

To my father,
Anatoly Ignatyevich



MILITARY OPERATION IN CHECHNYA 1994-96 AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE
RUSSIAN – TURKISH RELATIONS

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of
Bilkent University

by

145767

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

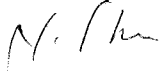
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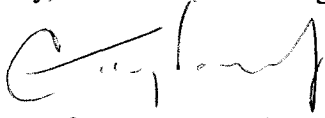
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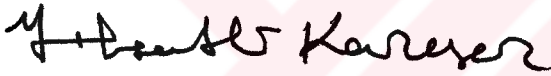
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ABSTRACT

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December 2004

This thesis analyzes the events directly related to military operations in Chechnya 1994-96. Factors leading to the conflict between the Federal Center and the Chechen separatists such as Dudayev's nationalist policy and the high level of criminality in Chechnya will be discussed together with the effects that the conflict had on Russia's relations (official and unofficial) with Turkey – another state with strong historical ties and interests in the Caucasus. The thesis will also study the Islamic factor as a linking element between Turkey and the Caucasus, tracing the history and development of Islam in both places, noting the radical Islamic groupings' activities, and surveying the Turkish mass-media approach towards the conflict.

ÖZET

ÇEÇENİSTAN'DAKİ 1994-96 ASKERİ OPERASYON VE ONUN RUSYA – TÜRKİYE İLİŞKİLERİNİ ETKİLEMESİ

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Aralık 2004

Bu tez Çeçenistan'daki 1994-96 arasındaki askeri operasyonlarla ilgili olayları analiz etmektedir. Çeçen ayrılıkçılar ile Federal otorite arasındaki çatışmaya tesir eden faktörlerden; Dudayev'in milliyetçi siyaseti, Çeçenistan'daki yüksek suç oranı gibi konular Rusya'nın (resmi ve gayriresmi) Türkiye ile – Kafkasya ile güçlü tarihi bağları ve çıkarları olan başka bir devlet – olan ilişkilerine olan etkileri bu tez içinde tartışılmaktadır. Tez aynı zamanda Türkiye'yi Kafkasya'ya bağlayan etmenlerden biri olan İslami faktörü de inceleyerek, iki bölgeye İslamın gelişimi ve tarihini izleyip, radikal İslami grupların faaliyetlerine atıfla, Türk medyasının Çeçen meselesine yaklaşımını araştırmaktadır.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The role that the conflict in Chechnya played in the history of the Russian Federation is difficult to overestimate. No doubt that the military operation in Chechnya in 1994-96 was not less important for Russia than the *Belovezhskaya Pushcha* agreement in 1991. That agreement put the end to the formerly mighty state owing the status of the superpower under the name "USSR." The Chechen conflict, on the other hand, was an attempt to further disintegrate the successor of the USSR – the Russian Federation. In some terms that attempt was successful and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, as Chechnya was called by Chechen separatists got informal independence at least for a short period. The results of that conflict were dreadful for the Russian Federation. The authority of the Russian Government was undermined both within the country and abroad. The population in the region where the military operations took place bore enormous losses (almost 100.000 military and civilians citizens of the Russian Federation: Russian, Chechen, and representatives of other nations got killed during the conflict). How and why such a disaster for Russia happened were once perhaps the most popular questions among well-known journalists, academics and politicians. They dedicated numerous works to the Chechen conflict and tried to provide valid explanations for the horrible process that led to the great number of casualties. After all those works, the theme of this paper may now seem somewhat banal. Nevertheless, one more time the attempt to look back in history to the events concerning Chechnya and trace the

developments that led to the tragedy will be made. To provide this work with some originality the stress will be made not on the already frequently discussed matters like the course of military events or the well-known terrorist acts performed by Chechen militants in Budennovsk and Kizlyar. Rather, some aspects that have been usually neglected by the works dedicated to the Chechen conflict will be examined. One of such aspects is the effect of the conflict in Chechnya on Russia's relations with Turkey – the state having strong historical ties with the Caucasus region and also having its own problems with insurgent movements on its soil. Up to now very few works were dedicated to this subject, so the main aim of this study is to shed more light on it and create a framework for understanding how the Turkish side at both official and unofficial levels perceived the Chechen separatists' struggle and how that perception affected the Russo-Turkish relations.

The thesis is divided into four main parts following the first chapter - introduction. The second chapter introduces the reader to the situation in Chechnya before its conflict with the Federal Center started, or, to be more precise, with Dudayev's separatist regime and the criminality that grew enormously after his coming to power in the republic. While talking about the roots of the conflict many sources fail to see the Dudayev's regime as a catalyst. This chapter discusses it more deeply and there is also some information about other Chechen leaders and their criminal activities in Chechnya and outside it.

Chapters three and four are intended to explain why public opinion in Turkey was so indignant at the decision of the Federal Center to employ forces against Dudayev. The third chapter deals with the negative attitude of Russians and Turks towards each other

and offers some reasons for that. The fourth chapter mentions the aspect of religion in the conflict. It helps to trace the developments of Islam in Turkey and Chechnya, presents some similarities in terms of Islamic extremism and demonstrates how the separatist leaders used religious factor to achieve their goals.

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the coverage of the Chechen conflict by the Turkish mass-media. It shows the general attitude of Turkish newspapers towards events in Chechnya and describes their ways of presenting information to the public. It also describes the so-called information war waged by the Chechen separatists in order to affect the world community.

The sixth chapter describes Russian-Turkish relations during the conflict. It is the core part of the thesis dealing with an aspect of the Chechen crisis that has not received much publicity so far. Stress is laid on Turkey's approach, divided into two levels: the official - statements of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pacts, agreements and other official documents concerning the conflict in Chechnya; and unofficial – all other acts that had not been authorized by the Turkish cabinet but nevertheless took place. Concerning the unofficial level this chapter reviews the activities of the pro-separatist NGOs acting on Turkish soil and their connections with the separatist leaders, while the description of the official level concentrates on the reaction of the Turkish cabinet to the events in Chechnya and the significance of these events for Turkish-Russian affairs. This chapter also shows how Russia and Turkey being two states that had their own interests in the Caucasian region had serious problems in their relations, and how being at the same time as states that had similar problems with separatist movements Turkey and Russia demonstrated mutual understanding and willingness to cooperate.

Certainly, this work does not claim to be the last word in the evaluation of the Chechen crisis and the roles of some well-known figures in it. Its primary task is to reveal some previously unknown facts and details relating to the 1994-96 events in Chechnya or, as it is usually said, show the other side of the coin that may seem quite different to those who were following those events mainly from the Turkish sources.



CHAPTER II

SITUATION IN THE CHECHEN REPUBLIC PRIOR TO THE CONFLICT

2.1 Elements of criminality in Chechnya

Some elements of criminality in Chechnya have deep historical roots. As soon as the first settlers from the inner parts of Russia settled in the Caucasus they became the targets of *abrek* (bandit of honor in mountaineers' understanding) raids. Raids were not invented by Chechens, of course. In the past, the Moscow Rus' suffered greatly from the Don and Volga Cossaks, who for several centuries complicated her foreign policy contacts with the southern neighbors by raiding foreign merchants, robbing vessels on the Black Sea and selling slaves.¹ Raids as a side trade are a well-known fact in the history of humankind and many nations had similar pages in the past. However, it is another matter that it seldom remained the basic source of income for such a long time as in the North Caucasus. According to historical accounts, when the Russian General Rumiantsev demanded from the Chechens that the raids be stopped, he was told "Our business is to raid and rob, while yours is to grow grain and trade."² That banditry was not only allowed but also even admired among Chechens is also demonstrated by neutral observers such as Sebastian Smith, who in his book about Chechnya noted:

A convenient myth exists that when God dished out riches throughout the world, he forgot the Caucasus, and realizing this error, allowed the peoples there to go their neighbors and take what they needed...A family whose men were brave

¹ T. Barret, *Lines of Uncertainty: The frontiers of the North Caucasus*, (Slavic Review, Vol. 54, Issue 3), p. 588

² http://en.rian.ru/rian/pdf_store/chechnya-eng/section02.pdf

during raids and successful at stealing horses, sheep and other riches under fire, was a family with honor.”³

and the well-known historian John Baddeley, who himself visited the region at the end of the 19'th century and wrote:

Cattle-lifting, highway robbery, and murder were, in this strange code, counted deeds of honour; they were openly instigated by the village maiden – often, by the way, remarkably pretty – who scorned any pretender having no such claims to her favour; and these, together with fighting against any foe, but especially the hated Russian, were the only pursuits deemed worthy of a grown man.⁴

Do the examples presented above mean that Chechens overall are more prone to criminality than any other nation? Certainly not, but very often among them there were groups that tried to use every opportunity to get easy earnings by criminal means. Such an opportunity was created for them by the regime of Dzhokhar Dudayev, the ex-Soviet general, who through so-called elections actually usurped the power in September 1991. His election was a sort of farce when as John Dunlop writes “...in some districts, the number of registered voters, and in the ballot boxes which were placed out in the town squares packets of ballots allegedly filled out by representatives of the Chechen diaspora were put into the voting urns. Moreover, neither the Ingush, nor a part of the Russian-language populace in the republic had participated in the election.”⁵ Prior to the “elections” the gang of armed people formed by Dudayev and called “National Guard” dissolved the provisional council and occupied its building. Thus, it was in fact the self-proclamation but not the election of Dudayev’s presidency. The same farce was with the parliamentary elections. Later the chairman of the electoral committee Khadzhiyev and his assistant Kerimov publicly acknowledged the falsification of the elections. According

³ Sebastian Smith, *Allah's Mountains: Politics and War in Russia's Caucasus*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 14

⁴ John F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus* (Longman, London, 1908), p. xxxvii

⁵ John Dunlop, *Russia Confronts Chechnya*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 114

to Yusup Soslambekov (one of the OKChN leaders) Dudayev took his relatives and other people close to him into the parliament although they had not got a sufficient number of votes.⁶ Additionally, many of them had a criminal background. For instance, Umayev, a member of the Chechen National Security Committee, was under examination on a charge of juvenile rape; Labazanov, the former Head of Dudayev's security, had served a term in prison for murder; others such as Akhmadov, Udugov, Gantemirov and Dzhabrailov previously were also under charges of criminal activities.⁷

After coming to power, Dudayev immediately started pursuing nationalist and separatist policies. They were very popular at the time following the dissolution of the USSR and many political figures used them for gaining popularity. Dudayev did this to a large extent. The well-known lawyer Nikolai Grammatikov wrote:

The Chechen leaders skillfully used the sentiments of national revival (neglected during the Soviet era) in their own interests and for their own benefits. Using the long-standing idea that Moscow was getting everything out of the regions and republics, while giving nothing back, Dudayev stressed in his propaganda the potential prosperity of Chechnya if the Chechens decided to secede from Russia.⁸

What made Dudayev different from other nationalist-politicians all over the post-Soviet Union was his personal enmity towards Russia and its leaders. Anatol Lieven writes: "Dudayev was raving that 'Russism is worse even than Nazism,' that 'Boris Yeltsin was the leader of a gang of murderers' and that his regime was the 'diabolical heir of the totalitarian monster.'"⁹ There may be various explanations as to why a former Soviet general, who served for a long time in the Soviet military, who had a Russian wife

⁶ Dzhabrail Gakayev, "Put' k Chechenskoy revolyutsii," in *Chechnya I Rossiya: Obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. Dmitri Furman (Moscow: Polinform-Talburi, 1999), footnote 29

⁷ "Tverskaya, 13," 2-8 May, 1996

⁸ Nikolai Grammatikov, "The Russian Intervention in Chechnya in December 1994: Issues and Decision-Making," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (Vol. 11, No. 4, December 1998), p. 118

⁹ Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of the Russian Power*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 69

and consequently half-Russian children, who spoke Russian better than Chechen became filled with such hatred towards Russia. This question should be addressed to psychologists rather than historians and journalists. Still, Lieven's opinion that not being really a Chechen in the full sense Dudayev "had to present himself as a 200 per cent Chechen nationalist by way of compensation" seems true.¹⁰

Whatever the reason, Dudayev tried his best to provoke the anti-Russian attitude among the radically oriented Chechen groups. All former grievances were recalled: Mass emigration (*muhacirlik*) to Turkey after the end of the more than half century long Caucasian war between imperial Russia and Shamil's murids. Then there was deportation to Northern Kazakhstan in 1944 by Stalin's order. All these made some criminal groups think that it was time for revenge and revolution. But this time it was not the classical struggle between haves and have-nots, it was rather the situation when bandits were taking the belongings from the ethnical minorities – Russians, Cossacks, Armenians. Chechen criminal groups simply decided that instead of trying to resolve disputes with the representatives of other nations by peaceful means the use of force was simpler, cheaper and fully coincided with customary norms of *abrek*-style living. Slogans like "*Ne pokupaite domov u Sashi i Mashi, oni vse ravno budut vashi!*" (Do not buy flats from Sashas and Mashas, they would be yours anyway) started appearing more and more often. That illegal expropriation of property and oppressing the Russian-speaking population did not receive popular support from the Chechen *intelligentsiya* but was approved by the less educated and, thus, more prone to be influenced by Dudayev's anti-Russian propaganda, were the people from the countryside. As Smith wrote "Dudayev discovered that setting his countrymen against the Russian bogeyman was the key to his

¹⁰ Ibid

popularity.”¹¹ By portraying Russia and the Russians as enemy No 1 for the Chechens Dudayev encouraged violence towards the Russian – speaking minority in Chechnya. As Dunlop also writes:

The “anti-imperial” campaign waged against Moscow by the Chechen mass media also served to stimulate a negative attitude toward the Russian populace on a day-to-day level. The growing crime rate in the republic began to take on a “national selective character,” especially in the area of housing, where some Russian homes were directly seized. Leading representatives of the Russian-language populace in Chechnya were murdered: for example, university rector Kan-Kalik; Dean Udodov; Judge Samsonova; an official of the cabinet of ministers San’ko; a correspondent for the press service “Express-Chronicle,” Krikor’yants, and “many others.”¹²

That many Russian families and individuals did indeed become targets of bandits was difficult to deny and that was reflected in the works of journalists who wrote on early 90-s Chechnya. For instance, Sebastian Smith stated that “it was invariably Russians who became crime victims in Chechnya.”¹³ Smith went on writing that Russians “faced constant harassment, or were even forced from their apartments and robbed and killed.”¹⁴ Then he gives a vivid example of that harassment: “One elderly Russian pensioner in Grozny, known by everyone as *tyotya* or “auntie” Natasha, was paid a visit by young Chechens at her tiny cottage in central Grozny. When the youths found nothing better to take, they ripped out her gold teeth.”¹⁵ Those were only singular examples of the harassment of Russians by Chechen criminal gangs and there were a lot of others that did not receive exposure in the printed editions. Later, however, many people that fled from Chechnya to other places in Russia or abroad started writing their memoirs about their

¹¹ S. Smith, *Allah's.....*, p.128

¹² J. Dunlop, *Russia.....*, p. 137

¹³ S. Smith, *Allah's.....*, p. 27

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 133

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 134

living in Dudayev's Chechnya. Here, for instance, a paragraph from the letter of a Chechen woman Dina, who left Chechnya in 1994:

From 1991, the "black people" did start to descend the mountains and to flood the capital of Chechnya where I lived. They came to join Dudaev's group which was very small first. Most of the 'rebels' were the social or criminal outcasts. The inmates of the two jails of Grozny were also released. So the city was swarming with armed and bearded men with the most disgusting and evil-looking mugs. Fear and despair settled in our souls. We couldn't believe it was really happening, and had a feeling that it had to be a horrible dream and something would awake us soon and we would sigh with relief... The situation was developing and worsening. However, nobody and nothing woke us up. The ruling gangs did what they wanted: kidnapped people, including kids, for ransoms, abducted women, spread narcotics, tortured and killed whomever they chose.¹⁶

Perhaps the only publication that concentrated mainly on that issue was the book "*Kriminal'ny rezhim*" which comprised documents assembled by the public affairs departments of the FSK, MVD and Defense Ministry, and letters from the people whose fundamental rights were violated in Chechnya. Some Western journalists, however, treated that material with doubts. John Dunlop, for example, wrote that "it obviously constituted disinformation."¹⁷ Nevertheless, even Dudayev himself acknowledged the acts of banditry but, "blamed it on Russian provocateurs – nothing to do with him."¹⁸

Anyway, the result of this "criminal nationalism" in Chechnya was that starting from 1992, 220.000 Russian-speaking people left Chechnya.¹⁹ However, things did not go better for Chechnya after that. On the contrary, the industrial enterprises left without labor stopped and the republic started sinking deeper and deeper into economic crisis. The prosperity that would come after the secession from Russia according to Duayev's promises did not come. The economy in Chechnya in Smith's words "went into terminal

¹⁶ Letter published in AltChechnya@yahoogroups.com, 13.05.2004

¹⁷ J. Dunlop, *Russia.....*, p. 138

¹⁸ S. Smith, *Allah's.....*, p. 133

¹⁹ Alexander Halmammedov, "Religiozno-politicheskiy konflikt v Chechenskoy Respublike Ichkeriya," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* (No. 4, 2000)

decline, and a new class of *biznesmen* took over the government, while cut throats took over the streets.”²⁰ True, failing to accomplish his promise that Chechens would drink camel milk from golden taps, Dudayev decided that the only solution was to allow illegal means of earning money.

