The state and stakes of Islam “from” Russia

Xavier Le Torrivellec
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Author

Xavier Le Torrivellec

A graduate of the Institute of Political Sciences of Bordeaux, Xavier Le Torrivellec (xavier@letorrivellec.fr) has been a Doctor of the EHESS in contemporary history since 2006. He received a grant from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (grant Lavoisier) where he worked from 1996 to 2000 and focused his research on the Republic of Bashkortostan (Russia). He delivers lectures in Political Science at the MGIMO University in Moscow to the students of the double-degree programme with Science Po Paris. He taught Russian history atINALCO. He is the author of a thesis on “The history of Muslim identities in Russia” and wrote several historical and sociological articles (www.letorrivellec.fr). He participated in several international research projects on Russia. He is a specialist in the history of the Volga-Ural region and he is currently involved in several community projects of the Institute of Geopolitics (Paris 8) and the EHESS. He is also working on religious issues in Russia. He was Deputy Director of the Center for Franco-Russian Studies in Moscow between 2010 and 2012, and he is professor at the State University of Voronezh since September 2013.

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Introduction

Despite recent diplomatic advances, the Russian position on Syria remains largely misunderstood in the West. When it is not explained by way of mercantile concerns to do with arms sales, the support for Bashar el-Assad is reduced to the rank of anti-Western villainy, as if it was some kind of legacy of the Cold War. But the current international events have forced a rupture in such short-sighted explanations that have seemed at times to be deliberate.

The Russian point-of-view should be understood in geographic terms: in order to defend its national interests, Russia seeks to contain the push northwards by the Wahhabist petro-monarchies of the Gulf. It deems that the Damascus-Teheran axis protects it from radical currents that spread from the Caucasus platform. This is dangerous for a country split between Europe and Asia and in which “a Tatar is concealed behind each Russian”, as goes the popular expression. Muslim fundamentalism calls into question the conditions that have allowed, for centuries, peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. In order to better understand the current geopolitical stakes, we are going to draw on several examples from recent sources and personal observations on the situation of Islam today in Russia. The aim of our article is to provide an informed analysis of a reality that is often neglected, without poring over irrelevant scholarship.

In order to understand the specificity of Islam in Russia, we will begin by noting a few comparative milestones. Unlike Western European countries, Russia remains profoundly religious. The importance of religion, as an invisible force, is demonstrated in daily life, through the mass belief in horoscopes, the frequent reference to “destiny” (sudba) in explaining personal events or the respect for numerous pagan rituals (for example it being forbidden to greet someone across the threshold of a doorway). Even if religions are infrequently practiced, sacredicity still penetrates the tissue of society.

Religion in Russia is the primary criterion for its national distinction: Russians are reputed to be Orthodox, and the Tatars – Muslim. The power of religion also surprises in the ways in which it is expressed: the conversion of whole villages to Islam or the popular hostility to the profanities committed by Pussy Riot. In terms of explaining it, we can refer to the hypothesis of unrealised secularisation: Soviet modernisation secularised Russian society, but the belief in the secular religion of communism preserved this religious foundation that we can still see today.

1 In a recent article, Marie Mendras did not mention at any point the presence of Muslims in Russia: “Syria: the hour of truth for “nyet !” diplomacy”, Le Monde, 11 sept. 2013.
The other difference refers to a simple preposition: one can talk of Islam “from” Russia and not simply of Islam “in” Russia in regards to a religion that has been present on Russian soil for more than a millennium. It is not an imported Islam, which could be perceived as foreign, un-absorbable, political and threatening. In this way, the Russian case illustrates the difficulty of speaking about an Islam “from” France. Russia is a Muslim country and Muslims from Russia are usually descended inhabitants: Islam, recognised as a “traditional religion” takes second place after Orthodox Christianity (with nearly 20 million Muslims versus 13 million for the whole of the EU).

More precisely, we define Muslims by their cultural origins and not by their faith\(^2\). Russia is part of the concert of Islamic states: it has been a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference since 2005 and it has just signed a customs treaty with Kazakhstan. For the Russian government, the participation of Islamic fighters from the Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region on the side of the Syrian opposition is a key matter. The arrival in Russia of Muslim migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia gives rise to tensions that reinforce the international struggle against terrorism and the probable extension of instability in Central Asia after the departure of American troops from Afghanistan. One can see that the threats facing Russia on its immense southern “front” are serious.

