents were rushing to tell the populace of their "valorous struggle with terrorism."

My relatives saw the report on television, but my mother could not believe that they were really talking about her daughter. She had recently come to visit me and had left on March 2. She

In their testimony, Anya and Dasha initially claimed that I suborned them to commit suicide attacks and that I participated in the two Chechen wars.

But I was in the fourth grade at the beginning of the first war and in the seventh and eighth grades during the second. Can you believe this?

had visited my job and spoken to my managers. We had agreed that I would come home during a weekend at the first opportunity, to visit the relatives, and then, suddenly — *this!*

Then they took me to 38 Petrovka, where the conditions were even worse. Some people who did not introduce themselves came to see me there. They asked me questions, insulted me, told me all kinds of nonsense, and played good cop/bad cop: that's when one of them beats and insults you, and the other is so kind, so compassionate and keeps trying to extract you from this situation. The conditions were horrible: I was in some dirty, gray room completely unsuitable for living in — teeming with ticks and cockroaches — the light barely managed to penetrate the window grate. In short, anyone who has ever found himself or herself in a similar situation will understand me instantly. At the time, it seemed to me that I would never see white light, that my life would end there and then.

I don't remember exactly how many days I spent in those conditions. I had no watch, I received no information, didn't know the day of the week or heard any radio: I was completely torn from the surrounding world.

And all that time my relatives were looking for me. Later they told me that they had gone to prospekt Vernadskogo and were told that I was in Pechatniki, in the women's pretrial detention facility. They rushed over there but were told that I hadn't been brought there. My loved ones were in Petrovka too; they were lied to, told I wasn't there. After some time, thanks

to the support of some of our acquaintances, my mother and our friends raised a ruckus and managed, though with difficulty, to figure out where I was. Meanwhile, I was awoken one night (I don't know the exact time), put with some other woman into a prison truck, and taken to women's pretrial detention facility No. 6 in Pechatniki. At first they didn't want to admit us, since when they examined us they had found signs of beatings, but later — following a long discussion — they left us there after all. After some time, my lawyer, Zezag Usmanova, came to visit me at the infirmary. When I walked out to her, I imagined that this whole thing was at last being illuminated and that it would soon resolve itself. But that was a false hope — even then, I didn't fully understand that I had landed into the system's grinder, which is trivial to enter but almost impossible to leave. For unknown reasons, they didn't let me meet my loved ones for a long time. Through my lawyer, I had to exchange brief notes with my dearest person, my mother, who needed the support more than I did.

How long were you under investigation?

I was detained on March 3, 2004, and sentenced at the beginning of the next year. On March 17, the Supreme Court reduced my sentence by half a year. On April 13 of 2005, I arrived in the colony near Mordovia.

Can you tell us please how and under what circumstances you made the acquaintance of two Russian Muslim women who testi-

fied against you and later recanted, claiming that they had been under duress?

I met Dasha Voronova and Anna Kulikova at the mosque. Two young women came up to me dressed in Muslim habit and introduced themselves as Aishat and Fatima. They asked me to show them how to perform the salat and I obliged. We started talking and exchanged phone numbers. At the time, I was renting a room with an old lady, not far from the Chinatown subway station where the insurance company that I was working at was located. In general, nothing presaged misfortune. But one day Aishat (who is also Anna) rang me up and told me that her mother had thrown her out of her house for converting to Islam and that she now had nowhere to go. What would any normal person do in my place? I did the same thing! I told her that she can live with me until she figures things out. But since I didn't have enough money to sustain us both, I got her a job at my company. A while later Anya brought in a friend of hers who wanted to insure his car. That was Said Akhmayev. In those days I was looking for a new place to live: my landlady asked me to leave because her grandson was coming to live with her. Anya told Said about this, and he in turn, as a fellow countryman, offered assistance — a place to live, owned by a man who'd gone abroad: I was told that it was free, I wouldn't even have to pay for it. Naturally I was elated for such help. So I agreed. It was there that, as it later it turned out, video surveillance had been installed. When I was detained, Anna and Dasha were also interrogated by, for unknown reasons, detectives from

Petrovka 38. At the time the girls were 19 years old. They couldn't handle the pressure. I don't know the details except that in court they recanted the testimonies that they had given against me earlier, claiming that they had been forced to sign all the papers and did so fearing the detectives' threats. But the court rendered the verdict based on the witnesses' initial testimony, ruling that the girls only recanted because they wanted to help me. It was Anna Kulikova and her mother who turned to *Grazhdanskoe Sodeistvie*, to Svetlana Gannushkina, and told her of the threats and warrantless searches. After that, my trial received broad attention in the mass media and human rights organizations started to get involved, for which I am very grateful.

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But I was in the fourth grade at the beginning of the first war and in the seventh and eighth grades during the second. Can you believe this?

There was a lot of such things during the trial.

Are you aware of the subsequent fates of these two girls? Have you had any contact with them? Did you not want to look them in the eyes and tell them what you felt?

No, I never saw these girls again nor had any contact with them. At some point my lawyer told me that Anna Kulikova married a Muslim who too was convicted later, and she ended up

having to go visit him while still pregnant. I don't have any desire to see them, but I don't feel any anger toward them either.

While the investigation and later the trial were underway, did you still hope that somehow you would be able to prove your innocence and receive an impartial verdict?

At first, like any person who has never encountered our judicial system, I believed that they would figure it out and let me go. But seeing how the testimony was skewed, how my case was being fabricated, and hearing my cellmates' stories, I took to heart the rule that the detectives themselves like to repeat: "All we need is a person, the sentence will follow." Today, I know all about the injustice, prejudice and inhumanity of Russia's judicial-executive system. Of course I understand that it too has honest employees and fair judges, that not everything is "rotten" in this system, but these people are only the exception — alien drops in an ocean of evil.

When did it become evident to you that everything was hopeless?

Almost instantly, at an early stage in the trial I understood that our efforts were in vain. Everyone who could do anything did so, but our system is inexorable.

How was a Chechen woman convicted of terrorism treated in the colony? And what does it mean for a Chechen woman to survive in prison?

To be a Chechen woman in places of incarceration, especially accused of such crimes, is incredibly hard — almost unbearable. The colony's administration has a tacit arrangement when it comes to people of

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Caucasian ethnicity. For us, lightened incarceration conditions do not exist; there is no forgiveness. We were not released on parole, and they sought to distribute us throughout the colony so that we wouldn't be in one cohort. We were not allowed to visit one another even with the administration's permission. But these are all minor issues compared to what we had to live through. They don't care too much that we are convicted of different crimes. The crimes were not as important as our ethnicity. The signifying factor for them, the main thing, is that you're a Chechen — everything else is secondary. From the first, our ethnicity condemned us to a torturous existence in the colony, where every day was a struggle for oneself, for the right

From the first, our ethnicity condemned us to a torturous existence in the colony, where every day was a struggle for oneself, for the right to be equal with all the other convicts.

to be equal with all the other convicts. This may sound terrifying, but I, even as a convict *de jure* if not *de facto*, didn't have the rights that other convicts had. Every one of my days was a struggle.

With whom was it harder to find a common language: with the administration or with the convicts?

It was harder, of course, with the administration. Naturally, there were people in its midst who sympathized with me, but they feared expressing it openly.

The manifestation of loyalty toward a convict is interpreted as a relationship, which could lead to an internal investigation within the colony. They are people too, but showing humanity toward a convict is punished.