Instead of dealing with socio-economic troubles Dudayev seemed to be deliberately making them worse. For example, while unemployment was skyrocketing in the republic he declared that Chechen girls need not go to school after three years and boys after seven.²¹ The horrible situation in which Chechnya found itself during the Dudayev’s regime could be described by Smith, who wrote “There was a minister of economics, but no economy, a foreign minister, but no diplomatic recognition, mountains of presidential decrees on law and order, but only the rule of the gun.”²² Another Western journalist David Remnick wrote:

Dudayev showed no resistance to the criminality around him. He seemed to encourage it. He installed several of his relatives in key positions where bribetaking was endemic – the managements of the main city market and the major banks, for instance. Many of his personal guards and flunkies were ex-cons who had been freed from prison in a general amnesty declared after the collapse of the Soviet Union.²³

So, not surprisingly Chechnya became what a Russian deputy minister Sergei Shakhrai called “a free economic-criminal zone.”²⁴ Illegal trade flourished. More than hundred unsanctioned flights hauling contraband and outlaws were made to and from the airport in Grozny. The old Caucasian tradition of raiding was also recalled in the 90-s Chechnya when cargo trains traveling through Chechnya were continuously robbed.

²⁰ S. Smith, *Allah’s.....*, p. 129

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ David Remnick, *Resurrection: The Struggle for a New Russia*, (Vintage Books, 1998), p. 274

²⁴ Ibid, p. 273

Production of counterfeit currency hugely increased. As a result, Chechen people had to either leave their homeland under Dudayev as did 650.000 Chechens who left for other regions in the Russian Federation or stay and live according to the criminal laws.

Chechen criminal groups were not limited to act only within their republic. Their activities took place in other cities in the Russian Federation and especially in Moscow. Later the Russian politicians would call it as the "Chechen export of criminality to Russia." Actually, the first criminal groups had appeared in the Russian capital even before Dudayev took over Chechnya but they received considerable reinforcement and their activities became more organized when the latter came to power in the republic. Due to the high rate of unemployment in Chechnya many young people fled from their homes in pursue of wealth and power to Moscow where they would be welcomed by their fellows being on the way to becoming a formidable criminal power in Moscow. Their leaders were strong and ambitious - Movladi Atlangeriyev, Nikolai Suleimanov, Lechi Altimirov and Hozh-Akhmet Nukhayev. The last one is perhaps the most prominent figure among other Chechen criminal leaders. His colorful career has been the subject of documentaries shown at international film festivals, including the Dutch "The Making of a New Empire" by Joseph de Putter, and the Polish "The Real Godfather" by Macron Mammon.²⁵ British film-maker Frederick Forsyth was so inspired by Nukhayev that he took him as a prototype for his documentary film about the Russian mafia "Icon."²⁶ Later Nukhayev was appointed by Dudayev as head of Intelligence Service in Chechnya and following Dudayev's death became the first vice-Prime Minister in

²⁵ From *EURASIA INSIGHT*, September 14, 2001
(<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/a3f57b7c84bc9c61c1256ac700480731?OpenDocument>)

²⁶ Ibid

Yandarbiyev's government. In 1999 he would create and become the leader of the nationalist movement "Nokhchi-Latta-Islam" with headquarters in Baku.

Nukhayev's previous activities, however, were quite far away from politics. Starting from the late 80-s he was one of the leaders of the organized criminal group called "*Chechenskaya obshchina*" (Chechen community) that made its money mainly by offering protection or as it is called *krysha* (roof) for businessmen and levying taxes on traders in markets. In the late 80-s and early 90-s when the country was experiencing the transition from central planning to the market economy and private business, like mushrooms after the rain there emerged various gangs that carried on their own criminal business. The well-known gangs that competed with each other for control over parts of Moscow were Solntsevskaya, Balashihinskaya, Lyuberetskaya, Orehovskaya, Taganskaya and others. *Chechenskaya obshchina* managed to press them all. One of its main characteristics was the refusal to live according to the established criminal rules. The representatives of the *obshchina* did not participate in the *vorovskaya skhodka* (gathering of criminal authorities) in Dagomys where all major criminal gangs divided their sphere of influence in Moscow. Prior to the meeting Chechens told the participants that they would take their piece of the Moscow cake anyway and did not want to bind themselves with any agreement. Chechens supported their words with actions and soon *obshchina* became well known in Moscow for its decisiveness in criminal actions and extremism in dealing with opponents. Especially revealing was *obshchina*'s defeat of Baumanskaya gang when all leaders of *baumantsy* were killed or wounded in the sudden assault by Chechens in the restaurant "Labirint."

Moreover, compared to other illegal groupings, Chechen gangs in Moscow enjoyed far greater protection from the high level officials. Some analysts would relate that solely to the strong relative ties between ethnic Caucasians, but according to a journalist well-known in the area of criminology, Nikolai Modestov, more than family connections were at work. Modestov stated that the Chechen criminal groups were deliberately treated too leniently by the Moscow police forces because the latter wanted to use Chechens as an effective antidote against the Slavic *brigady* (illegal groupings).²⁷ However, that treatment had very dangerous by-effects and replacing the Slavic groups from the domineering positions of the Moscow criminal world with *Chechenskaya obshchina* did not reduce the headache of the Moscow police but made it even worse.

The Chechen mafia was known not only for its martial “toughness.” It was the first criminal organization, which started using financial machinations. Their really pioneering criminal activity of using the irregularities of numerous Russian banks and exchanging fake bank bills (or *aviso*) for hard cash cost the Russian Ministry of Finance more than 3 billion \$! The biggest part of that money was soon transferred to the “free economic zone” in Chechnya where no one could control it. Not only the money but also its criminal owners could escape to Chechnya as well. The direct relationship between the Chechen mafia in Moscow and Dudayev’s criminal regime was demonstrated when Nukhayev being under arrest was rescued by Dudayev’s men. Not only the leaders but also rank-and-file members of “obshchina” in the case of emergency could easily find a safe-haven in Chechnya where among the “colleagues” they would be treated as national heroes. When the military conflict was about to start the majority of them joined Dudayev’s forces. According to Lieven they did not even try to hide their criminal

²⁷ Nikolai Modestov, *Moskva banditskaya*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Astrel', 2004), p. 37

background. Describing his talk with one of the Dudayev's *boyeviks* during the war Lieven wrote that to the question what his interlocutor's previous occupation had been he got this answer. "Oh, I was a racketeer in Moscow, and I suppose when this is all over, *insh'allah*, I shall go back to my racket."²⁸ Another Chechen talking to Lieven boasted that he previously had gone to Moscow "to work as a bandit," and now he was still a bandit but a bandit for his country.²⁹ But apart from the Chechens Grozny became a shelter for the criminals of different origins. Modestov wrote that more than 1200 people who were suspected of committing grave crimes could escape in the capital of Chechnya. In Rostov-na-Donu, Makhachkala, Mineral'nye Vody terrorists having been trained and instructed in Grozny took hostages and got ransom.³⁰

2.3 Decision to make use of armed forces in Chechnya

Thus, starting from 1991 under Dudayev's regime Chechnya became a semi-independent state drowned in criminality where the Russian-speaking population was oppressed. The existence of such a troublesome region on the territory of the Russian Federation for a relatively long period without interference from the Federal center was to a great extent owing to the lack of attention from above. Russia suffering the hard outcome of the disintegration of the USSR was itself in unrest. Several struggles at the very top of the government distracted attention from Chechnya for some time and the process of finding a solution to that problem was delayed. And when finally the Federal cabinet was deliberate to deal with the Chechen issue it became clear that those who

²⁸ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone*..., p. 353

²⁹ Ibid, p. 81

³⁰ N. Modestov, *Moskva* ..., p. 49

benefited from Chechnya's being a "free economic-criminal zone" would not give up their cozy positions easily and some radical methods had to be applied.

About the necessity of military operation there existed and still exist many opinions. At times Yeltsin was offered some alternative decisions, including economic blockade of the most radical regions in Chechnya, support of the Chechen opposition and finally negotiations with Dudayev.³¹ The last option, however, was the least achievable. Dudayev's aggressive populist national-Islamic policy gave a rise to establishment of various extremist groupings who were eager to go beyond Dudayev's aims with arms. For them the movement towards the full independence of Chechnya first and the whole Caucasus afterwards was irreversible. When Dudayev finally realized how dangerous game he was playing it was too late. Rather than a strong leader Dudayev reminded an apprentice sorcerer who let the genie out of the bottle but, being unable to control it, fell prey to it. A good example of that is Dudayev's conversation with the Federal Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev in Nazran in December 1994. When the Federal troops were already advancing towards Chechnya Grachev made a last effort to avoid bloodshed and during a private meeting asked Dudayev if there were any possibility to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. Dudayev, pointing at the Chechens waiting outside said: "You don't know these people. If I go and tell them that I am ready to look for a political solution they'll simply shoot us both and find someone more resolute instead of me."³² "Those people" to whom Dudayev referred were Yandarbiyev, Udugov, Basayev and other Chechen radicals that were associated with the uprisings in Chechnya. Later on they

³¹ For further information see J. Dunlop, *Russia...*, pp. 200-203 and D. Remnick, *Resurrection...*, p. 275

³² Grachev's memoirs used in Alexey Pobortsev's film "*Po tu storonu voyny*" (NTV, 24 November, 2004)

would unite with Islamic fundamentalists coming to Chechnya from abroad, adopt their ideology and following Dudayev's death become the core of the separatists' resistance.

Moreover, on the Federal side not everyone was in favor of the peaceful resolution either. The warlike sentiments in the Kremlin became particularly strong after the unsuccessful storm of Grozny by the Chechen opposition on November 26 when Dudayev's militants managed to destroy a huge part of Federal vehicles provided to reinforce the opposition. Some federal leaders including Yeltsin took that as a personal offence and became determined to punish the separatist leader. Especially keen on that idea were the Federal "power" ministers (Minister of Security S. Stepashin and Minister of Internal affairs V. Yerin), who together with some other prominent figures in the Federal government like N. Yegorov, O. Soskovets, M. Barsukov, O. Lobov and A. Korzhakov formed the so-called "party of war," promising Yeltsin to bring the rebellious Chechen Republic and its leader Dudayev to its knees in a very short period if Federal military troops were employed. Thus, Yeltsin preferred to cut the Gordian knot, rather than to try to untie it and soon military actions began in full scope.

Apart from the result of the military campaign also important was how the world community would react to that. Especially important for Russia was the reaction of Turkey, which among Russian political circles was regarded as an important partner in the future and at the same time as the possible contender for the influence in the Caucasian region.

2.4 Possible effects of the military conflict on Russian–Turkish relations

Those who saw Turkey as a rival based their ideas mainly on geopolitical matters. The Cold War had finished quite recently and Turkey as the partner of the United States in the NATO alliance still did not cause much trust among them. Especially suspicious about Turkey's real intentions were the Russian military commanders. Even when the USSR possessed the largest army and the biggest amount of the conventional weapons in the world, the Soviet military leaders very respectfully evaluated the military potential of the Turkish army, which according to Felgenhauer was "well armed, well disciplined, arduous in battle, large numerically, with good knowledge of the natural environment of the future theatre of war, and careful in logistical requirements (unlike other Western militaries)."³³ And, Felgenhauer continues, "[a]s the Soviet Union collapsed, Moscow's military staffs saw the Turkish military as becoming even more dangerous. By 1993, the General Staff in Moscow understood that it had no conventional capability to stop a possible Turkish military intervention if the many post-Soviet conflicts in the Trans-Caucasus got out of hand."³⁴

During the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh in 1993 those fears were very close to being justified. The Russian border guards, which carried out missions for protection of the frontiers of the former CIS republics in the Caucasus and were backed by Russian army units in the rear, were considered by the Turkish military leaders as a potential threat to the sovereignty of those republics and even Turkey itself. So, in June 1993 the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish armed forces, Doğan Güreş, told reporters that "Russia has become a very serious threat...Russia is continuing its traditional tsarist

³³ Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russian – Turkish military relations: much mutual respect, but many mutual misgivings," *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 39

³⁴ Ibid

imperial policies...Russian divisions are on our border," and so on.³⁵ This radical mood of the Turkish generals was also transmitted by the Turkish government. As the Armenian offensive in Nagorny Karabakh developed, Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Çiller spoke publicly of the possibility of war with Armenia (knowing that its borders were guarded by the Russian units) if the Armenian advance was not checked. And on 6 September 1993, Russian border-guards on the Turkish-Armenian border were fired on from Turkish soil.³⁶ Although military conflict was avoided it left an unpleasant image as to Russian – Turkish relations in the Caucasus. And only a little more than one year later there was again a military conflict with the direct involvement of the Russian military forces. In spite of the fact that the military action went on entirely within Russian territory and was not in immediate proximity to the Turkish state frontiers, that Turkey would not remain the simple observer during that conflict was obvious. At least the fact, that mentioned above Doğan Güreş's mother was Chechen and he himself reportedly could talk Chechen did not provide any grounds for optimism.³⁷ And taking into consideration the tensions on the Turkish-Armenian border, the perspective of a further worsening of the relations between the two states seemed quite possible. That is why Turkey's perception of the conflict in Chechnya was of crucial importance for the Russian Federal Center.

According to David Gudiashvili, what troubled Turkey the most was the possibility that the conflict would spread to the entire Caucasus.³⁸ Indeed, the Caucasus represented a place where various confrontations were doomed to happen. The bloody

³⁵ Ibid, p. 40

³⁶ Ibid, p. 41

³⁷ Robert Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Dış Politikaları, 1991 – 1997 Kürt ve Çeçenistan Sorunları," in *Çeçenistan: Yok Sayılan Ülke*, ed. Özcan Özen – Osman Akınhay (Everest Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002), p. 184

³⁸ David Gudiashvili, "Turkey and the Russo – Chechen War of 1994 – 1996," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Vol. 17, No. 5, 2002)

images of ethnical conflicts in early 90-s between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Abkhazians and Georgians, Ossetians and Ingush were still alive in the minds of the inhabitants of the Caucasian region. And the worst thing was that all those conflicts were only temporarily frozen but not resolved. So the entire Caucasus could be compared to a bomb with detonator ready to explode from a single spark. That spark could easily have been the conflict in Chechnya. Dudayev and his aids many times repeated that “Chechnya is fighting on behalf of all the Caucasian peoples” and appealed to the Caucasian republics to help Chechnya and rise against both Russia and “your own cowardly and corrupt leaders.”³⁹ Although, as it turned out, other Caucasian republics were wise enough not to be deceived by those provocative statements of Chechen leaders, according to Gudiashvili, some Western analysts at that time were quite alarmed by the possibility that a full-scale war might envelop other North Caucasian republics.⁴⁰

Certainly, that could not be the desirable outcome for Turkey and like everyone else it was alarmed by such a possibility. According to press reports the Turkish government came to the following conclusion: “We are afraid that the spread of the conflict that has already enveloped the entire Caucasus may turn the region into another Yugoslavia...Everything that is going on in the Caucasus is evoking a direct and serious response in Turkey.”⁴¹ To what extent that response would be direct and serious the Turkish government was still to decide. Now it had to deal with a serious dilemma: on the one hand, it had to be sensitive to public opinion in Turkey, which was demonstrating open sympathy to rebellious Chechnya, on the other, it really did not want to spoil the relations with Russia, which was Turkey’s second largest trade partner. As a result,

³⁹ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 101

⁴⁰ D. Gudiashvili, “Turkey and the...

⁴¹ Ibid

Turkey's approach towards the Chechen issue was quite an ambiguous one. In order to understand it better it should be divided into two levels: the official one, which tells what actually was done by the Turkish government concerning the Chechen question, and the unofficial, involving everything else that not being sanctioned by the Turkish authorities nevertheless took place. And each of those levels must be viewed separately.

The unofficial level was mostly represented by the numerous public organizations supporting the Chechen side and carrying out their activities on the Turkish territory. The activities of those organizations and the organizations themselves will be discussed in the next chapter, but now it is more important to understand why those organizations enjoyed vast support from the Turkish population. Here we must review the attitude of Turks and Russians towards each other from the side of historical perspective.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL ENMITY AND THE NEGATIVE IMAGES OF TURKS AND RUSSIANS

3.1 Historical Background

Viewed in historical retrospect, Russian-Turkish relations can hardly be described as friendly. These two states have often been the rivals for domination in the Balkans, Caucasus, Black Sea and other regions. Although they have always remained neighbors the history of their relations was to a greater extent represented by military conflicts than trade. Actually, if we compare the periods of the Russo – Turkish conflict with the duration of numerous wars in Europe, in which Russia also took part, the time of warfare between Russia and Turkey looks quite short. As was once wittily remarked by former Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, these two states have been at war “only for some 50 years out of over 500” and some historians even affirm that truly serious confrontations have taken only about 25 years.⁴² However, even in that short time Russia and Turkey fought each other fiercely. In the wars between Russia and Turkey not only geopolitical gains were at stake but an ideological matter as well. Russians and Turks were rarely inclined to give each other quarter or benefit of the “courtesies of war,” believing as they did that the cause of religious truth itself was at stake in the struggle between Christianity and Islam. That was why Russo-Turkish wars were always distinguished by the enormous number of undeniable atrocities committed by both sides.