The Islam of Russia is derived from the crossover of inherited ideas and borrowings occasionally taken from globalisation, coexisting in the framework of a multi-confessional country. We are currently witnessing a re-composition of religious forms and there are multiple references to Islam: the “faith of ancestors” has become the key idea of a return to “people’s roots”; Islam is the central argument for discussions on the identity of people from the Caucasus and the Volga; a retreat for disorientated individuals, Islam is also a tool for mobilisation for regional authorities. Around the tangle of community and individualistic logic, we can identify three main trends: the preference for stability of local Islamic traditions; the fashion of a Europeanized Islam meeting the requirements of secularism; and finally the choice of an Islam “purified” and “internationalized”. In reality, aspirations and Islamic practices mix these different positions. An understanding of the people involved is essential to comprehending, along with a good knowledge of the terrain, the situation of Islam in Russia. We see that the risks of radicalization are mostly dependent on individual trends, but they are limited by the maintenance of a

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\(^2\) Jean Radvanyi, “Several responses to an unasked question: Islam and the population census of Russia in 2002”, Islam and politics in the former USSR, Under the direction of Marlène Laruelle and Sébastien Peyrouse, IFEAC, L’harmattan, 2005, p. 159-169.
religious foundation in which Islam is a stabilising factor despite the manipulations to which it continues to be subjected. Following a historical discussion, it is around this subject that we will show the state of Islam in Russia, before discussing the situation in the two major regions of the Islamic population.
History of an “integrated” Islam

The history of Islam in the territory of modern Russia began almost 1300 years ago. In the middle of the 7th century, Islamic expansion of the Arab caliphate reached the Caucasus: the city of Derbent in Dagestan was conquered in 642. Before the Christianization of Kievan Rus in the late 10th century, the Volga Bulghars embraced Islam in 922. Both states succumbed to the Mongol invasion, but in 1252, Berke, the grandson of Genghis Khan, was the first Mongol ruler to convert to Islam. After the capture of Kazan in 1552, the Muslim peoples were integrated into Russia and their number steadily increased: they represented 4% of the population in the early 7th century, and 11% at the end of the 19th century (the USSR of Gorbachev had 19% Muslims and today’s Russia has about 8%). The absence of clergy in Islam complicated relations, which meant it remained distant from the tsarist government. Everything changed in the early 18th century when Peter the Great tried, in line with the European model, to assimilate Russia’s foreign populations. Christianization campaigns and the destruction of mosques caused large revolts. Catherine II opted for a policy of tolerance and, taking into account the multi-religious reality of her empire, established in 1788 a Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia (DUM), an administrative authority to appoint the mullahs and ensure compliance with Russian legislation. The first representative institution of this type, the DUMs allowed Russian Muslims to exist politically.

In the 19th century, the Tatar elite revitalized Islam through the modernist movement of jadids (djadidism). Financed by a rising bourgeoisie, the reformed madrassas (Koranic schools) multiplied (including the prestigious Mukhammadia of Kazan and Khusainia of Orenburg) where Russian, history, and arithmetic were taught. Meanwhile, Russia waged a long and harsh war to conquer the North Caucasus (1817-1864). The Ottoman Empire, aided by Britain, gave military support to North Caucasian imams, including Shamil (1834-1859), the hero of resistance who was spearheaded by Sufi brotherhoods. The allegiance of their Murid sheikh (spiritual master) system allowed them to form combative and disciplined groups. Sufi solidarity, linked to clan loyalties, remained predominant in the North Caucasus. In the early 20th century, a movement of political emancipation emerged among Muslims of Russia (the appearance of a Muslim press and the creation of a party, the al-Ittifaq Muslimin - Union of Muslims). On the eve of the revolution of 1917, Russia was a dynastic empire torn by demands for autonomy of its many Muslim peoples.
The establishment of the Soviet regime was a blow to all religions, seen as the enemies of an atheist regime with a demure project to establish the reign of a total ideology, a new “anti-religious religion”\(^3\). The chain of transmission of knowledge was broken by violence: the closing of madrassas in 1919, the neutralizing of the Sufi brotherhoods and repression against the mullahs lines. The Great Patriotic War offered some respite: Stalin met religious leaders and in 1944, the DUMs were restored (in Tashkent for Muslims in Central Asia, Baku for the South Caucasus, in Makhachkala in the North Caucasus and Ufa for the European part of the USSR). Khrushchev’s anti-religious campaigns did not eliminate religion, which remained present in rituals despite the introduction of Soviet official ceremonies (birth, marriage, and death). Religions were practiced in a confidential manner but often with the tacit approval of local Communists. The priority was to compromise in order to avoid any overly visible practice of religion. But as in Europe at the same time, urbanization accelerated the process of secularization. Traditions faded and the modernization process modified the relationship of each individual to his faith, meaning it did not disappear but was changing significantly. This process in the 1960s helped with a politicization of Islam in the USSR. A schism occurred between traditionalists and reformers, as well as between theologians of the DUMs, who played the power card, and “young mullah” protesters. The first fundamentalist currents arose in the 1970s, involving a globalization of religion.