I often heard very hurtful, piercing and insulting words directed at myself and

my ethnicity from administration employees.

It was much easier to deal with the convicts. Many of them were from Moscow, had heard my story and understood what had happened to me. They empathized with me, so I had many friends. Yet even here certain people from the administration would call the convicts in and firmly advise them not to be friendly with me.

What does a day in the penal colony entail?

The daily schedule in the colony goes like this: wake-up call at six o'clock in the morning, which everyone hates, then there are exercises — during the

winter it's completely impossible to do them, but you still have to. After that you go to breakfast, which is horrible porridge and milk diluted with water. There were times when convicts who protested these rations were sentenced to punitive isolation. Not a minute later than seven o'clock in the morning, you must be standing in work formation. If a convict isn't in formation on time, the following punishment awaits regardless of weather or time of year: after the formation has dispersed, she will walk as many laps around the yard as the guard sees fit. Lunch is at noon. At three o'clock, you're released from work and go home to wash-up quickly — that is, if one of your friends who's at home and working other shifts, has heated up some water, since hot water is provided only for one hour in the morning and evening. At five o'clock there's a check. We're counted and then a "card-index" is conducted, meaning that the convicts' identities are verified through their last names and on the spot. Until

seven o'clock, if you're not sent to fatigue duty, you have some bit of free time; dinner is at seven, with each cohort eating at a different time. Finally, with ten o'clock comes the long awaited and wished-for bedtime.

What kind of work did you do there?

That colony only had a sewing factory. I was considered to be a very good seamstress: category four. But the convicts get kopeks for their work, even though sometimes we would spend days there, finishing last minute orders. Everyone works, even the sick who have been discharged from the sewing factory. It's pointless to provide doctor's orders: no one cares one bit.

The most pay we received was no greater than one thousand rubles a month, a seamstress got even less, 300–400. We would spend it in the colony store, but they even made us spend a portion of this money "voluntarily" on subscriptions to local newspapers such as *Kazenniy Dom* and others. In addition to this, some paid court-mandated alimony from this money; some even managed to send something home to their children. In the end, many had nothing left in their accounts. But girls from other colonies, with whom we'd interact, would tell us that their salaries reached four or five thousand rubles. What our administration did with that money, no one knows.

What was the hardest thing during your term and during your incarceration in general?

The hardest thing in the colony is that you are a person without rights. You're a convict in a dour uniform with a label on your chest. Officially you are deprived of freedom, but in reality you lose your right to a voice, your freedom of movement. You can't say what you think is right or read what you

want or pray. Everything is taken away. You become nothing!

Were you subjected to coercion in the colony?

Yes, violence exists in the colony — I encountered it myself. They permit other personnel from headquarters to come to you, often they don't introduce themselves, you must appear before them and they can allow themselves a lot of things when it comes to a convict. No one defends you; moreover, no one records the beating if that's what happens to you. You can't prove anything.

In any situation there is something that enables a person to persevere. What sustained you all those years?

I held on thanks to many people who helped me voluntarily. These included Svetlana Gannushkina, *Memorial*, Union of Solidarity with Political Prisoners, *DOSH* magazine, Zoya Svetova, my mother naturally, and many other people. If I were to begin listing everyone who helped me survive it all, to all of whom I am thankful, we wouldn't have the space. I received letters and telegrams by the hundreds.

You said that you wrote us letters; not a single one of them ever reached us. It follows that whatever you received was probably subjected to censorship and sorting as well?

Yes, I really didn't get all the letters, books, newspapers and magazines that I had been sent. More than once I wrote letters to your editorial staff but found out only when I had been released that not one of my letters had reached its destination. There was a very interesting instance related to magazines in the colony. In summer 2011, when my friend Zoya brought

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me the *DOSH*, *New-Times*, and *Bolsboi Gorod* magazines, I wasn't allowed to have them for 3–4 months. In the end, the Director of the Operations Section, Kostyaev, called me in and stunned me by declaring that the *New-Times* was a magazine opposed to the Russian constitutional order, while *DOSH* was a simply a terrorist publication. That's the kind of madness that one may encounter there. In the end they placed these magazines among my personal effects; later, the day I was set free, my mother and Zoya had a good laugh when they gave them to me — one year too late! But my letters, notes and phone numbers from the girls, were all torn up by the Deputy Director for Colony Safety and Order, Tatyana Bezzubova. It was a peculiar turnaround. It was pointless to attempt to explain to these people that all of these were publications legally registered under Russian law. After all, they have their own state within a state.

Is it true that relations between the convicts in women's prisons are no less cruel than they are in the men's prisons?

I would put it a bit differently; I think I can elucidate this. Understand that in the men's colonies there are specific hierarchies; there are certain "understandings" there, and each knows his place. Women's colonies are utter chaos, full of gossip and intrigue. To obtain an early parole, many convicts walk over each other, agree to sleep with men from the administration and slip proscribed items to others. Those who cooperate with the administration, and there are many who do, can easily smear you. You can't prove otherwise because they are trusted, so that in the best case scenario you'll end up in administrative segregation due to

someone's wrongful accusation.

Who wrote you letters and what did they typically write about?

I received many letters not only from Russia but from abroad. I'll tell you about a letter from Ivan Vergun. He's a retiree who lives in Sakhalin. He wrote me about his garden, his children, his life, and that he learned of my story from the Internet. The words of support and compassion from people like him touched me deeply and helped a lot. There were letters and drawings from children, from Italy and France. People would read my story on the Internet. They were not apathetic. There are many who can distinguish black from white. I am thankful to all of them for their moral support. Moreover, I am also grateful to those who wrote completely different letters — to those who vented all the evil that was suffocating them. I became stronger thanks to them.

What is your greatest disenchantment? What struck you as the harshest wrong? And was there anything that came as a nice surprise over these eight and a half years?

The nicest thing was that during this difficult period, there appeared people who later became my friends and loved ones, without whom I cannot imagine my life now. I owe everything to them; I owe myself to them. After all, they helped not only myself, but my mother too. It's not possible to forget that, erase it from memory. As for hurts and wrongs? You know, when at 20 years old they place documents on the table before you in which your fellow countryman accuses you and destroys your life, when people with whom you are friends

POLITICAL PRISONER No. 1

After they led me out, I heard what I had been hearing for the past eight years for the last time — the sound of the lock locking and the rumble of the bars.

betray you... When a guy whom you dated gets scared and refuses you, when your entire world is flipped upside down, you can get angry, you can lose your mind, you can not take it and end your life, you can turn inward. But if you do that, you'll go the expected route, the route of many people who were broken and hurt by life. This is precisely what those who did this to me were trying to make happen.

So is there any point in doing what my "dear" enemies wanted me to do? I love them for making me stronger, wiser, and calmer. I learned to forgive people their weaknesses, to value that which surrounds us at this moment. I learned to forgive... And that's the most important thing.

I wish them only the best: we are all walking under God!

No doubt the last days before your freedom dragged on very long?

You know, it seems to me that I had waited an eternity for that day to come, but when it came, it seemed as if it wasn't about me, that it didn't concern me, as in a dream.