⁴² Alexander Lebedev, “Russia and Turkey in the 21st century: what is behind us and what is ahead?” *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 5

The descriptions of the horror of wars can be found not only in Russian or Turkish sources that frequently used to portray each other as merciless barbarians ready to slaughter everyone at hand but also in books written by Western authors.

3.2 Influence of Western sources

Actually, the Western writers also did very much in their works to create the negative images of both sides. In many books devoted to the Russo-Turkish wars the stress is made on the ugly moments of warfare. For instance, Fuller provides an example of the Russian atrocities by describing the storming the Turkish fortress of Ochakov by the Russians:

After the successful storm the victorious army was allowed to loot, rape, and murder for three days. The frenzied Russian troops killed at least 10.000 Turkish men, women, and children in the course of this outrage. Even more macabre, since the suspension of discipline precluded organizing proper burial parties, most of the corpses froze solid where they lay and remained contorted in icy agony until the following spring.⁴³

Or just the opposite example can be revealed from Glazebrook, who describes a historical episode of Turkish brutality to a Russian soldier during the war between Russia and Turkey in the late nineteenth century:

The battle was at its thickest and hottest, when three Turkish soldiers pushed a wounded Russian officer back from the parapet, and followed him over it to dispatch him with their bayonets. Major Teesdale, seeing this act of barbarity, vaulted over the breastwork, cut down the foremost Turk with his sword, and called on the Russian, in French, to surrender as a prisoner of war⁴⁴.

Besides showing the historical stereotypes of Turkish cruelty and brutality, some Western sources sometimes portrayed Turks as main antagonists in the scenes of

⁴³ Fuller, William C. *Strategy and Power in Russia*, (New York: Macmillan, 1992), p. 106

⁴⁴ Philip Glazebrook, *Journey to Kars*, (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 129

genocide, massacre or ethnic cleansing which are supposed to have happened during the First World War and after. The image of Turks massacring Greeks, Armenians and Kurds during the early decades of the century is implicit or explicit in many detective novels and thrillers in the twentieth century. For example, it is discussed in “The Orient Express” (1922), “The Mask of Dimitrios” (1939), “Pascali's Island” (1980), “On the Shores of the Mediterranean” (1984), and “In Xanadu: A Quest” (1989). Almost all those works were translated into Russian and presented to the Russian public thus strengthening the belief among the people that the lust to massacre Christians was in the blood of every Turk.

3.3 National prejudices

3.3.1 Images of Turks in Russia

Even without the Western influence Russia had long ago shared the popular antipathy toward the “Savage Turk” because in Russian literature as well as in history there are more than a few stories of how the two nations stunned the world with the thunder of bloody fighting. For instance, the film *Geroi Shipki* (The Heroes of Shipka) 1954 fully corresponded to that trend. In the lives of ordinary Russians, too, stories about warlike Turks have been passed down from generation to generation. So, what kind of image would arise in the mind of an ordinary Russian, who was educated in the schools where he studied the history interpreted by Russian historians? Russians always study the 18th century Russo-Ottoman wars and the brilliant victories of Suvorov, Rumiantsev and Ushakov over Turkish sultans and pashas. Affected by all these Russians would imagine Turks as men with the red fez on their heads, black thick moustaches and barbarous

looks, and refer to them using the humiliating words “*busurmanin*” or “*churka*” (the latter term used also for all swarthy people in Caucasus and Central Asia). The word “*turok*” would gain the meaning of “enemy” in the Russian language.

3.3.2 Images of Russians in Turkey

On the other hand, Turkish literature and folklore does not lack negative feelings about Russians as well, and similar expressions used to portray Russians disapprovingly can be found in the Turkish language. For instance, their proverb “*Domuzdan post, Rustan dost olmaz*” (there can’t be fur from a pig, there can’t be friend from a Russian) clearly explains the attitude of a Turk towards his Slavic neighbor. The word “*moskof*” used for describing Russians became its counterpart for “*turok*”. And Turks also have their own history. For instance, they always emphasize the battle of the Pruth River when Peter the Great, surrounded and forced to surrender by the Ottomans, hardly escaped with his army, let off easily by Grand Vezir Baltaci Mehmed Paşa due to bribes, causing the Grand Vizier to be executed afterwards. That historical episode caused many speculations among Turks making them assume (without any proof though) that Peter was allowed to escape because the Tsaritsa Catherine I spent the night with Mehmet Paşa. This speculation is very popular among Turks and it further spoils the image of Russians in Turkey, picturing them as people ready to use even their wives in achieving the goals. At the same time Russians although naturally refusing to accept the Mehmet Paşa case usually refer to Turks as sexually obsessed men ready to give up everything in order to get a woman in their bed. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the flow of prostitutes from the ex-Soviet republics to Istanbul and other cities just strengthened both images.

Turkish newspapers usually did not economize on space on their pages to produce stories in which prostitutes from the former USSR or “Natashas,” as they are known in Turkish were involved. Journalists did not bother themselves to get into the details, so they put label the “Natasha” on all prostitutes be they Ukrainian, Moldavian, Georgian, or Romanian so that in the process they become instantly “Russified” and thus create the idea that Russia was a sort of exporter of prostitution to Turkey. As correctly mentioned by Hakan Aksay (correspondent for the Turkish TV channel NTV) such an idea was not only “extremely harmful to the lucrative suitcase trade, on which many in Istanbul have long depended” it also had “a damaging social dimension” especially for those who were married to Russian women and had children from such marriages.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, lack of knowledge and prejudices emanating from the historical background did really much for Turks and Russians to make the task of explaining and describing each other more difficult.

⁴⁵ Hakan Aksay, “Turkish-Russian relations: the role of the media,” *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 136

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR IN TURKISH SUPPORT FOR THE CHECHEN SEPARATISTS

4.1 Historical significance of Islam in Turkey

Another factor in the antipathy of Turks and Russians towards each other was religion. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the main features of the Russo – Turkish antagonism was the struggle between the two religions: Christianity and Islam. The predecessor of the Turkish state, the Ottoman Empire was the sole Islamic state on the scene of European warfare, thus Ottomans considered themselves as the only defenders of the Prophet Muhammad's precepts against the *gavurs* [infidels] from the West and North. At the same time the Russian Empire, the most powerful Orthodox state in the world, often felt her responsibility for the fate of the Balkan peoples (Bulgarians, Serbians, Macedonians, Greeks), who like the Russians were Orthodox Christians but lived under the rule of the Muslim Ottomans. That caused definite tensions between Russia and Turkey that ended up with the Russo – Ottoman war of 1877-78. It is hardly true that religion was the primary reason for the opposition between the two empires in the Balkans but quite often the military actions of the Russian army were accompanied by proclamations of the necessity to free the Orthodox peoples from the Ottoman yoke. On the other hand, during the Crimean War (1853-56) the Ottomans had tried to establish cooperation with the already mentioned Imam Shamil, who at the times was leading the Muslim North Caucasians into war against the Tsarist Russia. Expecting help from the

Ottomans in his *ghazavat* [war against infidels], Shamil held the Ottoman sultan in the highest esteem, as the head of the Islamic world. “There is,” said Shamil to a Russian officer, ‘only one God in Heaven and one *padishah* on earth – the Ottoman *sultan*.’⁴⁶

In the 20th century the religion-based struggle between the two states virtually disappeared because both states underwent serious reconstruction. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia drastically changed social norms and established a regime where religion had no role. Cathedrals and churches were destroyed and clerics were murdered or sent to exile. Any attempts to revive religious feelings among the people were prosecuted. As a result, religion was completely removed from the state level and did not appear again until the early 90s.

A similar process was done in the Ottoman Empire. After it was dissolved the role of the religion in the new established Turkish state was diminished by its first president Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who after the revolution in 1923 abolished the Khalifat (1924) and proclaimed that Turkey was a secular republic (1937). Atatürk launched several reforms directed at further undermining the influence of Islam like changing the Alphabet from Arabic to Latin, he abolished the Sharia courts and the post of Sheikh–Ul–Islam, moved the official holiday from Friday to Sunday, adopted the European style of clothes, etc. However, unlike the Bolshevik leaders, Atatürk did not harass the clergy, did not destroy mosques, and did not persecute Turkish people for their religious views. In other words, although Atatürk diminished the role of Islam and took it under state control, he did not try to entirely destroy the religious roots that were quite deep in the lives of ordinary Turks.

⁴⁶ Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), p. 257

The role of Islam was strengthened in the forthcoming years. After the death of Atatürk his successors deviated somewhat from the former's tough attitude towards Islam. The political parties (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi and Demokrat Partisi) that came to power in Turkey in late 40s – 50s both acknowledged the historically important role of Islam in Turkish society and that the Turkish government should assist the people in their religious lives.⁴⁷ Consequently, the pressure by the state on the various religious foundations was loosened, and favorable conditions for the spreading of the Islamic ideas in the country were created. With the government's consent new İmam-Hatib schools were opened and additional courses of Koran study introduced. Later, Islam gradually returned to political life as well when new significant Islamic figures such as Necmettin Erbakan, Recai Kutan, Melih Gökçek and Recep Tayip Erdoğan appeared on the Turkish political scene. The party Erbakan founded (National Order Party) was to be banned several times and forced to dissolve but it would almost immediately re-emerge under a different name (National Salvation Party, Welfare Party, Virtue Party) and continue to attract the votes of a large religiously oriented public in Turkey. Starting from the early 1970-s political parties headed by Erbakan and his followers would always be a political power that their opponents had to reckon with.⁴⁸ It is worth mentioning that the peak of growth of activity of Islamic fundamentalists in Turkey coincided with events in Chechnya. In March 1994 the Islamist Refah Partisi (Welfare Party) with Erbakan as its leader scored the first big victory at the municipal elections in central, eastern and southeastern regions as well as in major cities – Ankara and Istanbul. Next year this party

⁴⁷ Salih Polat, "Protsess razvitiya svetskogo gosudarstva v Turtsii," *Religiya i pravo*, (2001, No. 2)

⁴⁸ For further information on the political Islamic movement in Turkey see Ahmet Yıldız, "Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook," *The Muslim World*, (vol. 93, No 2, April 2003), pp. 187 - 209

left behind its opponents and collected 21.38 percent of the votes which gave it 158 seats in the parliament and formed a coalition government with Doğru Yol Partisi (the True Path Party).⁴⁹ The strong positions of the fundamentalists in the parliament and the cabinet could not fail to affect the Chechen issue. By stressing the well-established theme of Islamic brotherhood fundamentalists inevitably stirred the warm feelings in the Turkish community towards the fraternal Muslim people of the North Caucasus in general, and according to Gudiashvili some Islamist cabinet members in particular, were actively campaigning for Turkey's more efficient support of Chechnya.⁵⁰

4.2 Islamic radicalism in Turkey

Apart from the Islamic fundamentalists there was even more radical groups in Turkey that were ready to use every means to protect the Islamic interests not only in Turkey but everywhere in the world. There was the group of Salafi Islam devotees, more generally known as Wahhabis. Their religious conviction – Wahhabism being at the same time the official religion of Saudi Arabia, was notorious for its intolerance towards other convictions and indeed anything that did not coincide with the rules specified in the Koran and those (including Muslims) who did not agree with Wahhabis' views would be considered as the enemies of Islam and *jihad* had to be launched against them. Wahhabis welcomed the use of suicide bombing and other terrorist actions directed against the “infidels” because ends justified means, so everything was allowed in the name of *jihad*. According to Prof. Doğu Ergil, who has been studying world terrorism and has written two books on it, contrary to some beliefs a regular network of those “jihadists” has been

⁴⁹ D. Gudiashvili, “Turkey and the...

⁵⁰ Ibid

set up in Turkey and their religious approach, interpreting Islam in the most fanatical way has been dominating unofficial religious instruction in Turkey for the past twenty years.⁵¹ Following the military coup in 1980 the Turkish government under the leadership of General Kenan Evren turned a blind eye to the development of Islamic radicalism in Turkey, says Ergil.⁵² While trying to preserve the young generation from any radical movement, i.e. communism the Turkish government proposed two things: religion and sports. However, trying to contain one radical movement Turkish authorities inadvertently promoted another, even more dangerous. Under the cover of harmless religious missionaries many Salafi devotees could freely enter Turkey and open their facilities where people were taught radical Islamic. Enjoying considerable financial support from collaborators in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Algeria Salafi teachers could relatively easily lure not only ordinary people but also clerics into their circle. In 1993 Ugur Mumcu an investigative journalist had written that many Turkish imams were paid by Saudi Arabia's radical religious organization.⁵³ However, the head of state Evren confronted all the best-known journalists and defended the situation of the imams who promulgated the Salafi doctrine among Turkish citizens and received salaries from abroad. Ergil called such mild treatment of Islamic radicals by the Turkish authorities "idiocy" because according to him after the card-blanc he given to the Salafis many Turks soon fell under their influence and became "jihadists prepared to sacrifice themselves with no limits to what they might do."⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Radikal*, 31 May, 2004

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ *Ibid*

Defining their goals as cleansing the Muslim territories from foreign “infidels” and secular governments Salafis took it as their duty to participate in every conflict where Muslims were involved. The first significant participation of Salafis in the warfare was their venture in Afghanistan where they fought against the Soviets. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops Afghanistan soon became the Salafis’ major place for ideological and combat training. After Afghanistan there came Bosnia and Chechnya. Ergil claimed that many Turks influenced by the Salafi teaching went to fight on the separatists’ side in Chechnya.⁵⁵ Apart from those who took a direct part in clashes with the Federal forces there were those in Turkey who tried to provide all necessary support for their collaborators. Such support included arranging meetings and demonstrations directed towards public opinion on the matter and getting the necessary reaction. Very much attention was paid by radicals to information networks and they worked hard in that direction through newspapers, journals, TV and radio programs.

The role of the media in manipulating the public attitude will be discussed in further chapters, but it is useful to provide a small but vivid example of how the propaganda of the radical Islamic groups with the support of the mass media could produce quite impressive effects. During the conflict in former Yugoslavia the American embassy in Ankara was attacked by a large group of Turks who were infuriated by the news that Serbians were reportedly using chemical weapons in Bosnia.⁵⁶ In Moslem Turkey many people affected by the newspapers describing the Serbian atrocities towards “people of Islam” felt a strong kinship with the Bosnian Muslims’ struggle for independence. If the Americans were attacked only for doing nothing to protect the

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ *Hürriyet*, 20 December, 1994

Bosnian Muslims it could be easily imagined what response from Islam-oriented circles in Turkey Russia would get after its decision to resolve the Chechen crisis by military means.

On the part of Dudayev and his supporters a great effort was made to present events in Chechnya as the ultimate struggle of Chechen Moslems for freedom. Hoping to draw attention on the part of the Islamic world and to receive aid from pro-Islamic organizations, for Dudayev it was beneficial to represent himself as the valorous warrior of Allah, leading his deeply religious soldiers into the struggle with infidels. In reality, however, Islam, or at least its traditional Sunni faction never occupied leading positions in a life of Chechens. The development of Islam in Chechnya deserves separate attention.