The disappearance of the Soviet framework was accompanied by a pluralisation of religious actors. Access to the sovereignty of the national republics of Russia triggered a burst of movement of the spiritual directions: regional DUMs emerged, led by local muftis. At the head of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia (TsDUM: Tsentralnoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musulman), Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin, located in Ufa, tried to maintain dominance against the Council of Muftis of Russia, established in 1996 by Ravil Gainutdin, the Mufti of the Grand Mosque in Moscow, and which incorporated most regional DUMs. TsDUM oversaw 1050 communities, against 750 for the Council of Muftis of Russia. The problem of leadership was recurring between Tadzhuddin, which bore the title “Grand Mufti of Russia” and Ravil Gainutdin. The Coordination Centre of Muslims in the North Caucasus was established in 1999 to thwart attempts by Tadzhuddin and Gainutdin to rally under their banner, and counts the largest number of communities under its jurisdiction (2,200).

Moreover, the creation of a “religious market” has put “established cults” in competition with proselyte religions (Salafist, evangelical churches, etc.). The most obvious sign of what was described as a “return” to religion (some analysts speak of “desecularization”) was the arrival of foreign capital for the construction of mosques (from 300 in 1991 to nearly 10,000 today), the resumption of pilgrimages to Mecca and the training of students in Saudi madrassas, Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey. In terms of foreign influence, if Iran is in retreat, then this is not the case for Turkey: the Zaman newspaper group and the organization Nourdjous have been hurrying towards their “cousins” in Turkic Russia. To cope with the sudden demand for Muslim scholars, foundations in Gulf countries send imams to new mosques in Russia. Many seek to eliminate local practices and preach the puritan Islam of Salafists (who advocate a literal interpretation of sacred texts and a return to the idealized religion of its original time). Although their practices seem strict to Muslims of Russia, they have become popular with young people who do not trust local imams, who are not savvy about theology and make compromises with the security forces. Feeling threatened, the official leaders sought the expulsion of most foreign imams in the late 1990s. But in the context of armed conflict, Salafist radicalism continues to be emulated in the North Caucasus. Authorities and Muslim officials have consequently come to consider taking all of Salafism as a “Wahhabist” follower of violence. The term “Wahhabi” is pejorative and used to describe any current “purist” of Islam and denigrate its defenders.
The state and stakes of Islam “from” Russia

The major fact for understanding the situation of Islam of Russia is the complete absence of unity at the heart of the community. Many boundaries run through Sunni Islam, which has a clear majority in Russia (98%; it is only Azerbaijanis who practice Shi’ism) and in which there is no official institution of the clergy. Anyone can become an imam, if he proves his faith and a basic knowledge of the sacred texts. This leads to personal conflicts and a phenomenon of impostures, for example imams who are self-proclaimed muftis. In addition, Russian Islam is traditionally divided into two legal schools, Hanafi and Shafi’i. The Shafi’is live mainly in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Muslims of the Northwest Caucasus and Volga-Urals adhere to the Hanafi school. Another factor is ethnic divisions: the DUMs of the national republics are mostly in the hands of representatives of the dominant ethnic group of the republic. In Dagestan, the distribution of religious functions depends on the ability of different ethnicities to access power. This multifaceted character of Islam is a problem for state authorities trying to control the situation based on DUMs and fighting against “unofficial” currents.

In August 1999, Shamil Basayev’s attack triggered the second Chechen campaign and encouraged the federal government to pay more attention to radical Islamic movements. Besides the administration of federal districts created by Vladimir Putin in 2000, monitoring activity was carried out by a committee for religious affairs. When expertise was required by the security organs or in the context of a criminal investigation, specialists in Islamic studies were called in. Close to DUMs through their work, these experts provided opinions often favourable to current official thought. Any divergent trends are defined as a function of their inability to account for the diversity of contemporary doctrinal adjustments. Police action resulting from these assessments prevented the emergence of competitors to an “official” Islam. In recent years, convictions have increased for “extremist activities” (under Article 280 of the Penal Code) counter to neo-Sufi and Salafi trends. The question remains as to the reality of the threat posed by these religious groups. Some “democrats” and Muslim intellectuals take the defence of Muslims accused of extremism. Their main representative is Gaidar Jemal, president of the Islamic Committee of Russia, which considers that the Salafists are Muslims like any others: in anti-government protests in Kazan, defenders of human rights marched alongside Tatar independence activists and members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, an

Inventory of a “multifaceted” Islam

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Islamist group banned in Russia since 2003. But if the repressive policy has reduced visibility, the “unconventional” trends remain in shadowy areas not covered by the work of experts.