I only thought about one thing: this is over — the nightmare has really ended. I was doing everything that day as if I was in a dream. For the rest of my life I'll retain the memory of when they were returning my passport to me through that little window. After they led me out, I heard what I had been hearing for the past eight years for the last time — the sound of the lock locking and the rumble of the bars. Millions of people have heard this before me and will hear it after me. It's the scariest thing on the first day of arrest and the most pleasant thing on

the day of freedom. Locks know how to squeal, but trust me when I say that many convicts on the day of their liberation hear their singing.

Is the motto of the preceding dissident generation, "Don't believe, don't be afraid, don't beg," still relevant or would you introduce your own changes to it?

I would add only one thing — fall, but get back up!

Have you managed to consider your future plans?

I don't know what I will do. I don't want to think of the fact that most likely I'll be denied work everywhere I go because of my conviction. I know that I need to study but have not yet decided exactly where and what. I don't yet have clear goals, but it's about time I did.

I know one thing for certain: when I wake up in the morning and open my eyes, pour a cup of coffee, look out of the window, I understand that I exist on this day, that this is the truth, that I live and that I am happy.

The fate of Zara Murtazaliyeva is the embodiment of the total injustice, cruelty and inhumanity of the Russian state in its dealings with Chechens who fell victim to imperial ambitions and the "current situation" in this country. The demonstrative judgment passed upon this innocent young woman — who had been awarded a gold medal upon graduating school, had studied in one of the Russian universities, and had come to tearfully plead with an intransigent old lady — is not only a trial of a student from Naur... Anyone can of course reckon that there is no smoke without fire, but for the empire the fire is all of Chechen society, which means that such calamity can happen to anyone. Yes, no one is secure: this can happen to any innocent in the present and the future.

Today, there are thousands upon thousands — no one, beside the Administration of the Federal Penitentiary Service

of Russia, knows the exact number — of Chechens sitting in Russian prisons and penal camps scattered throughout the country. Among them there are more than a few of those who like Murtazaliyeva were convicted of capital crimes on fabricated charges: participation in illegal armed groups, attacks on law enforcement agents, and the intent to commit a terrorist act as well as its actual performance... Some of these were only 15–16 years old back then. There are also some among the convicts who have been sentenced to life. They turned out to be a true harvest of the "valorous exploits" of the Russian army. We understand perfectly well that this glorious host prefers to "combat" naïve teenagers instead of real opponents with rifles in their hands. But who could prove any of this, and how, when the defenseless were being sentenced?

And who is there to defend justice now?

This story begins almost a decade ago-on January 15, 2003, to pick a tentative starting point. Its main characters are federal army officers, Sergey Arakcheev and Evgeny Khudyakov, serving under contract in the Chechen Republic. Its tragic component is the kidnapping of one local inhabitant and the murder of three others. The trials in this case lasted five years (in parallel to another high-profile case, concerning Captain Ulman's GRU Spetsnaz group). In the end, the accused were sentenced to long terms of incarceration. Khudyakov was absent from the defendants' bench; since his sentencing, he has been placed on the federal wanted list. Nine years later, one of the criminals, Sergey Arakcheev, who is serving his sentence in a high-security penal colony, was included as the first entry in a list of political prisoners drawn up by protest organizers in Moscow. Who is the author (or authors) of this idea? Who placed Arakcheev's last name on the list? Did the list's authors know what Arakcheev and Khudyakov had been accused of? If they did, then their action reeks of provocation and casts doubt on the other members of the list; if they did not know, then this is a case of "crudeness is no goodness."

We met up with one of the victims in this case, the brother of the murdered Abdula Dzhambekov, Sharani Dzhambekov, a lecturer at Chechen State University. Plunging yet again into this horror, he became very emotional. For him, the five years of examinations and trials did not pass without leaving their mark. Sharani suffers from grave health problems. It was difficult to listen to his tale about the cynical, completely gratuitous killing of his brother and his two friends. Our meeting left me with two hefty folders filled with copies of materials from the investigation and the trial, experts' findings, and testimonies from dozens of witnesses as well as victims. I needed time to understand the causal connections and the logic of the verdict passed down to these two officers. Moreover, it was uncanny that this kind of trial took place at all in the early 2000s. To this day, hundreds and thousands of crimes committed in Chechnya during the war

years have not been investigated or have not reached trial. The legal machinery worked perfectly in the other direction — nude verdicts and harsh sentences rained down on Chechens as if from a template. In my view, when it came to this case, "the human factor" had played a large role: there were witnesses who, due to the rapidity of events, had not yet been scared, detectives who presented a foundation of evidence, and a judge who stuck to the letter of the law.

Many have already forgotten or have never learned what Khudyakov and Arakcheev were accused of. Therefore, we will recount once again the events that took place at the beginning of 2003 on the Petropavlovsk highway in Grozny and attempt to preserve the court documents' phrasing.

In January 2003, First Lieutenant Evgeny Khudyakov and Third

Lieutenant Sergey Arakcheev were serving a tour of duty in the Chechen Republic. Reconnaissance platoon commander Khudyakov with his detachment was deployed in the Chechen Republic Government Administrative Complex in Grozny, while engineer platoon commander Arakcheev was deployed in the rear command post (RCP) of troop unit 3186, located in a former Grozny passenger-bus enterprise on the Petropavlovsk highway. On January 15, 2003 Khudyakov and Arakcheev were located at the platoon post in the Oktyabrsky District of Grozny with an armored group of two APCs, numbers A-225 and A-226, and their crews; there, at the site of a fellow service member's death, they consumed spirits. Around 1600 hours of the same day, on their way back to the detachment, an inebriated Khudyakov willfully altered the route, ordering the driver of APC No. A-226 to continue along the



The brother of the murdered Abdula Dzhambekov (left) – Chechen State University lecturer, Sharani Dzhambekov (right).

Petropavlovsk highway instead of following the APC under Churin's command into the RCP. Before the bridge over the Neftyanika River, Khudyakov ordered the APC to be turned perpendicularly to the road, thereby creating an obstacle to traffic in the direction of travel. Thereafter, wearing a mask and brandishing an assault rifle, he pulled Yunusov out of the latter's *Volga*, which had come to a stop before the APC, forced him to enter the APC's crew compartment, and ordered four women traveling in the car to get out and sit on the ground. During this time, Arakcheev remained alongside Khudyakov. Having shot up the *Volga*, Khudyakov and Arakcheev drove further down Petropavlovsk highway. Along the way, Khudyakov ordered his subordinates to tie up Yunusov, put a balaclava over his head in a manner that covered his eyes, and also to search him. Not only did they seize Yunusov's documents but also his wallet containing a salary of 7,000 rubles and a gold signet ring. Around 1700 hours of the same day, on a rural road leading from the pass through the Tersky Heights to the *Severnnyy* Airport, Arkacheev and Khudyakov encountered three *KAMAZ* trucks coming

toward them. Having let the first two pass, they stopped the *KAMAZ* commanded by S. Yangulbayev. Under threat of arms, Khudyakov demanded that Yangulbayev emerge from the cabin and lie down on the ground. Simultaneously, an inebriated Arakcheev came up to the passenger