4.3 Islam in Chechnya

4.3.1 Historical roots of Islam and its role in the conflicts in the Northern Caucasus

Many writers often overemphasize the role of Islam in Chechen society and especially its role in resisting invaders. For instance, Muhammad Iqbal Khan claimed that Islam was the only ideology that united the mountaineers in their struggle against the tsarist Russia.⁵⁷ Or another author Lesley Blanch, who in emphasizing the importance of Islam among the Chechens in the Caucasian War wrote: "...a fanatic religious movement – which was to grow until every village was a fortress, every man a fighting monk, and the whole country led, in battle, as in prayer, by an Imam who preached resistance with fire and sword."⁵⁸ Taking into consideration that both of the works are rather literary than academic and that the authors may have romanticized the mountaineers' love for freedom

⁵⁷ M. Iqbal Khan, *The Muslims of Chechnya* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1995), p. 5

⁵⁸ Leslie Blanch, *The Sabres of Paradise* (John Murray: London, 1960) p. 32

and ferocity in battle, we may assume that they found strong devotion to Islam the most plausible explanation for those features of the indigenous people of the Caucasus. However, some serious scholars also shared the idea that Islam in the North Caucasus was a fundamental motive for resistance. Among them there were historians sympathetic to the mountaineers' confrontation with the Russian Empire, such as Alexandre Bennigsen, Marie Broxup, and Anna Zelkina, as well as pro-Russian historians, such as M.M. Bliev and V. V. Degoev.⁵⁹

Yet anyone interested in the relationship between Islam and conflict in the North Caucasus should look back to the origins of Islam in the region, and becomes clear that the introduction of Islam to the North Caucasus was neither peaceful nor quick. Those who claimed that Islam was widespread in Chechnya from the very start and denied that it was adopted from the outside were usually the radical Chechen nationalists whose extreme emotional pressure in conditions of continuous political and economical crisis had generated in their consciousness fantastic images concerning the origins of the Chechen people. Thus M. Nakhshoyev in the newspaper "Ichkeria" wrote: "From ancient times every real *nokhcho* (Chechen) has been Muslim because we are the descendants of Nokh (Noah)...Our traditions and customs are fully consistent with the Koran."⁶⁰

Reality, however, was very different from such romanticism. Islam was first introduced to the North Caucasus in the 7th century by Arab invaders. In 642-643, just ten years after the death of Muhammad, Muslim Arabs under the command of Suraqa bin Amr reached the city of Derbent in Southern Dagestan. Reflecting Derbent's strategic

⁵⁹ Michael Reynolds, "Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus: An Historical Perspective," Paper presented to the Kennan Institute Workshop on Conflict in the Former Soviet Union, Washington D.C., November, 2003

⁶⁰ Lema Vakhayev, "Politicheskiye fantazii v sovremennoy Chechenskoy respublike," in *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obshestva i gosudarstva*, ed. Dmitri Furman (Moskva: Polinform-Talburi, 1999), p. 325

location between the eastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea, the Arabs dubbed the city *Bab al-Abwab*, or “the Gate of the Gates.” But to conquer that gate was a task of extreme difficulty for the Arabs because the local tribesmen did not meet the adherents of Muhammad with embraces and did not hurry to adopt Islam. On the contrary, they fought with ferocity, dealt the invading Muslims several sharp defeats and in 652 even slew the Arabs’ commander on the battlefield.⁶¹ Even after the people of Derbent were converted to Islam and the city became a northern outpost of Muslims the resistance of other North Caucasian tribes continued and local population that was converted to the Islamic faith found itself just as beleaguered by the mountain tribes as the original Arab Muslims.⁶² The Arabs and their chronicles repeatedly expressed exasperation with the warlike North Caucasian infidels. The commander of the Arab army Suraqa bin Amr described the torment of fighting the mountaineers in poetry, while al-Masudi’s irritated depiction of local Dagestani chieftains as a “host of robbers, brigands, and malefactors” similarly underlines the Muslims’ frustration.⁶³ Similar expressions would be used by the Russian military commanders in the Caucasus eleven centuries later.

Actually, the main feature of the North Caucasus inhabitants was to resist any power that might attempt to subdue them. Together with their fierce nature and rugged landscape this made the North Caucasus a place where no authority could be imposed by force. The Ottoman historian Ahmed Cevdet Paşa noted the relationship between the

⁶¹ M. Reynolds, “Islam and conflict...”

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

geography of the North Caucasus and the mountaineers' love of freedom, "Since their land is steep and difficult, they do not submit to a government."⁶⁴

For the mountaineers all invaders were alike: the Roman Empire or Arabs, Genghis Khan or Tamerlane, the Safavid, Ottoman or Russian Empires. All those historical great powers tried to subjugate the Caucasus at different times and the mountaineers always fought them with an equal fury. And in all this stubborn resistance Islam played little role for the North Caucasians. During the struggle with Mongols and Tamerlane Islam was not widespread as yet and knowledge of formalized religion was limited among the mountaineers. Safavids and Ottomans were Muslims themselves so the role of Islam in the mountaineers' resistance could not be significant at all. And even by the time when the Russian conquest of the Caucasus had begun and Islam was already widespread among the Vainakh tribes it played little role because, in Michael Reynolds' accurate words, "...as we have seen from the earlier episodes, the mountaineers had no need for Islam as an incentive to fight outside forces."⁶⁵ Those who tend to stress the religious side of the conflict between the North Caucasians and the Russian Empire usually do so because of the charismatic figures of Sheikh Mansur and imam Shamil who both proclaimed *ghazavat* and led the Caucasian tribes in battle under the green banner of Islam.⁶⁶ However, in both cases Islamic identity alone was not sufficient to unite the mountaineers.

The rebellion of Mansur was the first time that the Russians came face to face with the self-proclaimed Sheikh and Chechens, who supported "the holy war against the

⁶⁴ Ibid,

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ See, for instance Moshe Gammer, *Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994). The very title suggests that the Caucasian war was mainly the clash of religions between the Orthodox Russians and the Muslim people of Chechnya and Dagestan.

infidels.” However, the role of Islam in that conflict can be questioned because Mansur’s authority over other Muslims in Chechnya was not strong. He managed to influence people in Chechnya by his initial military successes, which he attributed to divine assistance from Allah. But as the struggle went on Mansur’s later defeats deprived him of his claims to work miracles and considerably undermined people’s belief in him. Some *qadis* and mullahs of Tabarsaran denounced him as a “humble shepherd” and “an impostor” who had no right to instruct them or others.⁶⁷ And one Muslim cleric even wrote to the Russian authorities and volunteered to assassinate Mansur in return for a 2000 ruble reward and having his name kept secret.⁶⁸ Moreover, despite the tragic nature of the warfare between Russia and the mountaineers, that historical episode cannot be regarded as a pure confrontation between Christianity and Islam. The fact that Mansur had declared *ghazavat* against the pagan and semi-pagan Ingush as well shows that too much in that conflict depended on the personality of Mansour, his religious fanaticism, rather than on the truly fundamental contradictions between the Orthodox Russians and Muslim Chechens.⁶⁹

Neither was religion the primary factor in the mountaineers’ resistance led by Shamil that lasted for quarter of a century. Rather than a motivation for the resistance Islam was more, as Reynolds says, “a guide for how the resisters should organize their communal lives.”⁷⁰ Indeed, Shamil’s effort to Islamize the mountaineer societies of the Caucasus and transform them according to sharia rules was so impressive that among the

⁶⁷ Anna Zelkina, *In Quest of God and Freedom: The Sufi Response to the Russian Advance in the Northern Caucasus* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), p. 61

⁶⁸ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Of Christianity, Enlightenment, and Colonialism: Russia in the North Caucasus, 1550-1800* (The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 71, No. 2), p. 411

⁶⁹ A. Zelkina, op. cit., p. 62

⁷⁰ M. Reynolds, “Islam and conflict...

mountaineers Shamil's era was referred to not as "the time of the Great War against the Russians" or as "the time of Shamil" but rather as "the time of the sharia."⁷¹ Shamil used Islam as a tool to build a centralized state and establish more or less effective bureaucracy. In accomplishing that task he made an endeavor to change the social attitude of the mountaineers and to replace their customary rules and norms called *adat* with sharia and almost succeeded. We say almost, because some of the mountaineers' customs such as blood feuds were too deep-rooted in their living styles to be easily replaced. Still, Shamil's success in reformation of the North Caucasians' societies and establishing rules of sharia in that region was evident.

Less impressive was the significance of Islam in Shamil's warfare against the Russian armies. First of all, mountaineers, as was mentioned above were themselves "congenital warriors" and their tendency to oppose any authority from outside was strong. Even Shamil with his great authority and the rules of sharia complained that the mountaineers and especially the Chechens were extremely disobedient. When, for example, Shamil replaced his Chechen deputy commander or *naib*, Tasho Hajji, the Chechens killed the replacement and compelled Shamil to reinstate Tasho Hajji.⁷²

Second, neither was the support for Shamil's *ghazavat* absolute. Another Shamil *naib* Hadji-Murat Gadjiyev, who was also a pious Muslim, fled from Shamil, submitted himself to the Russians and offered to use his popularity among the mountaineers for bringing them on to the Russian side.⁷³ Several other North Caucasian religious leaders also supported the Russians and even Ghazi Muhammed and Shamil's own spiritual

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Gammer, *Muslim Resistance...*, p. 244

⁷³ For more on the story of Hadji-Murat see the brilliant work of Leo Tolstoy "Hadji-Murat" in *Great Short Works*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967)

tutor, Jemal al-Din al-Ghumukhi, opposed the war effort.⁷⁴ Another religious authority Kunta Hajji, the initiator of the Quadiriya tariqat in the North Caucasus also did much to undermine Shamil's war effort. His preaching a quietist form of Islam and advocating non-resistance to the Russians found a receptive audience among the war-weary mountaineers and Shamil finally decided to expel him from the North Caucasus, but the mountaineers' exhaustion further fostered by Kunta Hajji's teachings was almost complete.⁷⁵

So, rather than being a direct cause of the resistance and introducing the concept of *ghazavat* Islam during the Shamil era was mainly as Reynolds says "a source of conceptual architecture for the creation of a centralized state."⁷⁶ But unfortunately warfare leaves a deeper imprint on the course of history than any other less bloody event. For instance, almost everybody in the world knows that Germany was the initiator of the two greatest world wars but few would know about the "German economical miracle" in the post-war years. In the same way Islam in the North Caucasus is frequently identified with Mansur's and Shamil's rebellions against the tsarist regime and the inhabitants of the region, especially the Chechens, are portrayed as devout Muslims who fully supported those rebellions.

Not long after the capture of Shamil in 1859 the Caucasian volcano became dormant after 1864 when the Caucasus became part of the Russian Empire and Chechens among other mountaineers became Russian subjects. Still small eruptions would take place afterwards. Especially in times when the central power was weakened in the country radical elements would try to use the opportunity, dragging the exhausted

⁷⁴ M. Reynolds, "Islam and conflict..."

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

Caucasian people in general and Chechens in particular into another conflict with the center. Such conflicts happened during the 1917 revolution and the subsequent Civil War, the first post-revolutionary years, which were extremely difficult for the country, and the Second World War. Again the role of Islam as a moving force in those conflicts is highly questionable despite the claims that they were the results of the actions of the Sufi Brotherhoods in Chechnya.⁷⁷ In fact, the resistance movement was neither widespread nor united and consisted of several groups pursuing different goals that were quite far from religious motives. According to Red Army intelligence officers' investigation the groups varied between those "committed to reviving the Mountaineer Republic, those seeking an Islamic state, those engaged in ordinary banditry, and those groups acting out of a mix of ideological and pragmatic motives."⁷⁸

4.3.2 Islam and Dudayev's policy

During the Soviet regime in Chechnya as everywhere in the Caucasus and all over the USSR religion was suppressed and any kind of religious social movement peaceful or violent was unthinkable. The situation changed drastically after the end of the USSR when the idea of communism had completely collapsed and the new ideology, capable of disciplining people and giving them an integral world outlook was required. With Dudayev's access to power in Chechnya that ideology became Islam, but a different one. It was a sort of mixture of the traditional Sunni thoughts with more radical branches and

⁷⁷ Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wibush, *Mystics and Commissars: Sufism in the Soviet Union* (London: C. Hust & Company, 1985), p. 30

⁷⁸ M. Reynolds, "Islam and conflict..."

Chechen national customs and traditions. In Sanobar Shermatova's words it was "a symbiosis that plunges scholars on Islam into amazement."⁷⁹

Actually, the idea of the revival of Islam in Chechnya was rather a tool in Dudayev's hands than his real ultimate goal. Being a former Soviet military officer, who was educated in a proper Soviet manner, was like his other military comrades a Communist Party member and thus "politically grounded and morally stable," Dudayev had a very little idea of what Islam and its rules really were. His "devotion to Islam" became well known when during one of his interviews he failed to know how many times a day should a Muslim pray.⁸⁰ Or his posing in front of the journalists and sending a whiff of vodka in their direction while talking about how deliberate he was in defending "his country" did not strengthen his image of a so-called noble warrior for Islam. Moreover, the whole political atmosphere in Chechnya in the early 90-s was far from being saturated with religion. The inhabitants of the Chechen village Roshni-Chu told the correspondent that before the conflict the Chechens did not even know how to do *namaz* properly.⁸¹ And even during the conflict one of the founders of the Vaynakh Democratic Party the nationalist Lema Usmanov would claim that the basic green field of the new Chechen flag was intended to symbolize the fertility of the native land but not Islam, while the Chechen combat hymn "freedom or death!" would prove to be a translation of Cuban "*Patria o Muerte!*" with the addition "Allah Akbar", and even Shamil Basayev, who would later become one of the leaders of the Chechen radical Muslims more

⁷⁹ Sanobar Shermatova, "Tak nazyvayemye vahabbity," in *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. Dmitri Furman (Moskva: Polinform-Talburi, 1999), p. 399

⁸⁰ D. Remnick, *Resurrection...*, p. 272

⁸¹ S. Shermatova, op. cit., p. 415

commonly known as Wahhabis would construct his image more from Che Guevara, than from his historical namesake.⁸²

During the negotiation process with the federal center when his relations with Moscow worsened Dudayev in the form of threat declared that he would define a route for the construction of an Islamic republic in Chechnya.⁸³ His using Islam for his political goal rather than for its own sake was clearly demonstrated by his speaking to the 'council of elders' in November 1994, when Dudayev said that "one way to fight against Russian aggression" would be to introduce the Sharia, but "if the Russians will stop the aggression, we will take away this Islamic constitution."⁸⁴ First of all, by doing so he planned to get some concessions from the Federal Center that surely would not welcome the creation of "Islamic state" on its soil and would try to avoid such possibility.

Secondly, an Islam-oriented policy (together with the hard nationalist stance) was the easiest way to gain popularity and support from the Chechen community, which after the several decades of the religion-banning Soviet approach welcomed the reverse of the political trend in their republic and a new leader promising more religious freedom and even stressing the importance of Islam - the religion to which almost all the Chechens belonged although not observing it rigorously. Thus, Dudayev in Chechnya indeed showed himself as a leader strictly demarcated from his Soviet *nomenklatura* predecessors and associated himself with Sheikh Mansur and Imam Shamil – the figures that did much to promote Islamic values in the Chechen society. Moreover, the religious

⁸² Georgi Derlugyan, "Chechenskaya revoliutsiya i chechenskaya istoriya," in *Chechnya i Rossiya: Obshchestvo i gosudarstvo*, ed. Dmitri Furman (Moskva: Polinform-Talbury, 1999), p. 209

⁸³ Musa Yusupov, "Islam v sotsial'no - politicheskoy zhizni Chechni," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Vol. 12, No 8, 2000)

⁸⁴ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 364

ideas helped to distract the people's attention from the miserable economic situation they found themselves in starting from early 1990-s. While pensions and salaries were not paid for months the Chechen leaders (who were definitely themselves free from financial problems) would justify it in terms of the Almighty's distributing wealth to people, about which nothing could be done. The role of Islam in Chechen society in the 90-s can be perfectly shown by its national aphorism – "Islam to those below – oil to those above."⁸⁵

Thirdly, by making public statements as to the establishment of sharia in Chechnya and the so-called threat posed by Moscow to the Chechen Muslims Dudayev wanted to attract the attention of the Islamic World and hoped to get financial assistance from the transnational network of its missionary organizations including the radical ones. And that hope was not in vain because starting from the early nineties there were financial donations from the Arab countries to Chechnya in support of Dudayev's separatist policy. Those donations were in Lieven's words "small in international terms, but great by local ones" and "made a strong impact" in the social lives of the Chechens.⁸⁶ Possessing quite humble financial opportunities ordinary Chechens would get easily enticed by the lucrative offers of Islamic disciples from outside and become members of their groupings that due to Dudayev's encouragement were spreading in the republic like mushrooms after the rain. Smith emphasizes that "[f]undamentalist teachers from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East gravitated to the region, entering universities and other parts of public life" in Chechnya.⁸⁷ Apart from the financial opportunities those teachers could use the spiritual vacuum created during the Soviet period, so they received

⁸⁵ M. Yusupov, "Islam v....

⁸⁶ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 361

⁸⁷ A. Smith, *Allah's Mountains...*, p. 77

as Reynolds says “relatively little intellectual resistance” and “enjoyed a special advantage in this environment.”⁸⁸

4.3.3 Influx of Wahhabism in Chechnya

The spread of Wahhabis or as they were also called Salafi Islam devotees in Chechnya was similar to the Turkish case when religious extremists under the image of harmless educational figures started the process of transforming ordinary people into religious fanatics and potential terrorists. Owing to the fact that the Chechens were very keen on preserving their customs that quite often contradicted the rules of the Koran the influence of Wahhabis was not very strong at the beginning. However, due to their active participation in warfare on the side of Dudayev against the Federal Forces situation changed drastically. During the conflict military formations consisting of Wahhabis were far better armed and equipped than the other separatist units owing to the financial assistance from abroad. In 1995 in Chechnya there appeared a Jordanian named Fathi ash-Shashani who was one of the main ideologists of the fundamentalist radicals in Chechnya and developed a dynamic activity in the republic.⁸⁹ According to the Muslim authorities in the Chechen republic Fathi was the emissary of Bin Laden – the well known leader of the terrorist organization Al-Oaeda - and had bank bills signed by the latter.⁹⁰ Another significant figure of the Islamic fundamentalists in Chechnya was Khattab – the volunteer from Saudi Arabia, who in his own words came to help his

⁸⁸ M. Reynolds, “Islam and conflict...”