**The sociology of Islam in Russia**

In sociological terms, three major trends are identified among the Muslims of Russia. “Traditionalists” refers to Islam as it has survived 70 years of atheism: a popular Islam, transmitted in local vernaculars and loyal to the authorities. It is close to TsDUM, more “traditional” as an heir to the DUMs under Catherine II. In the North Caucasus, Sufi Islam represents the traditional line. Even if it has stalled due to the demographic decline of the rural population, the Islam of “ancestors” is in keeping with the Soviet era. Proponents of “tradition” are rather elderly: also called “ethnic Muslims”, they practice less than the young, more at home than in the mosque, and remember they are Muslims at funerals, Muslim weddings or festivals. The link to the people is essential: any conversion is seen as a betrayal, and the overlap between national and religious identity is seen as evidence. This Islam of the “elders” is ironically qualified by the youth, “funeral” Islam. It is combined with respect for local traditions. In the Caucasian tradition, for example, the older man is greeted first. However, according to Sharia, respect on account of age does not exist. This applies even in the dance culture, very present in the Caucasus, but condemned by the “purists”.

Often from traditionalist areas, “modernists” favour the secular state model and the compatibility of Islam with liberal values. Proponents of this school of thought, often close to Western researchers and rather urban, offer a critical reading of current developments in Russia. They include the Tatar intellectual promoters of neo-jadidism who push the “Tatar model” in reference to the rest of the Muslim world. According to them, the Tatars have a historical role as bearers of a civilized and Europeanized Islam: they could export their “Euro-Islam” to the Muslim people still ignorant of modern human rights. The link to religion is strong but intellectualized: national identity is affirmed but it is no longer tied to community life in a village.

The last current is more “identity”-driven and in so being is more contemporary, more derived from “radicalism”. Whether the Deobandi currents (the Taliban of Afghanistan) or Salafi, much more commonly, what they have in common is the desire to distinguish themselves from other Muslims. Young people are likely to be attracted by this prospect. More internationalist than TsDUM, the Council of Muftis...
works with the Salafists and is regularly accused of “Wahhabism”. Rejecting the pre-existing situation, Salafis choose this stream for its critical potential. To find meaning and move away from a sense of futility are the benefits of such a strong choice of identity. More than Islam, it is the desire to prove to oneself and to others that one is able to submit to binding rules, which is the decisive factor in people’s decision to convert. Here we find similar processes to those in the Western areas. Just as much globalists as our “alter-globalists”, the Salafists are “connected” to the rest of the Muslim world and supporters of an alternative to Western domination; they are in favour of an individualized approach and “authentic” religion. They strengthen their positions as the ongoing globalization pushes individuals to build new identities valuing real or imaginary land.

These different trends refer to specific areas, which we must now address. In reality, the positions are less pronounced and can, for example, find traditionalists in towns and cities. But for clarity we have chosen to be somewhat definitive. In the countryside, they have to insist on adherence to traditions that are practiced there. It is not just a fashion of a “return to tradition” but of maintaining a “traditional” conception of the world. In Muslim villages the old self-proclaimed imams continue, as in Soviet times, to celebrate family rituals. Most often self-taught, they do not read Arabic and they make compromises that have been forged over the centuries: Alcohol is prohibited only during the public part of religious ceremonies. Relaying the past, they perform their duties in advising villagers and enjoy a high level of confidence. In this context, the arrival of a young imam, trained abroad and advocating a more rigorous Islam is seen as a provocation. Nourishing strong resentment against the young “intellectuals” who are trying to take their place, the older imams refuse to change practices that have allowed Islam to survive for decades of official atheism. In response, some “gerontophobia” is reflected in Salafist brochures.