Intending to conceal the traces of the murder, Khudyakov ordered his subordinates to remove the corpses, hide them in the roadside bushes, and gather the fired casings. In the meantime, Arakcheev detonated the *KAMAZ*, following which all of them departed. On the road they encountered a gathering of cars and people who tried to stop them. Khudyakov ordered them to move forward with the headlights turned off and to shoot to kill anyone who attempted to detain them. Having arrived at the RCP around 1900 hours, Khudyakov ordered that the unlawfully detained driver of the *Volga*, Yunusov, be taken to the gymnasium on the third floor of the building, where the reconnaissance platoon was lodged. Upon returning to the detachment, Khudyakov assembled all the reconnaissance operatives who had ridden with him, as well as his personal staff, in the psychological release room and announced that everything that had happened was to be forgotten. He instructed them that to avoid criminal punishment all of them had to say that

Afterward, he took the previously seized documents, money and gold signet ring of the driver from his subordinates, then entered the gymnasium and began to beat Yunusov, demanding he inform him of the insurgents' location. He fired three shots into the man's leg and dealt a blow from the butt-stock to the face of Yunusov. After the arrival to the gymnasium of an officer demanding Yunusov's release, Khudyakov and his subordinates drove the injured man beyond the unit's territory and left him on the road. That said, he returned his documents but kept the money and signet ring.

door of the *KAMAZ*. Demonstrating his rank and threatening the men with his weapon, he demanded that A. Dzhambekov and N. Khasanov who were in the cabin, emerge and lay down on the ground. Following this, Arakcheev and Khudyakov, on the recommendation of the latter, proceeded to fire from close range into the heads and bodies of Yangulbayev, Khasanov and Dzhambekov, who were lying on the ground. All three died on the spot.

APC No. 226 had had a breakdown and that APC No. 225, under Churin's command, supposedly towed it to the RCP and that no one went out anywhere else after that.

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tion. He fired three shots into the man's leg and dealt a blow from the buttstock to the face of Yunusov. After the arrival to the gymnasium of an officer demanding Yunusov's release, Khudyakov and his subordinates drove the injured man beyond the unit's territory and left him on the road. That said, he returned his documents but kept the money and signet ring. In the course of the preliminary investigation, the signet ring was recovered from Khudyakov and returned to its original owner.

Initially, Khudyakov and Arakcheev denied any involvement in these crimes. However, in the face of incontestable evidence, especially on the part of their subordinates and fellow service members, Tsupik, Milov, Golovin, Kulakov, Ermakov, Andreyev, Churin, Iskaliyev, Budchenko, Makarchenkov, Prosvetov, as well as the testimony of witnesses from among the local citizens, Umatgeriyeva, Sulumova et. al., the two were compelled to admit to the facts of their committed crimes. Arakcheev initially stated that he did not shoot at all — later, that he shot only at corpses. However, the investigation established that both Khudyakov and Arakcheev shot at Yangulbayev, Dzhambekov, and Khasanov. It was the second shooter who was armed with a 5.45 mm rifle (AKS-74) without a suppressor; the others had 9 mm special weapons with suppressors. The forensic investigation confirmed that the shots came from both types of weapons. During questioning on June 18, 2003, Arakcheev testified in the presence of his defender that he, firstly, offered to release the driver of the *Volga* but that Khudyakov did not listen to him, and, secondly, that during the time of the murder of the last *KAMAZ* passenger, Khudyakov had asked him, "What, are you too weak to shoot a Chechen?" Since he, allegedly, saw corpses, he shot at them. However, according to the the coro-

On February 23, one of the protesters' leaders, Alexei Navalny said the following about Arakcheev's case: "On this day it befits us to remember those members of the armed services who do not have the opportunity to celebrate this holiday with their families, not because they are serving on submarines, in distant posts etc. but because they were betrayed..."

ners' conclusion, all of the shooting wounds of Yangulbayev, Dzhambekov and Khasanov were inflicted while the men were still alive.

Khudyakov and Arakcheev were sentenced respectively to 17 and 15 years incarceration in a high-security penal colony. The court recognized Arakcheev's cooperation with preliminary investigation authorities in the incrimination of Khudyakov as mitigating circumstances. Arakcheev was awarded the Medal of Suvorov by decree of the President of Russia on March 22, 2003 — that is, already following his commission of the murder of peaceful citizens in the Chechen Republic. The court ordered him stripped of the indicated award. Both Khudyakov and Arakcheev were stripped of their ranks.

So goes a story that has become almost "commonplace" in the Chechen war. Both then and now, attempts are made to glorify soldiers who have committed criminal acts in the Chechen Republic. Certain famous public figures even frame this in philosophical terms: they say, in war it's either you or them. Several television and feature-length documentaries have been made about Arakcheev, who remains imprisoned. Meanwhile, irrespective of their crimes, Caucasians who have found their way behind bars enjoy no access to human rights activists, much less journalists. As a side note, polarized opinions about "the case of Arakcheev" abound in this field. On February 23, one of the protesters' leaders, Alexei Navalny said the following about Arakcheev's case: "On this day it befits us to remember those members of the armed services who do

not have the opportunity to celebrate this holiday with their families, not because they are serving on submarines, in distant posts etc. but because they were betrayed.

I am speaking first of all about the Arakcheev-Khudyakov case. These soldiers were accused of war crimes in Chechnya. They always denied their guilt. They were twice found innocent by a jury, but were found guilty anyway by a 'professional court.' Nowadays, that trial is sadly being forgotten. It has become a symbol of the mockery of due process and politically-motivated malfeasance. Put simply, Arakcheev and Khudyakov were sacrificed so that Ramzan Kadyrov could more easily race his Porsche *Cayenne* and hand out gold bars and five thousand ruble bills at weddings."

Alexander Cherkasov, one of the directing members of the Human Rights Center *Memorial* also spoke of the cases of Budanov and Arakcheev: "In both cases we are talking about a crime committed by members of the federal armed services against the civil population. A person's abduction was involved in both cases. If we are to speak of the crime for which Arakcheev was found guilty — the people who were in the *KAMAZ* were murdered and their corpses were burned in the car; another was taken to the internal security unit base... The similarity to the Budanov case is that this was happening during a counter-terrorism operation, which in reality afforded the security-service agents an opportunity for complete lack of supervision and minimal control over these agents. One

other similarity is that the crime instantly received wide attention: the murder of the people in the *KAMAZ* was in January 2003 received quite poorly in Chechnya, about the same way as the one committed in the spring of 2000 by Budanov. Further on, differences begin to appear. Budanov's case was known from the beginning. But the crime for which Arakcheev was found guilty was committed by men in masks without identifying insignias by which one could determine who these agents actually were. Arakcheev's defense is built upon this fact. Budanov was tried by a professional court. Arakcheev and his accomplice, Khudyakov, were tried by a jury which several times found the defendants not guilty (the lawyers reference this in particular). But — imagine Rostov-on-Don and Grozny. Imagine that now, eventually, a jury will be assembled in Grozny to try the case of Arakcheev. Just as the Rostov jury was predictable, so the Grozny one, most likely, will be predictable. In a war-torn country, to trust people who, in general, see the world as us and them, the deciding of guilt or innocence may be somewhat ill advised. It's not even that security-service agents operate under complete lawlessness — it's that an utter impunity predominates. The number of convicts number in the single digits: of them far from all came to the sentencing — and there are thousands of crimes for which no one has had to answer. There are thousands of executioners. There are murderers walking among us."