⁸⁹ Alexei Kudriavtsev, “Vahabbism: problemy religioznogo ekstremizma na Severnom Kavkaze,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (No. 3, 2000)

⁹⁰ S. Shermatova, “Tak nazyvayemye...”, p. 407

Muslim brothers in Chechnya “to fight in the name of Allah.”⁹¹ Having already combat experience in Afghanistan and Tajikistan where he fought on the side of Islamic opposition Khattab’s military action in Chechnya was quite effective. He formed two commando brigades consisting mainly of Egyptian and Saudi Arabians and was responsible for several devastating surprise attacks against the Federal Forces. One more mercenary commander from Saudi Arabia deserving notice was Abu al-Waleed, who first came to Chechnya as a religious tutor in 1995 but then took up arms and joined the separatists’ resistance. He also was known for raising funds for Dudayev’s forces.

So, due to the Wahhabis’ degree of success on the battlefield and the charisma of their leaders like Khattab and al-Waleed Wahhabis in Vakhit Akaev’s words they “got an aura of defenders of the native land, warriors of Islam and owing to that their positions in Chechnya became considerably stronger.”⁹² Following the end of the military conflict Wahhabis indeed greatly increased their influence. Many supporters of this radical movement like M. Udugov, I. Khalimov, A.-V. Khusainov joined the government formed by the new Chechen leader Maskhadov, and everywhere in Chechnya there started operating the sharia courts that replaced the civil ones and new regulations changing the habitual style of the social life of the Chechens were being forced on by Wahhabis.⁹³

This growing power of the Wahhabis, however, brought neither welfare nor safety to the Chechens. Maskhadov’s intention to use the Wahhabi ideology as an antidote to clan diversity and criminality in Chechnya failed for two main reasons. First of all,

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 408

⁹² Vakhit Akaev, “Religiozno – politicheskiy konflikt v Chechenskoy Respublike Ichkeria,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (No. 5, 1999)

⁹³ For instance, Chechen women were required to wear a covering on the faces with slots for eyes and men to wear short trousers and shirts with long sleeves. Also men had to shave mustaches and grow beards. Traditional holidays and wedding ceremonies were forbidden as well as the putting of the gravestones in cemeteries. All these contradicted sharply with the Chechens’ own rules and therefore lacked popular support. See Vakhit Akaev and Sanobar Shermatova.

Chechens were very reluctant to give up their traditions, beliefs and blood relations in exchange for the principles of the radical Islamists and sometimes even opposed them with arms. Thus, in 1995 when Wahhabis tried to remove the commemorative plaque of Hedi - Kunta Hajji's mother - Chechens rose to defend their relic with guns in their hands.⁹⁴ Three years later in Gudermes there was a huge armed clash between Wahhabis and devotees of the Sufi tariqats led by brigadier general S. Yamadaev with hundreds of supporters from both sides and according to the official data 50 men were killed in that skirmish. After that tragic event people's attitude towards "the bearded ones," as Wahhabis are known in the Caucasus greatly worsened and even Maskhadov himself publicly ordered the local authorities to expel Wahhabis from Chechen territory.⁹⁵

The second reason was that rather than serving as a tool for struggle with the criminality in the republic as had been planned by some Chechen leaders, Wahhabis on the contrary encouraged criminal activity and used gangster methods themselves. In 1998 they killed the mufti of Dagestan S.M. Abubakarov, who openly criticized Wahhabism, and made similar attempts on the lives of the mufti of Chechnya A.H. Kadyrov, S. Yamadaev and Maskhadov himself! Moreover, Wahhabis welcomed to their group some outright criminals such as Arbi Baraev, who kidnapped and publicly decapitated British and New Zealand telecom engineers in December 1998. Wahhabis were also responsible for the eruption of kidnappings that ravaged Chechnya and neighboring Dagestan. According to various reports someone called Abdurrahman who supposedly came to

⁹⁴ V. Akaev, "Chechnya: vozmozhen li afganskiy variant?" *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (No. 2, 1999)

⁹⁵ Ibid

Chechnya from the Arabic world granted permission for the kidnapping of foreigners and those who would not accept the Wahhabi ideology.⁹⁶

As a result, the Wahhabis' activities brought much more harm than advantage to the majority of the Chechens because they were absolutely indifferent to the fate of Chechnya and its people. They regarded Chechnya as a springboard for a universal Islamic revolution, just as the "internationalists" who flooded Russia in 1917 regarded it as fuel for kindling a world communist revolution. However, all over the rest of the Islamic world they got praise and admiration since they were in Reynolds' words a "living proof that a small but pious people could defeat great powers with little more than courage and faith in God."⁹⁷ Islamic activists from many countries evaluated the participation of Muslim volunteers in the warfare as an example of Islamic solidarity and each major or minor success of Dudayev's forces on the battlefield was portrayed as not a Chechen but a Muslim victory.⁹⁸

That case was valid for Turkey as well. Cengiz Çandar, one of the most prominent Turkish newspaper columnists emphasized the Chechen resistance as a moral boosting event for Muslim communities especially after the "blood bath in Bosnia, injustice in Palestine, and losses in Azerbaijan." He also stressed the role of Islam as a uniting force for resistance in Chechnya and stated that Chechens were "the most religious people among the Soviet Muslims." Finally, according to him, the only condition under which

⁹⁶ V. Akaev, "Islamskiy fundamentalizm na Severnom Kavkaze: mif ili real'nost'," *Centarl Asia and the Caucasus*, (No. 3, 2000)

⁹⁷ M. Reynolds, "Islam and conflict..."

⁹⁸ Ibid

normal relations between Turkey and Russia could develop was “Russia’s giving up the intention to oppress Turkic and Muslim people.”⁹⁹

Çandar’s statements actually reflected the general mood of the Turkish mass-media, which with some exceptions took a clearly anti-Russian position in illustrating the events in Chechnya. The scope of the Turkish media’s approach and its influence on public opinion in Turkey will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹⁹ *Sabah*, 5 January, 1995

CHAPTER V

THE CONFLICT IN CHECHNYA AND THE TURKISH MASS-MEDIA

5.1 General attitude of the Turkish media towards the conflict

The Turkish mass-media's reflection on the Chechen issue was able to satisfy the needs of any kind of anti-Russian public. Those who paid much attention to Islam could find in some newspapers an emphasis on the justified struggle of Muslims against the infidels. The word "Chechen" in those newspapers would be frequently substituted with the word "Muslim," the warfare in Chechnya would be seen as part of general struggle of Islamic countries against the oppressive West, and the parallels with the conflicts in Iraq, Bosnia, Palestine, Algeria where a "massacre of Muslims" took place would be drawn.¹⁰⁰ Unfounded reports that the rights of Muslims in Russia had always been infringed like the rights of blacks in South Africa, and that Muslims there were considered as "third-class people" would appear.¹⁰¹ There were also unequivocal statements that the conflict in Chechnya brought the ideas of the possible breakup of the Russian Federation and that would be a "positive outcome for the Islamic World including Turkey."¹⁰² The deep-rooted religiousness of the Chechen insurgents would be underlined by portraying them as mudjaheedins fighting under the Islamic banners "*Kelime-i şahadet*" and "*Allahuekber*" or publishing interviews with Chechen commanders like Shamil Basayev, who would express their readiness to fight for Islam everywhere.¹⁰³ Similarly, Dudayev

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance *Zaman*, 11 January, 1995 or *Akit*, 21 November 1995

¹⁰¹ See *Aktüel*, 5 January, 1995 or *Türkiye*, 17 December, 1994

¹⁰² *Zaman*, 20 December, 1994

¹⁰³ *Sabah*, 17 June, 1995 and *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 20 June, 1995

would strongly emphasize the role of Islam in their struggle and call the Islamic states to help Chechnya according to the norms of the so-called Islamic brotherhood. According to Dudayev, the UN, NATO, EU, OSCE were all “clubs of Christians” so Chechens as Muslims could not accept any help from them.¹⁰⁴ He also drew parallels between the warfare in Chechnya and Afghanistan where Afghans like Chechens had fought desperately only with the help of Allah.¹⁰⁵ However, nothing was mentioned about the fact that it was Dudayev, who took an active part in killing many of his “Muslim brothers” in Afghanistan during the Soviet military campaign with carpet bombing and was even decorated for that.

For the Turkic nationalist public which supported the idea of close relations and even the unification of all Turkic states and autonomous republics, some Turkish newspapers emphasized the significance of events in Chechnya for Turkey as the opportunity to express their protests against the “oppression of the Turkic community.” Although it had no relation to Turkic origin, on the pages of some Turkish newspapers Chechnya was added to the list of Turkic autonomous republics within the Russian Federation like Tatarstan, Chuvashia, Bashkortostan and others, and groundless statements about all those republics’ plans to separate from the Federation were made.¹⁰⁶ In order to make events in Chechnya closer to the Turkish public’s awareness the mass-media started giving Turkish names to some Chechen leaders. Thus Dzhokhar Dudayev became Cevher, Movladi Udugov became Mevlüd and Aslan Maskhadov’s surname was changed to a turkified version – Meshedoğlu.¹⁰⁷ Sometimes in pursuit of sensational

¹⁰⁴ *Zaman*, 6 March, 1995

¹⁰⁵ *Hürriyet*, 26 December, 1994

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance *Milliyet*, 1 April, 1992 and *Türkiye*, 6 September, 1994

¹⁰⁷ See *Zaman*, 25 January, 1995, *Türkiye*, 21 January, 1995 and *Ortadoğu*, 14 March, 1995

information Turkish newspapers would neglect factual accuracy. For instance a strong headline such as “Turkic Support for Chechens” would be followed by the information that the leaders of North Caucasian Republics including Dagestan, North Ossetia, Karachai-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia and Adygey had sent petition to Moscow to stop the military conflict in Chechnya. Although the only representatives of the Turkic world from the participants listed were Karachai and Kabardia, by looking at the heading one could get the impression that there was a sort of Turkic unity in the Caucasus supporting Dudayev’s Chechnya.¹⁰⁸ Or another example of wrong but attractive public information could be the portraying of the well known Caucasian leader Imam Shamil as a Turkic commander “leading Muslims and Turks in their struggle against Russian imperialism.”¹⁰⁹ By referring to Shamil more radical authors would claim cultural and political proximity between Chechnya and Turkey and call for Turkey’s support for the separatists.¹¹⁰

Those who did not stick to Islamic or Pan-Turkic ideas but nevertheless sympathized with the Chechens usually did so because of the image that had been created of a struggle between opponents, one of which was outnumbered but willing to compensate for the lack of quantity with the toughness and determination of its fighters. This public nourished its imagination with articles from newspapers describing Chechens as “21st century commandos” or “Rambos” who “with smiling faces and pockets full of ammo charge at the enemy lines.”¹¹¹ Another newspaper published Dudayev’s statement that every Chechen had to kill at least 100 Russian soldiers, otherwise he would not be

¹⁰⁸ *Türkiye*, 7 January, 1995

¹⁰⁹ *Milliyet*, 20 August, 1992

¹¹⁰ *Sabah*, 15 December, 1994

¹¹¹ *Türkiye*, 14 February, 1995

considered a *şehit* (Muslim who has died in battle).¹¹² The same sense of admiration could be found in the article “Chechens – Kings of Moscow” describing the Chechen organized criminal groups and their influence in Moscow. The statement that the mere hearing of the name of one of the Chechen gang leaders (Nukhayev, Suleymanov, Islamov, Atlangeriyev) could make any Muscovite tremble demonstrates that the image of Chechens as “tough guys” was very strong in Turkey.¹¹³ (Interestingly enough, previously, the Turkish press had dismissed all the claims by the Russians as to a Chechen mafia as “fantasy”).¹¹⁴ Reporting on the warfare the Turkish newspapers would usually describe only the successful military operations performed by the Chechen side and present the losses of the Federal forces as huge while the losses of the separatists were usually presented as ten times less.¹¹⁵

5.2 Emphasis on casualties

The numbers that were not concealed in Turkish newspapers were the losses among civilians in Chechnya. Starting from January 1995 especially and during the following four months of warfare Turkish newspapers were full of descriptions of great destruction and casualties among civilians in Chechnya caused by the Federal Forces’ bombardments. Usually those descriptions would be given strong headlines such as “Russians Perform a Massacre,” “Chechnya is Bloodbath,” “Russians Kill Civilians,” “Russians Set Fire to Chechnya,” “Chechen Civilians Under Fire,” “Brutality in

¹¹² *Türkiye*, 24 January, 1995

¹¹³ *Sabah*, 20 March, 1995

¹¹⁴ *YeniYüzyıl*, 30 December, 1994

¹¹⁵ *Akit*, 13 November, 1995

Chechnya” and so on.¹¹⁶ Certainly, newspapers with such headlines could hardly leave their readers indifferent to events in Chechnya and inescapably gave rise to anti-Russian sentiments.

In general, the issue of civilian losses during the military operations in Chechnya performed a key function in forming the tense atmosphere around the Chechen conflict not only in Turkey but in other parts of the world as well. And the role of the mass-media in that was also not of minor importance. How the mass-media could affect not only public opinion but also governing circles in a given state was clearly demonstrated by the USA’s reaction towards events in Chechnya. At the beginning of the conflict between the separatist regime and the Federal Center the US’s State Department press spokesman Michael McCurry said in a briefing on December 12, 1994: “We have been aware for some time, for months, of the conflict that exists in Chechnya, the efforts that the Russians have made to control violence there, to deal with what has been a very crime-ridden and corruption-ridden province....We are certainly well aware of the situation and how the Russians have been responding to it. But by no means does Chechnya define the broad parameters of the U.S. - Russia partnership.”¹¹⁷ However, later as the scale of the warfare increased and reports about civilian losses became more frequent the US’s attitude started to change. During his visit to Moscow on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Victory against Nazi Germany in May 1995 at a press conference the US President Bill Clinton said “The civilian casualties and the prolongation of the fighting have troubled the rest of the world greatly.”¹¹⁸ Although according to *The Times*

¹¹⁶ See *Zaman*, 27 February, 5, 8, 12 April, *Türkiye* and *Sabah*, 5 April, 1995

¹¹⁷ Gail W. Lapidus, “Contested Sovereignty: The Tragedy of Chechnya,” *International Security*, (Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 1998), p. 36

¹¹⁸ S. Smith, *Allah’s....*, p. 195

correspondent Anatol Lieven the number of civilian dead was greatly exaggerated by journalists, Clinton's words clearly indicated that the media's reports about the casualties in Chechnya did not pass unnoticed.¹¹⁹ Later there would come even more harsh statements from the West. For instance, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights used such expressions as this: "Thousands of civilians die – not as casualties of warfare per se, but as victims of needless and ruthless slaughter. The Chechnya conflict is no 'internal affair' of Russia, but a threat to European security."¹²⁰

Unfortunately, in the course of large-scale military operations no one can escape from undesirable losses among civilians as was demonstrated during the conflicts in Vietnam, Angola, Yugoslavia and other places where massive bombardments took place. Today the U.S. and European states that were criticizing Russia for the events in Chechnya do the same things in Iraq. And it is necessary to note that some Turkish newspapers furiously condemning actions of the Federal Forces in Chechnya treated the American military operation in Iraq with hostility as well. But in the years 1994-96 the attention of the Turkish newspapers was concentrated mostly on Chechnya or more precisely on the sufferings that were brought by the warfare.

5.3 Lack of objectivity

It is pointless to deny the fact that many civilian casualties were the result of the Federal avial bombardment; however, contrary to some popular opinion it would be wrong to claim that the Federal side did nothing to prevent the casualties. For example, in December 1994 following the refusal of separatists to surrender their arms and given that

¹¹⁹ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 108

¹²⁰ S. Smith, *Allah's...*, p. 225

Dudayev's forces had established firing posts in the dwelling quarters of Grozny the Federal side took a decision to evacuate the civilian population from the city before storming it. While some groups of civilians successfully left Grozny others could not do so because of obstructions created for them by the separatists. According to the Human Rights Organization "Memorial," which can hardly be called pro-Russian for its annual reports accusing Federal forces of committing war crimes, there was a deliberate intention on the part of Dudayev's militants to prevent civilians from leaving the besieged city. For instance, when the bus column that came from neighboring Ingushetia tried to evacuate the civilians it was blocked by the separatists. All the people were forced to get off the buses and return to their dwelling places, and all the vehicles were confiscated. Dudayev's assistant Mavlen Salamov talking to members of "Memorial" failed to provide any reasonable explanations for the blockage. From his words, however, it became clear that the order to block the column had come if not directly from Dudayev, at least from his closest associates.¹²¹ Interestingly enough the Turkish newspaper *Zaman* would publish the very same Dudayev's words about his feeling "a deep sorrow" for not being able to protect approximately 30.000 civilians killed during the "devil empire's" bombardments.¹²² There were other similar cases of Dudayev's military units' impeding the attempts to evacuate the civilians from the zones of military activity and according to the reports of "Memorial" separatist forces often deliberately set their firing positions in dwelling houses, schools, hospitals and other similar places causing the Federal Forces to attack them. In those cases losses among civilians were unavoidable. The conscious choice of Dudayev's forces to establish their bases in places surrounded

¹²¹ O. Orlov, *Rossiia – Chechnya: Tsep' oshibok i prestupleniy*, (Obshchestvo "Memorial," Moscow, izdatel'stvo Zven'ya, 1998), p. 88

¹²² *Zaman*, 25 January, 1995

by civilians is also confirmed by Smith, who wrote that some Chechens were actually angry with the separatists because the latter attracted bombings of their places. “Many dreaded,” he wrote, “the day that combatants came into their villages, set up local command posts, raised rebel flags, and fired machine-guns at airplanes, more in brazen defiance than with any hope of hitting them. Everyone understood that this brought retribution.”¹²³ The Chechen people’s attitude towards the actions of Dudayev’s forces were well described by Yeragi, a 54-year-old Chechen who looking at a few *boyeviks* walking from the village Serzhen Yurt into the forest above it said: “It’s those bastards’ fault. We didn’t need this war. So many funerals, so many old people killed or made to run.”¹²⁴

Unfortunately, neither of these or other facts demonstrating Dudayev’s so-called “sorrow” for civilian casualties were present in the Turkish media describing the events in Chechnya during the first months of warfare. On the contrary, it expressed its sympathy and ultimate support for Dudayev, whose appeals to the Turkish authorities and public frequently appeared in the Turkish newspapers and TV channels. In those appeals Dudayev urged the Turkish government to interfere in events, recognize de-jure the independence of Chechnya and provide all necessary support for his militants. Sometimes he simply incited people in Turkey with acts of sabotage directed against Russia such as closing the Straits to Russian ships, blocking Russian planes in the airports, etc.¹²⁵ And the Turkish public influenced by Dudayev’s appeals would sometimes react accordingly.