Islam in the countryside competes with the “theoretical” Islam of the cities, modern environments, where the relationship to faith has become individualized. Religiosity there has an important place, but so far without reaching levels of regular practice. For most citizens, belief does not mean adhering unequivocally to a religion: they are masters of creating a religious identity, a source or standard of moral behaviour. Faith has been individualized: everyone draws from it what he or she wants, giving it a position more or less personal, combined with other beliefs and practices at different rhythms. As such, the religion of Muhammad, which does not separate the temporal from the spiritual, experiences more brutally than others the shock of individualization. Social destabilization driven by modernization is more sensitive. This promotes a solely security-focussed interpretation of changes taking place in Islam. The fear of terrorism is linked to this “crisis” of urban Islam. It is in cities experiencing economic decline that Salafists attract the most disaffected youth.
under the cover of a discourse of rupture. The best known case is in Tatarstan, Naberezhnye Chelny (the headquarters of the car company Kamaz), which became the basis of radical nationalist and Islamist currents, sometimes linked to mafia circles. Prison is a place of heavy regimentation: a rapper popular among bandits in Russia is Timur Mutsuraev, whose songs have at times provoked jihadist fighters.

The “new Muslims”

A decisive factor for the future of Russian Islam is the arrival of “new Muslims” — economic migrants from the former Soviet Republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia. The settlement of believers who are often more devoted than their fellow believers in Russia has caused a stir in the Muslim community. Here and there have appeared mosques dedicated to a particular ethnic group and the ostentatious practices of new Muslims have upset indigenous Muslims: the comments in Tatar newspapers are critical around the time of every Muslim feast, and on the closing in Moscow of Prospekt Mira (Avenue of Peace) by thousands of migrants in prayer. The tension between the different ethnic groups is part of the patriotic context of the revival of Russian power since the 2000s. Increased pride of Slavonic populations feeds into questions on the imperial legacy: “We helped them during the Soviet era and now they have left us; what do they want from us now?” Discussions are currently taking place on whether or not to introduce a visa regime for citizens of the countries of the former USSR. Migrants are often used as scapegoats and tensions sometimes result in episodes of violence. The dissatisfaction of local people has been expressed politically through new modes of expression: in July 2013, to protest against the presence of a strong Caucasian community, residents of the small town of Pugachev blocked the Saratov/Samara highway and broadcast a video of their actions on social networks. However, in examining these sources, we note that religion is not mentioned as the reason for the anger of the people. Generally, the xenophobic sentiment is directed against foreigners who are feared as potential threats. But Islam itself is not the cause for this rejection of foreigners. The long history of close relations between the Orthodox and Muslim populations ensures mutual tolerance. But the immigration issue remains a source of tension for the future.

5 According to data from the 2010 census, Uzbeks are the most numerous among foreign immigrants, followed by Ukrainians and Tajiks. Alain Blum, Demographic instabilities, Insights of the Observatoire Franco-Russe, Russia 2013, Paris, Le Cherche midi, 2013, p. 168.

6 After the death of the young Ruslan Marzhanov (20 years old) during a brawl: http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2013/07/11/5422501.shtml
External influences

This theme is over-reported in the Russian media. Discussions on foreign interference allow the government to take more credit than is due. But they also contain some truth. After the fall of the Soviet Union, international missionaries networks were located in Russia: Tablighi Jamaat from Pakistan, the Turkish Nourdjou movement and an internationalist Islamist party called Hizb ut- Tahrir. The latter is particularly influential in Central Asia and the Caucasus: advocating the Islamization from below, it penetrated the social fabric through an Islamic system of mutual aid (charity work, helping the poor, lending money at zero rates, free school management in clandestine Islamic schools)\(^7\). The Russian government responded by the mid- 2000s by pushing transnational organizations underground. But the continuing influx of migrants from southern countries of the former Soviet has led to fears of a resurgence of foreign trends. The recent appointment of Kamil Samigullin, a 28-year-old theologian and Murid Sheikh from Turkey, as mufti of a Tatarstan DUM marks a strengthening of the Turkish influence on Islam in Russia. Through its diaspora, technology and international trade, Russia is fully integrated into the global networks of Islam. The jihadist rhetoric, which constructs a universe of meaning to justify a move to armed violence, is growing in Russia. We will see that its impact varies depending on the region.