It is incontestable that all of the cases concerning war crimes and kidnappings in Chechnya, which have not been brought to their conclusion, need to be reexamined. If our society aspires to qualitative changes, we have to be just in our approach to and evaluation of that which happened in Russia and the Chechen Republic at the turn of the century. It's impermissible to make heroes of scum — and criminals of

heroes. The easiest thing to do is to blame the crimes on the war and justify them thereby. War is a conflict between two armies, armed men versus armed men — it is not thievery, banditry, torture and the murder of innocent people. If anything has changed substantially in this equation, then we can append the known and unknown authors of war crimes and capital crimes to these lists of "suffering" and political prisoners.

Taus Serganova

PS.

A repeat request to reopen the case in light of new facts has been submitted to the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation.

On January 30, 2012, Sergey Arakcheev's lawyer, Dmitry Agranovsky, submitted a repeat request to reopen the case in light of new facts to the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation. In the request he indicates that the response to the previous request was received from the Military Prosecutor's representative (which was the indicting party at the trial) and contained claims that were unsupported by the realities and materials of the case.



The repeat request provides an exhaustive list of evidence for Sergey Arakcheev's alibi, as well as multiple instances of violations of the Rules of Criminal Procedure permitted by Judge V. Tsybulnik during the trial. In view of the indicated, the lawyer Agranovsky, requests that the criminal case of S. Arakcheev be evoked from the North-Caucasus District Military Court and directed with a determination of the need for renewal of the case in light of new facts, to the Presidium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation.

On June 7, 2012, at a triumphant award ceremony in Penal Colony No. 3 of the Ryazan Oblast Division of the Federal Penitentiary Service, the Silver Cross was awarded to the convict Sergey Arakcheev. The award was presented by the Chairman of the Public Monitoring Committee for the Ryazan Oblast, Viktor Boborykin, on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church and the National Public Organization Boyevoe Bratstvo.

The fate of this former officer who had served in conflict zones, has more than once been recounted by various mass media journalists and human rights activists. The award ceremony was held in the presence of convicts and personnel, at a service in the colony's church building. The priest leading the service offered the award recipient his heartfelt congratulations, wished him "a long life" and read a short, heartfelt sermon for the occasion.

Having been awarded the Silver Cross award and an Orthodox holy image, S. Arakcheev turned these items over for safekeeping in accordance with established procedure as items having significant material value, which will be returned to him per checklist upon his release.

Source: official site UFSIN for the Ryazan Oblast.

MAIRBEK VATCHAGAEV
President of the Caucasian Studies Association
Paris, France

AT TIMES, HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF...

In doing so, it attests that there is no great difference between tsarist policy during the colonization of the North Caucasus, Bolshevik methods in the years of militant atheism, and the conduct of modern Russia-the indiscriminate heiress of all past traditions, good and bad.

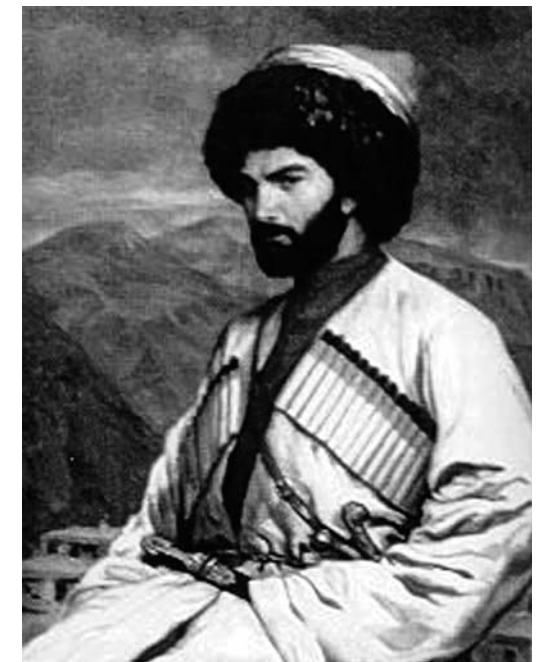
Today, following two bloody wars in Chechnya, many of our compatriots insist that their lot is a nightmare unlike any other in Chechen history. We must object: this is an erroneous claim — though one's tongue does not turn to reproach those who think this way for their weakness of memory. After all, each tragedy is singular, and no one has the right to dispute the impressions of a person who thinks his or her misfortunes are more terrible than anything ever witnessed by the human race. Any individual has his or her own inimitable peculiarities: some stoically face the blows of fate, while others lose their serenity merely hearing of them.

Our people's past is an interminable history of the struggle for the right to exist beneath this sun. We never started wars with anyone! Others brought war to us! And the suffering that they brought with them has in many ways repeated century after century. Today, it bears remembering certain similar traits between the methods employed by the Russian army in Chechnya in the 19th century and what was hap-

pening in our country at the end of the 20th century. Unfortunately, this shows that history sometimes repeats itself...

Almost every Chechen knows that on September 15, 1818, the Russian army led by General Sysoev (Vasily Sysoev, 1772–1839, lieutenant general, participant in the Napoleonic Wars and Caucasian campaigns) wiped the village of Dadi-Yurt from the face of the earth. General Yermolov himself vividly describes this episode in his memoirs and reports to superiors: "Wishing to punish the Chechens, who were engaging in endless banditry, especially the villages called Kachkalykovski [that was the name for the Chechens who lived in the present-day Gudermessky District], the inhabitants of which had stolen our horses, we proposed to expel all of them from the Aksayev lands [present-day Aukh], which they were occupying initially under terms reached with the landowners and which later, having strengthened themselves, they retained against the owners' will.

During the attack on these villages, which lie in rugged and forested lands, I



Hadji Murat

knew that our losses would be grievous if the village inhabitants did not first remove their wives, children and property, which they always defend desperately, and that the only thing that could force them to remove their wives would be terror.

To this end, I ordered Major General Sysoev of the Don Army to take a small body of troops and, having incorporated all the Cossacks available on short notice, surround the village of Dadanyurt which lies on the Terek River. Having done so, he was to offer the inhabitants the chance to evacuate and, in the event of resistance, to punish them with arms, not sparing anyone.

Said Bitsirayev,
"Dadi-Yurt"



If we are to recall all this, it becomes apparent that the Russian army in its wars and aggressions against the Chechens at the turn of the 21st century, has thought of nothing new. After all, why would it? It possesses great historical experience, a rich tradition of violence, insult, and humiliation of the victims, both living and dead, of imperial policy. Even the army's numbering system has been preserved since the days of the Caucasian wars.

Grozny



The Chechens did not listen to the proposal; they defended themselves tooth and nail. Each stead was surrounded by a high fence; it was necessary to take each one by storm. When the soldiers would burst into the house, many of the villagers would kill their wives right in front of them, so as to keep them from the soldiers' grasp. Many of the women threw themselves upon the soldiers with daggers.

A most stubborn battle ensued for the majority of the day; never have we had so many significant losses: for, excluding the officers, the dead and the wounded numbered two hundred men.

On the side of the adversary, everyone who had arms was exterminated, and their number could not have been four hundred people. Up to one hundred and forty women and children were taken captive. These were spared by the soldiers as people who were defenseless and asking for mercy. (But a much greater of their number were slaughtered or killed in the houses due to artillery and fire). The soldiers got fairly rich spoils because the villagers were the predominant bandits near the front line, such that no theft or robbery took place without their participation. The larger part of the property was consumed by the flames. The village consisted of two hundred houses: on September 14 these have been razed to their foundations.