¹²³ S. Smith, *Allah's*, p. 184

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ *Türkiye*, 24 January, 1995

For instance, in protest at actions by the Federal Forces in Chechnya hundreds of Turkish women blocked for several hours the traffic on one of the bridges over the Straits.¹²⁶

Actually, not only in Turkey but also in many other parts of the world (including Russia itself, or at least its some circles) the approach of the mass-media to the Chechen issue was clearly anti-Russian. The most plausible explanation for this must be the skillful manipulation of information by the Chechen side. Or, as many journalists would prefer to say, the Chechens affected the world public opinion by winning the so-called “propaganda war.”

5.2 Fighting on the battlefield and war of information

5.2.1 Ichkeria’s Minister of Information

As stated above, informational support during state actions, especially in war-time is extremely important because it inevitably affects the troops’ morale and shapes the public attitude at home and abroad. The Chechen side and especially its propaganda champion Movladi Udugov, who was appointed by Dudayev as Minister of Information, understood the power of the mass-media better than the Federals did at that time and a massive flow of information that was usually far from true started coming from the Chechen sources. It was very similar to the “Reality control” in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when the primary task of Udugov was not reflecting on the actual events taking place in Chechnya but making up the “necessary” ones. Smith, who was witnessing the information minister’s activity, wrote that whatever Moscow said about

¹²⁶ *Kavkazsky Vestnik*, No. 17-18, 30 March, 2000

Chechnya would be countered with Udugov's own information, as with "500 civilians killed in one bombing raid, 800 Russian soldiers killed in one attack."¹²⁷

Being a Wahhabi, or rejecting modern values in favor of the traditional Muslim theology, did not prevent Udugov from embracing the tools that modernity provided. While idealizing the existence of the Prophet Mohammed times he, on the other hand, effectively used tools of radio and TV communication, video devices and the Internet for his propaganda purposes. Udugov set up the *prezidentsky kanal* (presidential channel) that beamed into homes of residents in Chechnya from a secret transmitter carted over the mountains. Usually that channel played interviews with field commanders and gave speeches by Dudayev. And like a true electronic pirate, the *prezidentsky kanal* would cut into regular local broadcasting put out by the Federal authorities.¹²⁸ Describing Udugov's mass-media skills Smith called him "the most dangerous man the Russians faced" and wrote:

"Regularly, he (Udugov) rang up foreign or Russian news agencies, radios, TV channels and newspapers to give the separatists' side of the story. To the outside world it all sounded perfectly real when Udugov announced that 'the president and chief of staff of Chechnya-Ichkeria' took some decision or another. His language was always appropriately official and bureaucratic. No one was told that the meeting had taken place in a wood."¹²⁹

6.2 Treatment of journalists

Udugov's personal capabilities in handling the media were crucial but they were not the sole advantage that the Chechen side enjoyed during the warfare. Another factor that played an important role in the media's taking the pro-Chechen position was the

¹²⁷ S Smith, *Allah's...*, p. 181

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 182

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 180-181

handling of journalists reflecting the events in Chechnya on both sides. Generally speaking the attitude of the Federal Military towards the people with cameras and writing-pads was firmly negative. The Federal Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, Lieven writes, “had already suffered very badly from Russia’s free media and their accusations of corruption against him,” so it was quite natural that he treated journalists with suspicion and hostility.¹³⁰ The manner of other military commanders was not much better. “I do not wish to talk to you,” said General Kvashnin often to journalists waiting for interview.¹³¹ Of course, after such an approach on the Federal side there could be no positive cooperation between those who fought and those who described the fighting. One journalist from Moscow, who was appointed by the Federal Center to elucidate events in Chechnya and given a document stating that he was to be assisted in collecting the material said that after the very first contact with the Federal paratroopers he was arrested, thrown into a damp basement and twice threatened with execution.¹³² And that was a journalist initially expected to work together with the Federal forces! The then head of the FSK Sergei Stepashin openly admitted the loss of the information war by the Federal Center and said

How brilliantly the Chechen Minister of Information Mauvladi [sic] Udugov works, how artfully and easily he releases to the press any distortion, lie, juggling of the facts... But we push away the journalists; we are not releasing anything anywhere, we are not giving anything! And I myself for a long while did not want to express myself.¹³³

As for the Chechen separatists, the attitude of Udugov & Co. towards journalists was just the opposite. Journalists from everywhere could travel freely within the

¹³⁰ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 119

¹³¹ Alexander Mikhailov, *Chechenskoye koleso*, (Kollektsiya “Sovershenno sekretno,” Moscow, 2002), p. 164

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ A. Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone...*, p. 120

territories controlled by Dudayev's militants. They could easily stay with frontline *boyeviks* (combatants) and interview their leaders. While the Federal side did not rush to share its information with the press the Chechens were open to do so. Therefore, most of the information about events on the battlefield and beyond it was derived from Udugov's sources and consequently reflected the separatists' point of view, although the journalists (be they Russian, Chechen or from any other country) publishing that information tried to portray themselves as completely independent and objective.

Actually, the so-called independence and objectivity of a journalist during the warfare can only be discussed when he is not continually get involved in what is going on but periodically visits the theatre of action and elucidates the events from a distance without taking any side. But if he goes along the frontlines for a long time, in most cases he unwillingly starts to associate himself with those who share with him their food, and shelter, and whose speeches he records. That is why after being pushed and threatened by the Federals and having close and prolonged contacts with Dudayev's side the majority of the journalists' reports about Chechnya were clearly pro-Chechen. Separatists in those reports were usually portrayed as glorious fighters for freedom. Anatol Lieven in his book about Chechnya even compared Chechen *boyeviks* with Homer's epic heroes and Andrei Babitsky, the correspondent of the Radio *Liberty* later tried to justify their cutting the throats of captive Federal soldiers by saying that actually Chechens were not that cruel but by doing so they simply wanted to make the war more noticeable and attract public attention.¹³⁴

Information availability for journalists and readiness for contact were not the sole advantages of Dudayev's side. In waging the essential propaganda war the separatists

¹³⁴ Radio "Liberty," 24 December, 1999

spared neither time nor funds. In 1995 in the basements of the presidential palace in Grozny there was found a document showing that the Ministry of Security of the Chechen Republic received sufficient amounts of money for paying the journalists their salaries.¹³⁵ What kind of journalists they were and for what the salaries were paid the document does not tell but it at least makes one consider once again why some journalists in their reports were so sympathetic towards the separatists and were eager to contact them.

Correspondents for the Turkish media were no exception from this rule and they also had close access to the separatist side from which they got the information about the conflict. And it was much easier and safer for them to get in touch with Udugov since the news agency “Chechen Press” established by the latter was located in Istanbul from where bulletins issued by the separatist side were faxed not only within Turkey but also around the world.¹³⁶ Taking that into consideration and adding the above-mentioned reasons for Turkish public’s sympathy towards separatists the appearance of statements in the Turkish mass-media that the Russians surpassed Nazis in their massacres would not seem to be extraordinary.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ See Appendix

¹³⁶ S. Smith, *Allah's...*, p. 181

¹³⁷ See, for instance, *Türkiye*, 3 March, 1995

CHAPTER VII

CHECHNYA AS AN AREA OF DISCORD BETWEEN RUSSIA AND TURKEY

7.1 Turkey's unofficial approach towards the conflict

7.1.1 Pro-separatist organizations

Turkey's approach towards the Chechen issue is best explained with reference to two levels quite different from each other. These levels are the official – statements of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pacts, agreements and other official documents concerning the conflict in Chechnya; and the unofficial – all other acts, not authorized by the Turkish cabinet but nevertheless took place.

The unofficial level meant the activity of public organizations supporting the Chechen separatists and acting on Turkish soil. Most of those organizations were founded by the descendants of those who had moved from the Caucasus to Turkey during the years of "*muhacirlik*" following the Caucasian War (1819-1859). According to Turkish media accounts, in Turkey there were about 7 million Turkish citizens of Caucasian origin and there are about 100 public organizations set up by them.¹³⁸ According to local sources, among those organizations the most active ones in terms of expressing their support for Dudayev's Chechnya were those that carried out their activities in the major cities (Ankara, Istanbul) and in places where a more or less considerable Chechen diaspora was present. Such places were the Konya area (in Turkey's central part), Sivas (central - eastern part) and Kahramanmaraş in the south. And essentially, it was those places in which the pro-separatist organizations organized the collecting of the public

¹³⁸ D. Gudiashvili, "Turkey and..."

donations that were supposed to be sent to Chechnya.¹³⁹ The support provided by them varied from simple expressions of sympathy towards Chechens to sending finance and military equipment to the Chechen side. The extent of material assistance provided by those organizations was limited because, after all, Turkey had its own financial problems to deal with and could not have the luxury to allocate extra funds from its budget to support Dudayev. Most of the financial assistance came from the ordinary people in Turkey, who could contribute their endowments via bank accounts numbers published in many Turkish newspapers.

A type of support not limited by financial capacity was that expressed in public actions of protest against the Federal policies regarding Chechnya and harsh statements by the pro-separatist organizations' leaders. On December 12, 1994 at a press conference dedicated to the north Caucasus the President of the North Caucasian Cultural Association Hikmet Kandemir declared "Russia is out to strangle Chechnya's urge for independence...Yet the war is not over and Chechnya is still fighting...Not only the Chechens in Turkey and outside it but all ethnic Caucasians are supporting the Chechens' right cause and Chechnya's struggle for independence,"¹⁴⁰ He also pointed out that Turkey should be more actively involved in that issue and that its interest was everywhere in the post-Soviet territory from Crimea to the North Caucasus.¹⁴¹

A little later there was a meeting in support of Chechen independence at Şişli Abide-i Hürriyet Meydanı. Banners such as "Yeltsin, get your bloody hands off Chechnya," "Russia is the leader of tyrants," "Chechnya is not the backyard of Russia" were waved and some significant Turkish figures made speeches in support of the

¹³⁹ *Abreklerin Günlüğü*, December, 1999

¹⁴⁰ D. Gudiashvili, "Turkey and..."

¹⁴¹ *Türkiye*, 13 December, 1994

separatists. The president of İhlas Holding Nevzat Yalçıntaş (also the leader of Aydınlar Ocağı – the so called “intellectuals’ organization”) in his talk presented Chechnya as a fully independent state and strangely enough as an indicator of its independence he showed its common borders with Georgia. When the vice-president of the True Path Party İbrahim Yaşar Dedelek was going to make speech and was hissed by the public, he said that he participated in the meeting not in the name of the Turkish Prime Minister and the party’s leader Tansu Çiller but as a “nationalist individual.”¹⁴²

Dedelek’s statement openly pointed to the fact that the attitude of the Turkish government towards Chechnya was not as sympathetic as some pro-separatist circles in Turkey might have expected. Initially, the Turkish government did not show any signs of disturbance at events in Chechnya and did not try to concentrate any attention on it. During her visit to Moscow in September 93 (by that time Dudayev had already unilaterally declared the independence of the Chechen Republic and the possibility of military conflict between him and the Federal Center was quite high) Tansu Çiller said “Turkey is looking on the Caucasus from the Russian window” meaning that Turkey was not going to interfere in the Russian sphere of influence.¹⁴³ Actually, Turkey’s approach was much the same as that of the majority of Western states whose leaders’ statements in support of Yeltsin’s policy appeared in the Turkish press. The US Secretary of State Warren Christopher expressed his confidence to the effect that if Yeltsin sent troops in Chechnya he had no other alternative left and the US would treat his act with understanding.¹⁴⁴ A similar statement was made by the German Minister of Foreign Affairs Klaus Kinkel, who said that the Chechen issue was an internal affair of the

¹⁴² *Türkiye*, 18 December, 1994

¹⁴³ *Vakit*, 13 December, 1994

¹⁴⁴ *Akşam*, 15 December, 1994

Russian Federation and recalled that the self-proclaimed sovereignty of Chechnya was not recognized by Germany.¹⁴⁵

Certainly, pro-separatist organizations in Turkey were not satisfied with the existing circumstances. President of the Chechen Association Hilmi Ünal criticized the statements of the Turkish Foreign Ministry which according to him was too mild and feeble regarding the matter and said

“At no time was Chechnya a Russian land. It was only for a limited historical period that the Chechen people remained subjugated and that the Chechen lands belonged to Russians. Chechnya belongs to Russia to the same extent as Vietnam to the United States or India to Britain.”¹⁴⁶

Heads of other Caucasian organizations also expressed their support for Dudayev and announced that many of their young members (not necessarily Chechens) were ready to fight the Federals in Chechnya.

According to Gudiashvili, the majority of the organizations formed by people of Caucasian ethnicity shared the nationalist ideas of the radical “Ülkücü” or “Bozkurtlar” movement and supported its plans for the greater Turan state.¹⁴⁷ One should avoid such generalizations because the numerous Caucasian foundations are actually diverse in their political orientation. In Ankara, for instance, there are organizations supporting Pan-Turkic nationalist ideas as well as organizations cooperating with left-wing circles in Turkey. There are also Caucasian foundations that (at least officially) do not interfere in the politics and limit themselves simply to social and cultural activities. Nevertheless, it is true that some Turkish radical nationalists provided noteworthy support for the separatists. The fact that Chechens did not belong among the peoples of Turkic origin did

¹⁴⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, 20 December, 1994

¹⁴⁶ Gudiashvili, “Turkey and ...

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*

not embarrass some *ülküci*'s because the word "Turkic" was successfully replaced by the word "Muslim" and enmity towards Russia was emphasized as a common point between Turks and Chechens. Obviously, such a mood served Dudayev well, because he wanted to use every opportunity to get support not only in Turkey but also outside its borders. His so-called Special Representative Safita Murat attended the meeting "Chechnya – we are with you" held in Northern Cyprus and organized by "Ülkü Ocakları" and the Cultural Center of the Cypriot-Turkish Union in support of Chechen resistance. Later the president of Northern Cyprus Rauf Denktaş by referring to the Chechen case talked about the attacks against the Islamic World and used such statements as: "Our hearts are with our Chechen brothers."¹⁴⁸

As the warfare in Chechnya became more intensive Turkish nationalist movements started taking more decisive steps. The *Nizam – i Alem* (New Order) *Ülkücü* movement portrayed the events in Chechnya as a direct threat to Turkey saying "what today happens in Bosnia and Chechnya tomorrow may happen in Istanbul, Izmir and Ardahan against the Turkish nation" and urged the Turkish public not to remain silent.¹⁴⁹ Afterward, this movement announced its decision to send volunteers to fight in Chechnya. Those who had agreed to join the volunteer troops were introduced to journalists and expressed their readiness to die. The chief of the *Nizam – i Alem Ülkücü* organization Nasan Basri Arıcı condemned the Federal side for carrying out massacres in Chechnya and criticized the Turkish government for remaining a mere observer of events. He also claimed that the number of volunteers had already reached 2.645 and that

¹⁴⁸ *Türkiye*, 21 December, 1994

¹⁴⁹ *Vakit*, 27 December, 1994

in the shortest period they would do all necessary work to send them.¹⁵⁰ Other sources confirm that information saying that there were about 2 thousand Turkish volunteers fighting on Dudayev's side and that there were military camps in Turkey (mostly in Trabzon and Girne) where the volunteers received combat training and from where they were sent to Chechnya.¹⁵¹ In response to requests by Russian official spokesmen that all necessary measures to prevent Turkish volunteers from joining separatist forces in Chechnya be taken, Turkish government responded that the training and sending volunteers was completely the initiative of the Chechen diaspora, which was acting on its own.¹⁵²

7.1.2 Separatists' connections in Turkey

The Chechen diaspora and its organizations in Turkey were also very energetic in trying to establish contacts between Dudayev's government and Turkish official circles. While Dudayev visited Turkey quite secretly, his aides' visits were more open and received more publicity. For instance, the so-called Foreign Minister of Chechnya Şemsettin Yusuf visited Ankara in January 95 where he reportedly met with True Path Party authorities. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey did not confirm the information an organization called *Kafkas Halklari ile Dayanisma Dernegi* with which Yusuf cooperated refused to give details as to the latter's contacts in Turkey.¹⁵³ In his speech Yusuf called for Turkey's support for the Chechen separatists in their struggle and said that the real target of the Russian military was Turkey but they (the Chechens) would

¹⁵⁰ *Türkiye*, 22 January, 1995

¹⁵¹ Gudiashvili, "Turkey and ...