\(^7\) On the situation in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see *Imperial strikes: Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan*, Paris, Fayard, 2013.
Diversity of a “territorialized” Islam

Islam is as diverse as the Russian territory on which it has been present for centuries. The two main areas of the Muslim population are the Caucasus and the Volga-Urals region. Located in the heart of European Russia, the peoples of the middle Volga have participated in the process of Westernization. This region differs from the Caucasus through its longer-standing integration with the Russian regions, greater familiarity with European cultures and a higher level of urbanization. Unlike the Caucasian peoples who have maintained more traditional forms of family life, the Muslim peoples of the Volga-Ural region have been experiencing a deceleration of their natural growth, particularly in the birth rate. The peoples of the Caucasus also have a more community-led approach to their faith. Within these two macro-regions, there are significant differences in their ethno-religious composition: in the oblasts where Muslims are minorities (25% in Adygea, 4% in the Rostov region, 15 to 25% in North Ossetia) the DUMs used to defend the interests of Muslims. In republics where the majorities are traditionally Muslim (50% in Tatarstan, 60% in Bashkortostan, from 55 to 85 % in Karachay-Cherkessia, 60 to 90 % in Kabardino-Balkaria, from 75 to 90 % in Ingushetia and Dagestan), Islam is “coherent” as a communal religion and as a support for political legitimacy. Large Muslim communities inhabit large Russian cities like Moscow (which has at least two million Muslims), St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. In terms of image, it is regrettable that the Volga-Ural region is often overlooked when it comes to discussions on Islam in Russia. If the Caucasus and its recurrent violence have the effect of a foil, then the middle Volga is a model of peaceful coexistence between the major religions.

The Volga- Urals region
Approaching the end of the Tatar “model”?

The largest minority in Russia with 6 million representatives, of which only a third live in Tatarstan, Tatars see themselves as Muslims in reference to Russian Orthodox Christians. Recent work on the religiosity of young people shows that 70% of Tatars surveyed see themselves as “Muslims”. Among them, 46.7% celebrate religious holidays, 56% have a Koran, but 50.2% of them never go to the mosque. Even among practitioners, the proportion is lower among those who respect the Islamic bonds (the five daily prayers, fasting, alms giving and pilgrimage to Mecca). Proud of their tradition as the enlightened vanguard, the Tatars, who are more
secularized than other Muslims in Russia, want a moderate version of Islam. In 2005, the inauguration of the Kul-Sharif Mosque, next to an Orthodox church by the Kazan Kremlin, symbolized the height of this Europeanised and tolerant Islam. But the image of Tatarstan as a land of harmony has been undermined by the attacks of 19 July 2012. The attack against the Mufti and his deputy highlighted internal rivalries in the ummah of Tatarstan and the fragility of the “Tatar model”. Now challenged as the vanguard, the Tatars are divided on the way forward to revive and modernize their beliefs in “ethnic religion”. The struggles over the control of mosques have intensified in recent years between DUMs in Tatarstan and powerful Salafist pressure groups. Under the mandate of the first mufti Gabdullah Galyullin, the activity of the DUMs was more political than religious. From 1998, the new Mufti Gusman Iskhakov, made loyalty to the local system the main focus of his work. The state interference in Muslim affairs became a Tatar specificity: local governments pay a monthly salary to imams attached to the DUMs. So much so that the separation between religious bodies and regional authorities emerged as purely declarative. For politicians, the reference to Islamic values of the Tatars is a powerful instrument of legitimization. Since 1991, Uraza-bajram is celebrated inside the Kazan Kremlin with prayers that bring tens of thousands of people. Each year, the Kremlin is the heart of the celebrations of the capture of Kazan by the troops of Ivan the Terrible in 1552. In the context of convergence of interests between the DUMs and the Tatar government, “uncompromising” believers (i.e. those opposed to such governmental moves) see their only choice as to accept offers of help from abroad. They quickly engage in what is generally called “Wahhabism”. Pressure put on such radical currents before the Universiade in Kazan in July 2013 may have prevented a terrorist act. But could the appointment of Samigullin Kamil as Mufti be sufficient to re-expose the tensions that came with the attacks in 2012?

**Bashkortostan, the path of pragmatism**

The situation is less tense in neighbouring Bashkortostan, the other largely Muslim region of the Volga-Urals, which enjoys a quiet reputation. Nomadic until the early twentieth century, the Bashkirs are defined in relation to the Russians, who make up 40% of the population, but especially in relation to their longstanding rivals, the Tatars, who represent 30% of the population of the republic. When they want to distinguish themselves from the Tatars, the Bashkirs insist on their pre-Islamic tengrist beliefs: there are 3 mosques in Ufa versus 26 in Kazan. On the