The heroic defense of the village became an example of tenacity and courage which has left its traces in Chechen legends and songs. That morning began for the villagers with a call issuing from the village minaret: a signal which proclaimed the foe's advance. Legend has it that young women, led by the fearless daughter of the village's founder, Aibika, began to dance in the central square to support their men in battle. The music enraged the general; he ordered the village fired on with cannon. But the fiercer

the cannon blows rained down, the louder grew the dance's melodies: nothing could stop the women. After the men had been killed and the Russians entered the village, the women and young girls themselves took up arms. To avoid capture they slit their own throats before the eyes of the astonished soldiers.

By evening the village was utterly destroyed. The Russians captured forty-six wounded women. But when they were being ferried across the Sunzha River, they began to throw themselves overboard shouting, "Death to the enemy!" Moreover, each woman tried to grab a Russian soldier in a death embrace and drag him down with her. In this manner, every one of them avoided becoming a captive. A few children survived this horror, among whom two were later to become notable figures of their epoch. One of them, gaining fame under the name Peter Zakharov, became an Academy Fellow of Russian painting — the other, Boto Shamurzayev was raised by Baron Georg van Rosen and later became one of the confidants of the Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovich. In the mid-30s, he was allowed to go to Chechnya by personal request, where he served for some time as a translator to the commandant of the Caucasian Front's left flank. Thereafter he went over to the side of Shamil, became one of his closest allies and was appointed as naib for Greater Chechnya. However, falling victim to his comrades-in-arms' slander, he was forced to once again return to the Russians' service.

Another bloody example of how entire Chechen villages were destroyed in those times — where each child, woman, or elderly person was viewed as a potential enemy — is the story of Germenchug. At dawn on June 22, 1832 (the Germans were not the only ones to choose four in the morning as

the hour of invasion), Baron Rosen (Georg van Rosen, 1782–1841, participant of the Patriotic War of 1812, infantry general, between 1831–1837 commander of the Special Caucasian Corps) approached the village of Germenchug, intending to capture it unawares. It did not work out: the first skirmishes broke out upon approaching the nearest steads. There was too much noise as a result, and it was therefore decided to storm the village openly on the next morning.

In this manner, the inhabitants of Germenchug were afforded the opportunity to prepare a defense. The storm of Germenchug began early in the morning of June 23. The first hours of battle showed that the engagement would be costly to the invaders: Russian soldiers were dying in droves. The most interesting thing was that neither Baron Rosen nor the other commanders even thought of offering the villagers the chance to evacuate! The plan to initiate the assault suddenly, was calculated precisely in order to kill as many inhabitants as possible — these had been described as destroyed, "dangerous" Chechens in previously prepared reports (familiar, isn't it?).

The storm was led by Colonel Albrand (Lev Albrand, 1804–1849, colonel and staff-officer, lost his right arm in the Caucasian War, major general from 1847, Governor of Erivan). Only at lunchtime did they manage to enter the village. Each house had become a fortress; the artillery was hammering the houses directly and at close range. Wielding daggers, the wounded were throwing themselves against the lines of the approaching invaders. At the last moment, not wishing to be captured, women followed the men's examples, forcing the soldiers to shoot them point blank.

By evening the last remaining defenders gathered in a tower in the village

center. Albrand attempted to negotiate a surrender but without result: all offers were met with gunfire. And when the *La-ilaba-illa-allab* Dhikr sung by Sheik Abdurakhman, the Germenchugs' representative, emanated from the tower and was joined by all sixty of his devoted murids, Albrand ordered them burned alive (does this not remind you of 1940s history?).

In his memoirs, Albrand writes that he never heard a single prayer for assistance escape the tower. The higher the flames grew, the louder waxed the Dhikr. For a long time the soldiers watched this drama unfold, until the voices of the fire-engulfed murids fell silent at last. The fallen tower buried sixty courageous men who had chosen death over captivity.

The exiled poet-libertine, Alexander Polezhaev, also took part in that punitive operation. He dedicated his poem "Germenchug Cemetery" to this tragedy:

*I behold: the earth around me
Imbrued with bloody streams.
Here lies one icy corpse and here another
Upon the precipice of their native land.*
(Polezhaev, Alexander.
Works. Moscow: 1988, p.105.)

Also taking a personal part in this battle were the Commander-in-chief Baron Rosen, and General G. Zass, who was more famous as a "collector" of highlander skulls.

No less famous in Chechnya at the end of the 1930s was Colonel A. Pullo (commander of the Sunzhensky Front, lieutenant-colonel, a nobleman from the Tavrichesky Governorate. Promoted to the rank of colonel for the battle near the village of Akhmet-polo in 1839 and appointed commandant of the Caucasian Front's left flank, promoted to major general fol-

This method, introduced back during Catherine's reign, survived "deservedly" through all the years of the Caucasian war, right up until the 1859 arrest of Imam Shamil and thereafter passed fluidly into the 20th century. Thousands of Chechen children, taken to Russia as hostages, were executed as revenge for their parents' actual or supposed infraction of the terms of cessation of resistance.

lowing the battle near the village of Akhulgo). Under the guise of arresting undesirable highlanders, he undertook campaigns deep into Chechen lands, giving the Russian soldiers and Cossacks the opportunity to pillage. They would lodge for the night in Chechen houses and later accuse their hosts of harboring some unheard-of fugitive. On these grounds they took whatever caught their eye from the host's property. By the Emperor's example, the valorous warlord would reject all of the Chechens' complaints as slander, though this banditry was taking place not only with his knowledge but under his personal orders.

Pullo devastated the fields and pastures of the Chechen villagers maliciously, and forbade trade under threat of arrest between the highlanders, the Terek and Sunzhensky Chechens and the Andis. He refused to permit visits to the Fortress Grozny, unless the visitors first paid a ten percent tax on imported property. *Sui generis* conscription was introduced by order of Pullo: one rifle was recruited from every ten steeds. This decree, incomprehensible to the highlanders, elicited their general indignation.

The commandant of the left flank accompanied his actions with placating reports to Commander of the Special Caucasian Corps Golovin. In these he assured that the Chechens were behaving calmly and that no insurgencies were to be expected in the immediate time. "Subsequently, we anticipate no large disturbance or general rebellion in Chechnya this year

[1840 — M.V.]" (*Russian State Military Historical Archive; Military Science Archive*. 6363 (1). "Correspondence at the suggestion of Adjutant General Grabbe, concerning the 1840 expedition in the left flank of the Caucasian front," p.3).

Pullo enjoyed the support of Lieutenant-General Grabbe who spoke of him as follows: "Colonel Pullo is experienced and courageous; in his capacity as staff-squad commandant, he has become a truly exemplary colleague" (*RSMHA*. Collection 62. Grabbe, Paul. Inventory 1, Dossier 26, p.31). Such favor from his superior encouraged Pullo to finally get completely out of hand. According to his comrades-in-arms, it was his punitive policy toward the Chechens that drove all of Chechnya, from the Bashlama to the Tersky Mountains, to abandon their homes and pastures, lands and property, and go into the mountains to fight with those who wanted not to subjugate the highlanders but only kill them.

Our contemporaries often mention Moscow's policy of not returning enemy corpses to their native land. It is worth noting that this barbarous custom was also not invented today. We should remember the sad dole of Sheik Mansur who was buried within the walls of the Shlisselburg Fortress near St. Petersburg on April 24, 1794. Sheik Mansur always remained an enemy for Russia, but the fate of its former allies turned out to be just as unenviable. Fanatical cruelty was, unfortunately, a typical phenomenon for the Russian army during its conquest of the North Caucasus.