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ *Hürriyet*, 7 January, 1995

never let that happen.¹⁵⁴ One more visit was paid to Turkey by the so-called Minister of Transportation Said Ibragimov, who after being refused a visa to Iran by the local authorities came to Istanbul where he met with representatives of the Chechen diaspora and expressed his wish for Turkey to take decisive actions to stop the Russian cruelty.¹⁵⁵ Appointed by Dudayev the so-called Minister of Finance of Chechnya Necmettin Uvaysayev during his brief visit to Ankara agreed with some local groups that bank accounts would be opened for the support of the separatists and promised to continue fighting until the last man.¹⁵⁶ Another noteworthy Chechen and former speaker of the Russian Parliament Ruslan Khasbulatov came to Ankara to attend a conference “Caucasus and Central Asia: Past and Future after the Independence” held at Bilkent University. His visit was organized without the participation of the Chechen leaders or pro-Chechen organizations but his attitude towards the Chechen issue was not very different from the latter. In his talks to the Turkish journalists Khasbulatov expressed his gratitude to the Turkish nation for its “sensitivity” in the Chechen matter and supported the independence of Chechnya.¹⁵⁷

By arranging such meetings with the separatist leaders pro-separatist organizations spent much effort in trying to have the Turkish cabinet extend diplomatic support to Chechnya and accept it as a subject of International Law. Several requests were made both by the organizations’ leaders and separatists themselves to the Turkish government to interfere in events. Various conferences dedicated to the Chechen issue and directed at attracting the attention of the Turkish cabinet as well as of other

¹⁵⁴ *Vakit*, 14 January, 1995

¹⁵⁵ *Zaman*, 6 February, 1995

¹⁵⁶ *Türkiye*, 25 March, 1995

¹⁵⁷ *Yeni Şafak*, 27 May, 1995

governments in the world were held in Turkish cities. During the preparation for the 4th Kurultay of the Assembly of Turkic Nations one of the visitors, the owner of the *Ugge Igilik* newspaper Bilah Laypanulu stated that Chechnya was only the initial step of Russia to wipe out all Muslim and Turkic nations from the North Caucasus and in order to prevent this Turkey should use all diplomatic means.¹⁵⁸ Similar statements were made by Hilmi Ünal, who requested Turkish president Demirel to stop the warfare and assist in sending humanitarian aid to Chechnya.¹⁵⁹ A leader of another pro-separatist organization, the Caucasus-Chechen Support Committee Fazil Özen, wished for Tansu Çiller and heads of other states to interfere and stop “that genocide.”¹⁶⁰

In addition to the anti-Russian oriented Turkish media mentioned above some pro-separatist organizations started issuing their own newspapers and journals dedicated solely to events related to the warfare in Chechnya. Publications with relatively large circulations in Turkey were the journals *Marşo* and *Çeçenistan* published in Ankara and Sivas respectively. Later in 1998 the United Caucasian Association in Samsun published its monthly newspaper *Abreklerin Günlüğü* which also had a considerable circulation. Certainly, those journals and newspapers criticized the Federals and published information favorable to Dudayev’s side.

All in all, Turkey’s unofficial support provided by the pro-Chechen organizations for the separatists, was not as insignificant as some analysts would claim. The number of organizations actively involved in collecting material assistance for Dudayev’s side and lobbying separatists’ interests in Turkey was not small and especially in regions in Turkey where the North Caucasian diaspora’s influence was strong those organizations

¹⁵⁸ *Türkiye*, 27 March, 1995

¹⁵⁹ *Zaman*, 31 March, 1995

¹⁶⁰ *Türkiye*, 8 April, 1995

managed to attract public support and even enlist some local authorities for cooperation. Still they failed to bring Turkey and Russia to the brink of confrontation as intended, although, as will be further demonstrated, there were some uneasy moments in Russo – Turkish relations during the Chechen conflict.

7.2 The official side of the Russian-Turkish relations during the Chechen Crisis

7.2.1 Turkey's initial reaction

As stated above, the Turkish authorities openly stated that the activities of the pro-Chechen organizations in Turkey were not to be treated as Turkey's official position regarding the conflict in the North Caucasus. Indeed, compared to the statements of the leaders of those organizations the Turkish cabinet used much milder tones in addressing the Federal authorities. When full-scale warfare began in Chechnya Turkish authorities including President Demirel, Prime Minister Çiller and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs limited themselves to statements in which they expressed their deep regret at seeing the growth of the conflict and called on both sides to use diplomatic means to stop it.¹⁶¹

Following several invitations from Dudayev to the Turkish authorities to become an intermediary in the conflict there were some weak attempts on the Turkish side to participate in settling the issue. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Murat Karayalçın said that he acted as a mediator between the two leaders – Yeltsin and Dudayev - and expressed the opinion that creating an alternative government in Chechnya without Dudayev would not be an effective step towards peace there.¹⁶² The Federal side treated

¹⁶¹ *Hürriyet*, 19 December, 1994 and *Zaman*, 5 January, 1995

¹⁶² *Hürriyet*, 28 December, 1994

such attempts skeptically since that was interference in Russian internal affairs and the Turkish side was not pushing the matter too hard. In some cases such invitations from separatists were simply ignored by the Turkish authorities, and in others they would express their sorrow for the disaster brought by the conflict but refrain from any harsh statements. For instance, in response to the request of Hilmi Ünal to help the separatists Demirel said that he had already done what he could about Chechnya including talks with Yeltsin and other world leaders. While calling the Chechens “brothers” Demirel nevertheless stressed Turkey’s desire to preserve good relations with its neighbor (Russia) and said that Turkey could provide only humanitarian aid to Chechnya.¹⁶³ Previously, the Turkish government had indeed asked Russia for permission to send humanitarian aid to Chechnya and after permission had been granted sent 11 tons of foodstuff, medicine, clothing, blankets and tents for the Chechen refugees.¹⁶⁴ Such an act served well Turkey’s intentions to give some satisfaction to the Caucasian lobby, which was demanding from the Turkish authorities the provision of all necessary help to Chechnya, and at the same time not to spoil relations with Russia. The Russian side was also anxious about the possibility of ruining the balanced relations between the two states. The Russian Ambassador in Turkey Vadim Kuznetsov in his interview with the Turkish press expressed the hope that events in Chechnya would not harm Russo-Turkish relations and that the Turkish government would approach the issue carefully by considering the consequences of its further actions.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *Zaman*, 31 March, 1995

¹⁶⁴ Gudiashvili, “Turkey and ...

¹⁶⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, 12 January, 1995

7.2.2 Previous matters of disagreement between Russia and Turkey

Worries about events in Chechnya being a possible reason for a deterioration of relations between the two states were not groundless. Turkey and Russia had already had some uneasy moments in bilateral affairs and events in Chechnya made previous areas of discord come again to life.

One of such areas was the European Conventional Forces Agreement (ECFA). The Turkish side was closely following military events in the Northern Caucasus and expressed its worries about the deployment of large Russian military units in that region. At the very beginning of the warfare in Chechnya Turkey sent a message to the Russian side stating that military activity in Chechnya led to a violation of the ECFA. The Turkish side did not fail to stress that having significant numbers of Caucasian-origin people on its territory it closely followed the matter and hoped that the ECFA to which both Russia and Turkey were parties would be observed.¹⁶⁶ Any kind of new agreement, decision, and action regarding the presence of the Federal military in the Caucasus was met by Turkey with caution. Thus, when Georgia signed a new agreement on military cooperation with Russia and Russian troops were located on the Georgian border with Turkey it was evaluated as a potential threat by the Turkish media.¹⁶⁷ Turkey also invited the US president Clinton to discuss with Yeltsin the issue of diminishing the number of troops with respect to the ECFA. Not wishing to upset Yeltsin Clinton did not raise the matter in

¹⁶⁶ *Cumhuriyet*, 29 December, 1994

¹⁶⁷ See, for instance “Sınırimıza Rus Tehdidi” *Yeni Gunaydin*, 11 March, 1995

discussion. Although Clinton's position according to Robert Olson did not surprise Turkey it made its worries even stronger.¹⁶⁸

Before that many articles from foreign sources had been published in Turkish newspapers about the Russian threat emanating from the events in the Caucasus. The *Daily Mail* newspaper called Russia the biggest menace to Turkey and warned that the West's partner on the NATO bloc (Turkey) could remain isolated against Russia while Western politicians were trying to please the Kremlin.¹⁶⁹ Especially in the light of further integration of European states and their plans to establish united military forces under the banner of EU of which Turkey was not a member the Turkish cabinet might indeed fear such a perspective. That is why Turkey tried to take all possible measures to secure its borders and make Russia observe the ECFA. It rejected Russia's proposal to make amendments in the agreement in return for extra security guarantees from the Federal side and announced its decision to concentrate extra military units on its Eastern border.¹⁷⁰ That in turn caused some unrest among Russian circles. Not only radicals such as Zhirinovsky but also respected political and academic figures in Russia expressed their worries about a possible Turkish threat. Sergei Karaganov, a respected analyst and a deputy director of the prominent Institute of Europe of the Academy of Sciences named Turkey a hostile power, and Alexei Filatov, a deputy chairman of the Duma Defense Committee and director of the Centre for Geopolitical and Military Forecasts also referred to Turkey as Russia's most likely future adversary.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Robert Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya'nın Dış Politikaları, 1991 – 1997 Kürt ve Çeçenistan Sorunları," in *Çeçenistan: Yok Sayılan Ülke*, ed. Özcan Özen – Osman Akinhay (Everest Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002), p. 179

¹⁶⁹ *Hurriyet*, 22 December, 1994

¹⁷⁰ R. Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya...", pp. 179-180

¹⁷¹ Galia Golan, *Russia and Iran: A Strategic Partnership?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), p. 24

Another disagreement between Russia and Turkey had arisen over the pipelines for the oil and gas extracted in the states in the Caspian region. After the dissolution of the USSR Turkey sought for new opportunities regarding the energy resources in those states and tried to develop several projects that would enable Turkey to get direct access to the oil and gas of CIS states and participate in its profitable transfer from Central Asia to Europe. That was not welcomed by Russia, which considered the extraction and transfers of the energy resources in the Caspian region as its prerogative and did not want rivals. The clash of interests was inevitable and particularly hot debates started over the route of Azerbaijani oil. As an alternative to the Baku – Novorossiysk line Turkey strongly supported construction of a line from Baku through Supsa (Georgia) to Ceyhan (a town on the Turkish Mediterranean coast). To strengthen its arguments more Turkey started creating problems for Russian shipping through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

That was in turn another problematic point in Russo-Turkish relations. New regulations concerning the passage of Russian tankers through the straits and allowing only one to go through at a time were called among radical circles in Moscow as actions “designed to sabotage Russia’s oil exports.”¹⁷² The justification on the Turkish side that changes in the regulations were required because of new safety measures in trying to prevent accidents and possible spillage that would aggravate pollution did not help much and Moscow claimed that Turkey was violating the Montreux Convention of 1936 governing the straits.¹⁷³ An official of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Yakov

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 23

¹⁷³ Ibid

Ostrovsky said that Turkey with its new regulations was seeking to close the straits to transport and gave a warning that Russia would present the case to the UN.¹⁷⁴

7.2.3 Turkey's restrained position towards the conflict

Thus, there were evident areas of discord in Russo-Turkish relations and, more important the Chechen crisis coincided in time with disagreements which might go so far as to aggravate the situations. Chechen separatists on their part used every opportunity to provoke a confrontation between Russia and Turkey. Apart from his inflammatory calls to Turkey to close the straits to Russian ships and undertake further steps to limit Russia's economic and political activity, and his blaming Russia for all problems in Turkey, Dudayev also announced plans to trade North Caucasian oil resources in the world market and an intention to get access to that market via Turkey.¹⁷⁵ The possibility that such an ambitious plan might be realized might be compared to Dudayev's previous promises of a prosperous life in Chechnya. However, his speech sounded agreeable to those in Turkey who dreamed of participation in the Caucasian oil business. So, to public circles that were already supporting Dudayev in Turkey were joined those who might have expected economic advantages from Chechen independence.

The official side of Turkey, however, was not that enthusiastic about such plans and did not rush to embrace the Chechens as a new economic partner. The Turkish government soberly evaluated the situation and despite all disagreements and tensions in the above mentioned areas did not take an obviously anti-Russian position during the Chechen crisis. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia Ankara responded

¹⁷⁴ *Yeni Yüzyıl*, 16 February, 1995

¹⁷⁵ *Ortadoğu*, 7 March, 1995

in an objective and positive way by supporting Russia's territorial integrity and the necessity to preserve it.¹⁷⁶ In a statement issued by the Russian MFA it was stated that Russia was aware of the anti-Russian pressure put on the Turkish cabinet which had withstood it and took a balanced and objective position.¹⁷⁷

Diplomatic relations between two states continued satisfactorily. Prime Minister Tansu Çiller paid an official visit to Moscow in May 95 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany. Some radical circles in Turkey saw that as a betrayal to the Chechens.¹⁷⁸

Further contacts on various levels were made and to some extent it could be said that the Chechen conflict played a role as a catalyst for cooperation between Russia and Turkey. The example is the visit of the FSK chief Stepashin to Ankara in February 95. During his visit Stepashin met with several Turkish authorities including President Demirel with whom he discussed the presence of definite groups in Turkey that reportedly sent weaponry and volunteers to help the separatists. Stepashin called on the Turkish cabinet to use all their influence to limit the activities of those groups and on his side promised that any activities threatening Turkish territorial integrity and thus damaging Russo-Turkish relations would not be tolerated by Moscow. As a guest of the director of the National Investigation Committee Sönmez Köksal, Stepashin emphasized that it was an official visit and that both sides reached agreements in essential areas such as international terrorism, drug trafficking and economic crimes.¹⁷⁹ Stepashin's visit was

¹⁷⁶ D. Gudiashvili, "Turkey and..."

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ See *Yeni Şafak* "Çiller Çeçenlere İhanet Etti" 10 May, 1995

¹⁷⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, 23 February, 1995

especially significant because there had never been such close contacts between Russian and Turkish security services before.

There could be several answers to the question as to why Ankara displayed moderation regarding the Chechen conflict and despite the unrest among its population of Caucasian origin did not yield to provocation of some radical circles.

7.2.4 Reasons for Turkish cabinet's initial reluctance to support Dudayev

7.2.4.1 Economic ties with Russia

First of all, as was stressed by Demirel, Turkey did not want to harm its trade relations with Russia. Following the break up of the Soviet Union Russia soon became Turkey's second largest trade partner after Germany and the bilateral trade volume in the early nineties reached the level of more than three billion \$. Despite the disagreements about the pipeline Turkey was already importing huge amounts of oil and gas from Russia. Apart from the official economic relations there was also another substantial trade volume between the two states that was not always recorded by statistics. It was the so-called "suit-case trade" or "shuttle commerce." There was a huge flow of low-scale entrepreneurs buying small amounts of Turkish goods and selling them back in Russia. According to the Russian Ambassador to Turkey Alexander Lebedev such trade relations were especially important because apart from the economic side it included contacts between people.¹⁸⁰ Turkey's budget got a significant amount of money from the tourism sector and that was partly because the resorts on Turkey's southern coast soon replaced the Crimea as Russians' favorite place to spend vacation. Turkey's investment in the Russian economy was not low either. Starting from early nineties in a short time there

¹⁸⁰ A. Lebedev, "Russia and Turkey ...", p. 6

was created a large network of Turkish trade and building companies in Moscow and other big cities. Bearing in mind all those factors it was clear that Turkey indeed had much to lose should it extend support for Chechen separatists and undermined its relations with Russia.