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other hand, the institutional division of local Islam has limited the rise in religious conflict at the political level: local Muslims are divided between the TsDUM of Talgat Tadzhuddin (138 affiliated communities) and the DUMs of Bashkortostan (202 communities). The regional authorities have distanced themselves from Muslim bodies after previously having favoured the DUMs of Bashkortostan. Islam is less politicized than in Tatarstan. But it is not socially marginal: at present, 792 mosques operate in Bashkiria, versus less than 20 in 1986. There are a dozen madrasas versus none in the Soviet era. Among the hundreds of young people who complete an annual cycle of Koranic studies at the Islamic University of Ufa, 20 continue their studies abroad (including the Al-Azhar University of Cairo) and 10 are appointed imams. We are currently witnessing a rise in religious practice among the children of Turkic families. Confronted with the debates that go beyond its territorial framework (as in the jihad launched in April 2003 by Tadzhuddin against the countries of the anti-Iraq coalition), the Bashkir regime, at its most open and dynamic since the departure of Murtaza Rakhimov, favours a multicultural model of denominational neutrality.

### Islam in the minority: the other Volga-Ural regions

In areas where Muslims are a minority, local communities emerged in the early 1990s, but without the need to create representative centralized structures. At first, TsDUMs gave no attention to these “peripheral” Muslims. This allowed them to be spared the internal struggles. The 50,000 Muslims in the republic of Mordovia (6% of the population) are under the influence of Kazan and it was not until July 2000 that a DUM in Mordovia emerged. Attached to the TsDUM, it united 12 of the 17 communities in the region and is based in the important Tatar village of Belozeria (located 20 kilometres northeast of Saransk). This village is considered one of the centres of Salafism in Russia since 1997 – to the extent that an emissary from far off city of Astrakhan, Aiub Umarov, has been installed in its neighbourhoods. There are eight mosques for 3,000 inhabitants. The sale of alcohol is prohibited, every family has at least three children and people practice the five daily prayers. Their life unfolds according to the precepts of Islam. In response, local authorities have created a competing DUM with the remaining five communities. Based in Saransk, overseeing the construction of a new mosque in the city, it is responsible for the fight against Salafi influence. The tension is palpable and the arrival of “new Muslims” to build the stage of the World Cup in 2018 could inflame the situation. Another Salafi village has attracted media attention: Srednaya Eliuzan in the Penza

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9 See the passionate reports made on this village and its inhabitants: http://akkul.wordpress.com/
Oblast, where a study was published in French\textsuperscript{10}. On 25 June 2013, one of the imams was arrested for extremism.

The Orenburg Oblast (the Muslim population is composed of 150,000 Tatars and 120,000 Kazakhs) occupies a strategic position on the border of Kazakhstan. Torn between Orenburg (where the DUM was founded in 1994) and Buguruslan (on the border with the Samara oblast), the local ummah has been divided after the revelation that a Tatar from Buguruslan was shown to be among the hostage-takers in Beslan. Local authorities have expelled the self-proclaimed mufti of Buguruslan, Ismagil Shangareev, whose educational and publishing activities were financed by Saudi money\textsuperscript{11}.

The Udmurt Republic (which has 100,000 Tatars) was the victim of an attempt by the same Ismagil Shangareev to create a DUM to rival the DUM in Udmurtia, founded under the auspices of the local government in 1994. The situation is even tenser in the southern oblasts of Saratov and Astrakhan.

In Saratov (which has 80,000 Kazakhs and 60,000 Tatars), Islam is a part of the political game: to weaken a competitor, a local MP released, in late May 2013, a television report on “Saratov – the heart of Wahhabism in Russia”\textsuperscript{12}. A denial of the facts by Mikaddas Bibarsov, the Mufti of the DUM in Saratov, was not enough to hide the scandal. The Astrakhan Oblast (which has 150,000 Kazakhs, 60,000 Tatars and many minorities from the North Caucasus) is particularly sensitive to any attempt at destabilization. Located close to the Caucasus, it is under the influence of Caucasian networks. The arrival of young Dagestanis, who gather every Friday in the “red” mosque in the city centre, helps promote the rise of Salafism.

In comparison, the Ulyanovsk Oblast is somewhat protected because of its distance from the Caucasus. This did not prevent an attempted schism in the early 2000s. Only the election of General Shamanov as governor of the oblast put an end to the activities of an Islamist organization linked to local criminal groups. But the use of force has delegitimized local DUMs that were willing to compromise with the regional authorities.


For now, the situation among the Muslim communities in Siberia seems under control. The Tatars are well integrated and in skilled jobs, particularly in the petroleum sector. Note however the conviction in May 2013 of two imams from Uzbekistan by a court in Novosibirsk. The risk exists therefore of a spread of radical Muslim communities among Siberian movements, with the consequences this might have.