Following the overthrow of the Tsar, the Bolsheviks adopted his manner of withholding the bodies of their enemies from their loved ones. Today, "democratic" Russia likewise does not hesitate to employ this base tactic in its struggle against the undesirable and disobedient. That is, history attests that there is no great difference between tsarist policy during the colonization of the North Caucasus, Bolshevik methods in the years of militant atheism, and the conduct of modern Russia — the indiscriminate heiress of all past traditions, good and bad.

Thousands of documents kept in the Historical Archive evidence that these facts drawn from the history of the North Caucasus' subjugation are far from isolated cases. It is no accident that it is precisely in this period that the Russian command was willingly or not forced to adopt measures for curbing the Cossacks' violence against the highlanders. It got to the point that the Emperor was forced to personally address the Special Caucasian Corps command with a demand to cease the practice of beheading, scalping, and hanging on display of such trophies on posts around Cossack villages (*RSMHA* Collection 13454. Inventory 6, Dossier 561. "General Staff Order prohibiting the Cossacks from scalping killed highlanders"). Only, do not think that such humanity on the part of the Russian Emperor was evoked by the highlanders' suffering. No, the matter was something else: the Emperor complains that he is being reproached for such exotic habits in Europe!

However, the prohibition did not have much effect. The authorities were forced to return to it several times in the course of that war. The great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, who was himself present in the events in the Caucasus at the beginning of the 1850s remarks that a required attribute on all of the Cossacks' saddles were the

scalps of highlanders they had killed. Such barbarity was normal for the Russian army. To claim otherwise is extremely foolish.

Here is what another contemporary of those years, a Russian officer, writes: "As per custom, General Zass ordered the dead men's heads cut off and returned to the Prochny Okop fortress. A year later I met General Zass in Stavropol. He was riding in a sled followed by another sled covered with a sheet. 'Where are you going, Your Excellency, and what are you conveying?' 'I am going on leave, brother, and transporting some settled matters to deliver to Velyaminov.' With these words he threw back the sheet and I beheld, not without disgust, fifty or so bare skulls. Velyaminov sent them to the Academy of Sciences" (Filipson, Grigory. "Memoirs. 1832–1847." *Siege of the Caucasus. Memoirs of the Participants in the Caucasian War of the 19th Century*. SPb: 2000, p.83).

Speaking of highlanders' skulls, we cannot forget the story of Hadji Murat, which, thanks to the eponymous novel by Leo Tolstoy, has become famous for all time. On April 12, 1852, during a desperate attempt to free his family, which was being held by Shamil in Veden, Murat was killed by Cossacks. After his death, one of the outstanding participants in the Caucasian war was fated to become not only the protagonist of an immortal work, but a museum exhibit item... Lieutenant-Colonel Korganov, the commander of the Nukhinsk district, chopped off Hadji Murat's head and sent it to Count Vorontsov in Tbilisi as confirmation of the rebellious highlander's death. Hadji Murat's body was buried near Nukha, in modern-day Azerbaijan. From that day on, his skull has been kept in the Kunstkamera in St. Petersburg, under inventory number 6521. Even after the fall of the Russian Empire — and now even after the fall of the Soviet Union

— his relatives are not permitted to honorably bury this person. After all, the skull is the museum's property! Moreover, in response to Dagestani requests, the museum's management even declared the loss of the "exhibit item," though in actuality it had been concealed in the storage-rooms.

And here is another vivid example of similar barbarity: General Velyaminov (Alexei Velyaminov, 1788–1836, lieutenant-general, staff commandant of the Special Georgian — later Caucasian — Corps, thereafter commandant of the 14th and 16th infantry divisions, in 1831–1838 commandant of the armies in the Caucasian Front armies and in Chernomorie, commandant of the Caucasus Region) loved very much to collect highlanders' wrists. He too would send these as "presents" to various scientific institutions around the Russian Empire — to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan and Kiev. Nor did he overlook foreign academies of science — they too received some of his idiosyncratic "gifts." So it is not surprising that one may find "souvenirs" from the North Caucasus sent in by anthropology connoisseurs — Russian generals — in the museums of Berlin, Copenhagen and Paris.

We can observe the inhumanity of Russian soldiers both in archived materials and in the memoirs of eyewitnesses. The following is Tolstoy's description of an attack on an aul: "The dragoons, the Cossacks, and the infantry scattered themselves throughout the aul. There, a roof is caving, a door is being broken — here, a fence is beginning to burn or a hut or a haystack, and the smoke unfolds in the fresh morning air; here is a Cossack dragging a bag of flour, a soldier a carpet and two chickens; another carries a bowl and a *kumgan* of milk. A third has packed a donkey with various goods; here come some men leading a frightened and ragged, old Chechen

man, who hadn't the time to run away... Thirty fathoms from us a woman was running from the aul to the precipice, with a bag in her hand and a child in her arms. Her face and head were covered with a white kerchief, but the folds of her blue shirt suggested that she was still young. She ran with unnatural speed, screaming, her arm overhead. Chasing her, ran even faster, a handful of infantrymen... The soldier took hold of his rifle with both hands and struck the woman on her back with all his might. She fell, blood appeared on the shirt and the child screamed... Later, I came up to the woman and turning her beheld the tear-stained face of the toddler and the lovely pale face of the 18-year-old woman, blood flowing from her mouth..." (Tolstoy, Leo. *Collected Works*, v.3. M-L: 1932, p.221).

In 1854, Pyotr Nesterov (lieutenant-general from 1854, comandant of the Vladikavkaz Military District in 1846–1848, commander of the 20th Infantry Regiment and commandant of the Caucasian Front's left flank from 1848) was removed from his post due to mental derangement. Upon his arrival to replace the madman, General Baryatinsky told him that he was expected in Tbilisi to be awarded yet another award. Nesterov lost his mind after many years of repeatedly organizing slaughters: he liked to exterminate peaceful inhabitants, for the sight of dead Chechens according to his own acknowledgment brought the general pleasure.

Noteworthy is the story of another famous Russian army war general, Baron Nikolai. Following a few years of services in the Caucasus, including in Chechnya, he retired prematurely and left for his native France where he became a Jesuit monk. In his letters to relatives he recalled painfully the years he spent in the service of the Russian army. It was precisely what he had had

to do in the Caucasus that drove him to remove himself from the world — to dedicate the remnant of his life to the expiation of the sins he had committed during the conquest of Chechnya for the Russian Crown.

It is worth recalling that the most popular form of punishing the Chechens was taking the most respected villagers' small children as hostages. This method, introduced back during Catherine's reign, survived "deservedly" through all the years of the Caucasian war, right up until the 1859 arrest of Imam Shamil and thereafter passed fluidly into the 20th century. Thousands of Chechen children, taken to Russia as hostages, were executed as revenge for their parents' actual or supposed infraction of the terms of cessation of resistance. Others were sent deep into Russia (*RSMHA*, Collection 13454, Inventory 2. Lists of captured highlanders: Dossiers 185, 202, 205, 206, 211, 217, 246, 292, 315, 334, 414, 481, 546, 550 and many others), where for the most part they died due to being unable to adapt to such an abrupt change in their living conditions. Those who survived were turned over to military institutions with one goal in mind: to employ them in combat in Chechnya on the side of the Emperor. Their education and upbringing was aimed at turning them into devotees of the Empire. At that, almost all of them were baptized and became, like Lieutenant Laudayev, more Russian than the Russians themselves. The fates of the painter Peter Zakharov and the general Alexander Chechensky, described in myriad works by both Chechen and Russian scholars, allow us to observe only a small part of this tragedy, the tip of the iceberg as it were.