The North Caucasus

The position of Islam in the North Caucasus should be first seen through the prism of radicalism, since the majority of Russian Salafist groups are present there. There remains a strong Sufi tradition including in Chechnya and Dagestan, where Salafism is present. Proponents of a “purified Islam” without any intermediary between God and men, the Salafists condemn Sufi practices (the worship of saints and meditation on their graves) and reject the Shafi’i school, but are nonetheless very predominant in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. There are 15 Sufi orders present in Dagestan divided along ethnic criteria and they enjoy great authority among the population, and have rallied against the official authorities. The influence of “Wahhabism” was reinforced during the first Chechen war, but the Russian government was able to contain the conflict within the borders of the breakaway republic. The second war began with the invasion of Dagestan by Chechens, which aimed to create a caliphate in the Caucasus. The fight involved international Islamist networks, which provided money, weapons and fighters. Today, the situation in Chechnya has been normalized but violence is rampant between two hostile camps. Ramzan Kadyrov, who maintains order using hard-handed methods, controls the republic. But if violence has declined in Chechnya, it has spread elsewhere: in Ingushetia in June 2004, in Beslan in September 2004, in Kabardino-Balkaria in October 2005 and to Moscow. The Russian government sees foreign mercenaries as responsible for the spread of violence. But it is mainly due to domestic factors and we can say that any repressive policy desired by Vladimir Putin has accelerated the spread of radical Islam in the region. This is particularly the case in Dagestan where the struggle between official Islam of the DUMs, supported by the Sufi orders, and Salafi groups still sees dozens of deaths each month. Authorities routinely use force to neutralize members of the radical movements that criticize the “deviations” authorized by the official religious authorities. Young people who

had studied theology in madrassas in the Middle East and practiced differently, but peacefully, the local traditions, have been arrested and tortured. The use of such methods can only radicalize young converts. Groups of Islamist fighters operate in a clandestine manner to carry out attacks. In addition, corruption and poverty have contributed significantly to the popularity of radical Islam. The unemployment rate in the North Caucasus is over 50% and wages are one-third less than the average in Russia. The population denounces the corruption of local authorities, blaming a lack of foreign investment. The ruling clans are accused of monopolizing resources, seize subsidies sent by Moscow and punish opponents. The Salafist discourse, insisting that under Islamic law theft and corruption will not be tolerated, seduces people. At the same time, the many divisions also limit the spread of radical Islam. The gap between young and old can be found throughout the North Caucasus and ethnic tensions are still numerous and vivid: the Balkar and Cherkesses claim their own republic, separate from those of Kabardin and Karachai to which they are attached; in Dagestan, domination is contested by the Avars Darghins (15% of the population), but also by the people of the plain (mostly Kumyks).
Conclusion: Russia, a country like any other

We can see in conclusion that Russian Muslims have a role to play in the political life of their country, but the institutional divisions around more or less compliant versions of Islam have so far prevented such a development. At the same time, these divisions limit the development of Islamic fundamentalism. Similarly, the historical roots of Islam in Russia and the tradition of interfaith tolerance give cause for optimism. Through the case of the Volga-Ural region, Russia shows that it is an example of peaceful coexistence of monotheism. But the success of the Universiade in Kazan in July 2013 does not necessarily show how the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014 will turn out. Russia faces similar evolutionary problems to those of Western countries, of disillusionment and of radical identity quests. This brings us to familiar problems – the self-esteem in the jihad cause found by some young people in French suburbs – responses to identity loss, which is implied by a modernity that is often the face of the West. The danger is in the rise of individualism and not in institutional struggles or in the absence of Muslim parties (as some analysts deplore, citing discrimination against Muslims who would supposedly be victims in Russia). The Chechen model of Islamization of society, as a way to cut the grass under the feet of Islamists, is not exported to the rest of Muslim Russia. The options in Russia will therefore depend very much on the international context. If today, the Russian government condemns arms supplies to the Syrian opposition, it is because it seeks primarily to reduce the risk on its own territory. The Russians do not forget the death of schoolchildren in Beslan on 1 September 2004. For their part, Western governments know that Moscow is also sensitive to the risk that Islamist groups will recover chemical weapons. In the context of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the Syrian crisis shows the extent of the abyss before which Russia stands, as well as throughout the Western world. Time is running out to establish a true strategic partnership.
The state and stakes of Islam “from” Russia

Bibliography