At the same time, amid a few thousand documents about Chechens, kept in the archives of Moscow and St. Petersburg, I could not in the course of

extensive research find a single one which told of the skulls of Russian soldiers hung up around a Chechen aul, or of how the Chechens carried around their enemies' scalps with them. Everyone would have found this disgusting and shameful for a Chechen. It is not by chance that Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky notes in his "Letter to Doctor Erman" that "[Chechens] did not burn houses, did not trample the corn fields, did not destroy vineyards. 'Why destroy the gifts of God and the labor of people?' they would say... And this law of the highland 'bandit' is a virtue which the most educated peoples would be proud of, had they had it" (cited by Edelbiyev. "A Third Rome or Commonwealth. History and Modernity." *Caucasus*, No. 267, 1995.)

The Chechen never allowed himself to scorn labor. Moreover, following a battle it was almost always the Chechens who started the negotiations for exchanging the dead. They considered it their duty to bury not only their own dead but those of their worst enemies too. And so how astounded were the Chechens when the Russian officers refused to claim their corpses, proposing that the Chechens bury them themselves somewhere in the forest. The thing of the matter was that the officers did not want their fallen soldiers recorded in their documents. They preferred to record their dead through the infirmary, thus claiming that they had died of fever; this afforded the headquarters the opportunity to write off their losses not as combat losses.

As is natural in all wars, the Chechens took their enemies captive and exchanged them for their kin or exacted a ransom. It was even not infrequent for captive Russian soldiers to remain among the family of their host and later receive the opportunity to settle there and marry. To this day,

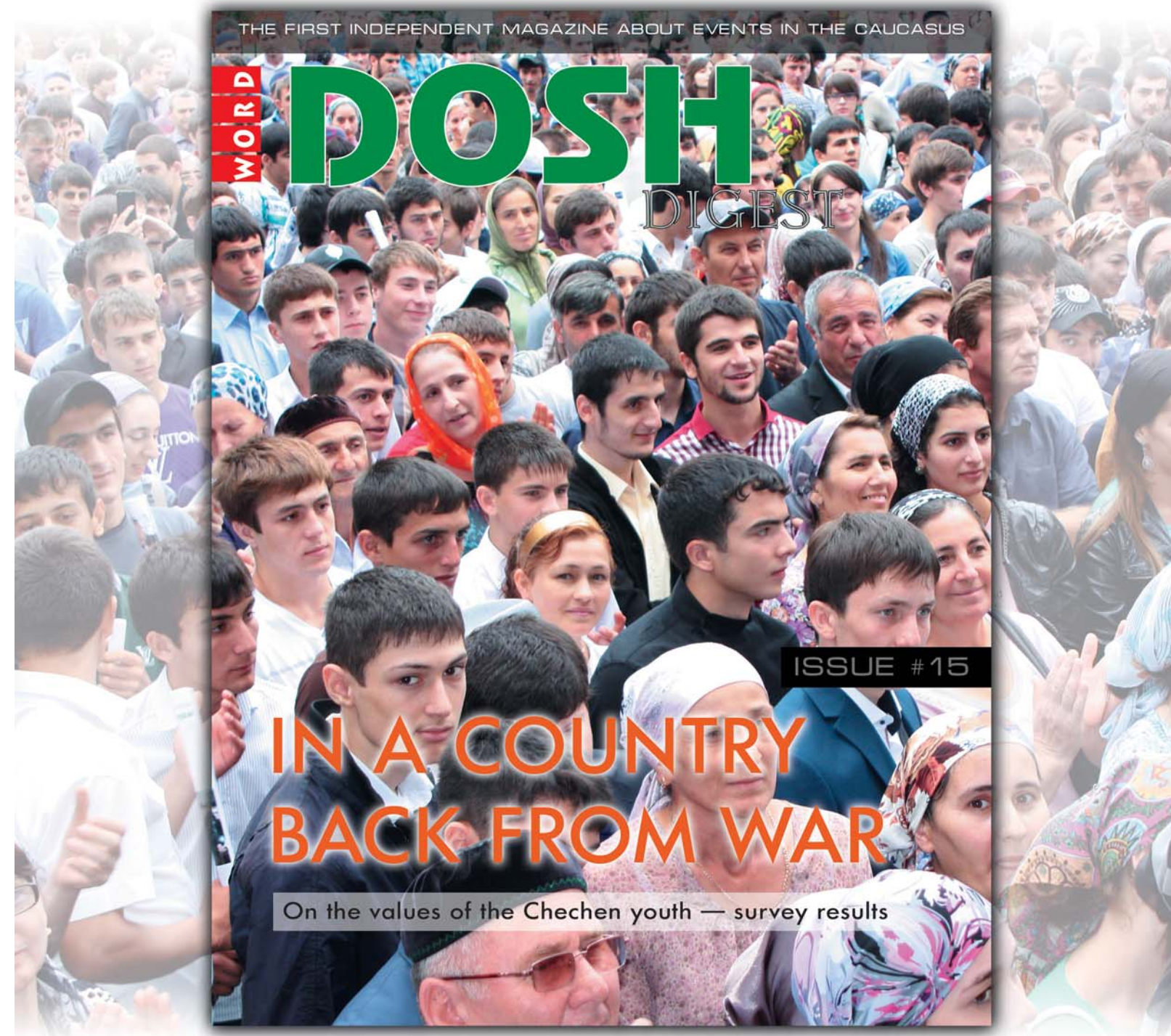
there are those among the Chechen teips whose ancestors were wartime captives during the Caucasian War; now, they are fully legitimate teip members (Vatchagaev, Mairbek. "Myths and Realities in Modern Chechen Society." *Central Asia and the Caucasus*. No. 2 (26). Stockholm: 2003).

If we are to recall all this, it becomes apparent that the Russian army in its wars and aggressions against the Chechens at the turn of the 21st century, has thought of nothing new. After all, why would it? It possesses great historical experience, a rich tradition of violence, insult, and humiliation of the victims, both living and dead, of imperial policy. Even the army's numbering system has been preserved since the days of the Caucasian wars.

We repudiate decisively as lacking any evidence attacks by Russian chauvinists accusing Chechen society of aggression. It truly is, in effect, militarized, since for many centuries it has been required to defend its principles, and yet at the same time (as strange as it may sound to a majority which has appropriated the lesson of hating Chechens) it has never encroached on its neighbors' sovereignty. Of course there were forays made by this or that individual for horses or girls, kidnapped for marriage in Khevsureti or Pshavia; however, the Chechens never dealt a military blow to their neighbors. But among the latter, there were many willing to subjugate the Chechens to their authority. This temptation overpowered practically all the nations surrounding Chechen lands.

Yes, the Chechens are warriors, but they are defenders of their lands, not invaders casting around the entire world in search of spoils. He who does not understand this cannot grasp the meaning of our history, nor the current problems in Chechnya.

The forthcoming issue of DOSH Digest



Autumn in the mountains.
Nozhay-Yurt district of Chechnya.
September 23, 2012