7.2.4.2 Kurdish problem

Second, it was difficult for Turkey to openly support Dudayev and thus act against the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation because it had similar problems itself. Kurds in Turkey represented a huge group counting more than 10 million and some radically-oriented Kurdish circles were trying to create an independent Kurdish state in the eastern part of Turkey. In 1978 they founded the Kurdistan Workers Party under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan and in 1985 the National Liberation Front was set up.¹⁸¹ Each year hundreds of the Front members died in armed clashes with Turkish military forces. So the Chechen issue was not easy for Turkey in the sense that it was impossible to insist on the principle of inviolability of the state borders and at the same time support separatism in another state. That was actually what the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Albert Chernyshev said in an interview to the journal "Turkish Probe" on 25th January 1995 Chernyshev said that although he would avoid direct comparisons between the Chechen crisis and Turkey's problems in the southeast, the two problems did have something in common. He also added that the Russian Federation entirely supported Turkey's desire to preserve its territorial integrity but that all comments ... the existence of extremism on one side only were "bad statements." Chernyshev then clarified Russia's concern at the statements and visits of Dudayev's

¹⁸¹ D. Gudiashvili, "Turkey and...

aides to Turkey and statements made by certain Turkish parliamentarians in support of separatists much the same as with Turkey, concerned at Kurdish declarations in Moscow.¹⁸²

Turkey was indeed closely following the activities of Kurdish nationalists in other countries and especially in Russia because the latter had strong historical ties with Kurds. Kurdish tribes fought on the Russian side during the Russo-Persian and Russo-Ottoman wars throughout the 19th century and following the heavy defeat of the Ottomans in the Balkans in 1912 there was especially close cooperation between Russia, which wanted to annex part of Eastern Anatolia and the Kurds who sought an autonomous state under the Russian Empire.

Apart from strategic cooperation there were also educational and cultural aspects connecting the Kurds to Russia. Russia's interest in the Kurds goes back to as 1787 when Empress Catherine commissioned the publication of Maurizio Gorzan's Kurdish grammar.¹⁸³ Intensive Kurdish studies were continued and soon St. Petersburg became the world center for Kurdology. Nowadays its Institute of Oriental Studies possesses the largest collection of Kurdish texts. There were also educational units set up in several Russian cities for Kurdish leaders and their descendants. As Reynolds writes "Kurds saw Russia as a gateway to European education and enlightenment and sought cooperation with Russia as a way to break through the backwardness that they believed had trapped the Kurdish people."¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ M. Reynolds, "Inchoate Nation Abroad: Tsarist Russia, Nation Building, and the Kurds of Ottoman Anatolia, 1908-1914," paper presented to the Bilkent University Workshop on Kurdish Nationalism, Ankara, December, 2003

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

Despite all those ties Russia unlike several European states which recognized the Kurdish parliament in The Hague (Holland) did not make any serious efforts to promote Kurdish sovereignty. With the exception of statements by some radical leaders in Russia who saw the Kurdish question as an opportunity to demonstrate their “tough” nationalism. When two members of Kurdish Office Rustam Broyev and Asiri Serif applied for permission to open a bureau in Moscow and were rejected, a member of the Duma for the Liberal Democrat Party led by Zhirinovskiy Mikhail Burlakov expressed his support for Kurdish independence, called Turkey a puppet of NATO and accused it of atrocities against Kurds.¹⁸⁵

Apart from such radically oriented speakers the overall tone of the Federal authorities concerning the Kurdish question was quite mild and would get stronger only when information concerning the Turkish cabinet’s support for Chechen separatists would appear. In that sense the Kurdish problem was perceived by the Russian side as a way to influence the Turkish authorities if they decided to support the Chechen separatists. The phrase “those who sit in glass houses should not throw stones” used by Chernyshev in July 95 when he requested the Turkish government to limit the activities of pro-Chechen organizations clearly expressed the Federal position.¹⁸⁶ The Turkish side understood this very well. As Demirel later said in an interview about the Chechen problem, Turkey could not play any other role than providing humanitarian aid to Chechnya because if it had approached the Chechen problem beyond those parameters, the Russian side might have approached the PKK problem differently than it did at that

¹⁸⁵ R. Olson, “Türkiye ve Rusya...”, p. 175

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 176

time.¹⁸⁷ So, during the first year of the conflict the official position of Turkey regarding Chechnya was in general far from being hostile towards Russia.

7.2.5 Growth of tensions concerning Chechnya

Things changed somewhat in the following year. As was already mentioned above in 1996 the position of the Islamists in the Turkish parliament got stronger and according to Gudiashvili this “accelerated the process of a revision of an official position on the North Caucasian issue.”¹⁸⁸ As an example of such revision he points out that the Turkish government repeatedly stated its intention to make Chechnya a full-fledged member of the Community of the Islamic states. There was also a serious attempt to establish full-scale official relations between Turkey and Dudayev’s government when with the participation of the chief of the Welfare Party Erbakan and Dudayev a Turkish citizen and ethnic Chechen Berkan Yaşar was appointed ambassador of the Republic of Ichkeria to Turkey. That appointment was supported by Tansu Çiller too.¹⁸⁹ Yaşar on his part called himself an “honorary representative of Turkey in Chechnya.”¹⁹⁰ That the new Turkish cabinet started demonstrating its sympathy towards the Chechens more openly was obvious.

The year 1996 had a troublesome start concerning Russo-Turkish relations. On January 16 a group of terrorists captured the *Avrasya* ferry going from Trabzon to Sochi, raised the separatist Chechen banner over it and demanded the cessation of military actions in Chechnya. Although the trouble was resolved without bloodshed and all the

¹⁸⁷ “Where to now with Turkish – Russian relations? (an interview with former President Suleyman Demirel,” *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 18

¹⁸⁸ D. Gudiashvili, “Turkey and...

¹⁸⁹ Ibid

¹⁹⁰ *Hürriyet*, 27 January, 1995

terrorists were arrested by the Turkish police on the third day of the incident it again stirred animosity on both sides concerning Chechnya. Yeltsin approved the action of the Turkish police but accused the Turkish side of trying to bring the Chechen issue to the world arena.¹⁹¹ Indeed, after the ferry crisis Tansu Çiller expressed herself in these terms: “A human tragedy is continuing in the Caucasus with mothers and children being massacred. The attention of the world must be drawn to what is happening there.”¹⁹² The sympathy of some Turkish officials, according to Hakan Aksay was also demonstrated by “the developments that led to extremely light sentences for the hijackers.”¹⁹³ Incidentally, several of them including their leader Mohammed Tokcan soon managed to escape from the prison.

Besides, early in 1996, two separatist leaders Aslan Maskhadov and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev visited Turkey where they met not only North Caucasian public organizations but also official representatives and thanked both for moral and material support.¹⁹⁴

Public demonstrations in support of separatists in 1996 were not more frequent than in 1995, but this time they were usually attended by high-ranking Turkish officials. The peak of activity was the Turkish public reaction to Dudayev’s death in April 96. On that occasion the leader of Turkish Liberal Democrat Party Besim Tibuk proposed that an official mourning should be held in Turkey. In Ankara Kocatepe mosque there was a

¹⁹¹ R. Olson, “Türkiye ve Rusya...”, p. 183

¹⁹² Smith “Allah’s Mountains...”, p. 216

¹⁹³ H. Aksay, “Turkish – Russian relations...”, p. 136

¹⁹⁴ D. Gudiashvili, “Turkey and...

huge funeral ceremony that was attended by Welfare Party leader Erbakan, Nationalist Party leader Alpaslan Türkeş, and more than 250 deputies.¹⁹⁵

Sanctioned by the local authorities many places in Turkish cities were renamed after Dudayev. The most vivid examples are the renaming of “Tandoğan Meydanı” into “Dudayev Meydanı” in Ankara and opening “Şehit Cevher Dudayev Parkı” in Istanbul. The ceremonial opening of the Park was made by that time Mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayip Erdoğan.¹⁹⁶ Now in many cities in Turkey there are various places like streets, parks, mosques, etc. that carry the name of the former Chechen leader.

Moreover, there were several contacts between separatist representatives and Turkish officials. In August the so-called Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ichkeria Ruslan Chimayev visited Ankara to meet with Turkish representative of the Parliamentary World Union and the member of Motherland Party İrfan Köksalan.¹⁹⁷ At the end of the month under the leadership of Hozh-Akhmet Nukhayev and Ruslan Chimayev there was held a meeting in Istanbul dedicated to the discussion of opening Chechen representative offices abroad. At the same meeting September 6th was declared to be the Chechen Independence Day.¹⁹⁸ Then, in September there was held a program in Istanbul called “Hand in Hand with Chechnya” where again calls to Turkish government to support Dudayev were made. One of the participants - writer Medet Ünlü even stressed Turkey’s support to the separatists as an important factor in their ability to withstand the Russia’s

¹⁹⁵ *Marşo*, May, 1996

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁹⁷ *Marşo*, August, 1996

¹⁹⁸ *Marşo*, September, 1996

superior military power. The program was attended by the mayor of Istanbul Erdogan, who also expressed his support for the separatists.¹⁹⁹

Another significant pro-Chechen activity occurred at the beginning of October with the participation of the deputy Speaker of Turkish Parliament Yasin Hatipoğlu and a State Minister Sabri Tekir. It was called the International Conference on Caucasus organized by the Caucasus – Chechen Support Committee. In that conference Ruslan Chimayev thanked Turkey for the various kinds of help provided to Chechnya including medical treatment of wounded militants and the freedom given to pro-Chechen action on Turkish soil. Another Dudayev appointment – the so-called Minister of Health of Ichkeria Umar Khanbiyev emphasized the role of Turkey as a bridge between Chechnya and the international arena.²⁰⁰

Despite the change of attitude towards the Chechen issue of the Turkish cabinet in 96 the statements of the Chechen leaders as to about Turkey's considerable support for Dudayev should be treated with caution. The medical treatment of Chechen militants mentioned by Chimayev did indeed take place in Turkish hospitals but it also went on in hospitals in Egypt, Jordan, Ukraine and ultimately Russia itself. Moreover, to claim that Turkish Health authorities met them with hugs and kisses would hardly be correct. One influential Chechen source living in Turkey and having strong links with the local government in Grozny said that he personally had contacts with bureaucrats in the Turkish Health Ministry to arrange the wounded Chechen fighters' staying in state-run hospitals, but that the officials had turned down his request.²⁰¹ Much easier for the

¹⁹⁹ *Abreklerin Günlüğü*, July, 1999

²⁰⁰ *Çeçenistan*, November – December, 1996

²⁰¹ *Turkish Daily News*, 17 March, 1999

wounded combatants was access to the private hospitals in Turkey where official control was limited.

Closer to reality was Chimayev's statement about the freedom of action enjoyed by the Chechens in Turkey. They could freely enter and leave Turkey with the unrecognized documents issued by the self-proclaimed Dudayev's government. Neither was a problem about the residence permit in Turkish cities. According to mass-media guesses there were 20.000 – 100.000 Chechens in Istanbul only.²⁰² Although such figures seem to be exaggerated the number of Chechens living in Turkey indeed significantly increased once the military operations started in Chechnya. Certainly, they had not the most kindly towards the Russian-speaking population and used the opportunity to take a sort of revenge on Russians coming to Turkey. In other words, a small-scale criminal activity in which some Chechen groups were involved took place mostly in the Istanbul districts Laleli and Aksaray where the Russian tourists and suit-case traders usually stayed. For justification it is necessary to note that Chechens were far from being the sole criminals in those questionable quarters but their determination, strengthened by the fighting on their native land, and the sympathy of the Turkish public granted them relative immunity in making money out by robbing Russian-speaking visitors. Besides, there were acts of violence performed by Chechen individuals on Russian tourists and suit-case traders, the majority of whom were women. Some of those cases were also noticed in Turkish newspapers.²⁰³

Furthermore, not only tourists but also Russian diplomats became the target of Chechen groups' harassment. Anxieties ... were openly expressed by a Senior Councilor

²⁰² R. Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya...", p. 189

²⁰³ See, for instance *Hürriyet*, 10 March, 1996

of the Russian Federation, Leonid Manzashin, who said that diplomats were often persecuted and threatened by Chechens in Istanbul streets.²⁰⁴

With the growth of the number of Chechens in Turkey the tension in Russo - Turkish relations grew as well. Chechen flags raised over some buildings in Istanbul caused another discomfort for the Russians. According to the Russian media Turkish authorities treated anti-Russian activities too leniently and let the Chechen representative offices openly demonstrate their banners.²⁰⁵ The head of the Caucasus Chechen Support Committee Fazil Ozen, however, dismissed those statements saying that the flags were shown by migrants from Chechnya and that there was still no a permanent Chechen office in Ankara.²⁰⁶ Still, the image of Turkey as a supporter for the Chechen separatists was quite strong in Russia.

7.2.6 Signs of improvement in mutual understanding

The Chechen issue continued to be the cause for some tension between Russia and Turkey throughout the Federal forces' military operation. The first sign of improvement appeared following the cease-fire agreement between the Federal and separatist leaders and the withdrawal of the Federal troops from Chechnya in August 1996. Although the Turkish government welcomed the end of military actions in the Northern Caucasus it refrained from recognition of Chechnya's independence and establishing diplomatic relations with the so-called Republic of Ichkeria. Later, in October Demirel made an official visit to Moscow on the occasion of BlackSea Economic Cooperation meeting. Before going back to Turkey Demirel met with the

²⁰⁴ R. Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya...", p. 189

²⁰⁵ *Izvestia*, 24 August, 1996

²⁰⁶ Ibid

Russian Prime-Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and discussed with him the matters of concern both to Turkey and to Russia. Demirel emphasized the necessity for counter terrorism and denounced any support and connivance in it. He also added that it would be wrong if Russia and Turkey tried to play the Kurdish and Chechen cards against each other. Chernomyrdin for his part said that he was perfectly aware of the sensitivity expressed by Turkey concerning the Kurdish question and promised that Kurdish organizations and facilities in Russia would not be tolerated.²⁰⁷ Those positive developments were further strengthened by Çiller's visit to Moscow in December 1996, during which there was signed the Memorandum of "Understanding on the Fight Against Terrorism." As Olson correctly noticed that memorandum meant that both sides agreed to renounce any kind of support for separatist movements on each other's territory.²⁰⁸ Such a step could only please Russia and Turkey because it largely reduced the Chechen and Kurdish issues' capacity to bring both states to the brink of a conflict.

²⁰⁷ *Marşo*, Ekim, 1996

²⁰⁸ R. Olson, "Türkiye ve Rusya...", p. 190

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

At first glance Turkey's attitude towards Russia during the Chechen crisis seemed quite hostile. Military actions in Chechnya that received severe criticism from nationalist- and religious- oriented circles in Turkey really carried the possibility of spoiling the relations between the two states. However, due to both the Russian and the Turkish sides' efforts that were guided not by sentiments but by a sober evaluation of the situation the serious deterioration did not come about.

Certainly, collecting funds for the Chechen militants, providing them medical treatment, opening pro-separatist organizations and naming streets and other places after the Chechen leader could not please the Federal side. Therefore Moscow would several times give a significant indication of displeasure at Turkey's stance on Chechnya.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, at the same time, taking into consideration the presence of the huge North Caucasian diaspora on its territory, anti-Russian sentiments and the Islamic factor Turkey's support was still not that significant in proportion compared to the reaction of some other states. Here Russia's so-called "Slavic brother" Ukraine may serve as an example. Despite the fact that in Ukraine at least the quarter of the total population is Russians and another quarter considers Russian as its native language, the pro-Chechen demonstrations were at least not less frequent than in Turkey and some places in Ukrainian towns and cities were renamed after the separatist leaders as well. For instance,

²⁰⁹ See, for instance, the statement of the speaker of M.I.A. of Russian Federation Mikhail Demurin, *Turkish Daily News*, 21 August, 1996

in Lvov the street that previously carried the name of Lermontov was renamed “street of Dzhokhar Dudayev.”²¹⁰ Moreover, Ukrainian mercenaries were the most numerous among the groups of foreigners fighting on Dudayev’s side. The Ukrainian mass-media did not even try to hide the fact of Ukrainians’ presence in Chechnya. According to the Ukrainian newspaper the so-called representative of Ichkeria in Ukraine, Ruslan Badayev, stated that several Ukrainian fighters were awarded “medals of honor” for their fighting on the separatist side.²¹¹ Another newspaper claimed that almost half of the total number of mercenaries were Ukrainians.²¹²

Thus, although seen as Russia’s one of the most serious geopolitical rivals in the Caucasus, Turkey did not make any concrete efforts to use the conflict in Chechnya as an opportunity to strengthen its position in the region. Turkish officials openly stated that Turkey was seeking cooperation rather than confrontation with its northern neighbor.²¹³ The main reason for this were the financial benefits emanating from Russian-Turkish economic affairs. Indeed, despite internal pressure from radical groups Turkish leaders knew that the benefits of good relations with Russia would definitely outweigh the gains (if any) of supporting Chechen separatists despite all promises and boastful statements by their leaders. For instance, during the warfare open expression of sympathies towards the Chechen separatists by a large part of public in Turkey did not impede Turkish building companies GAMA and ENKA from signing contracts with Moscow for the reconstruction of Grozny.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ *Yeni Şafak*, May, 1996

²¹¹ *Moloda Galichina*, 1 August, 1995

²¹² *Vseukrainskiye Vedomosti*, 15 April, 1995

²¹³ 1991 Sonrasında Rusya Federasyonu’la İlişkiler dönemi
(<http://www.foreignpolicy.org.tr/tur/makale/akamel.htm>)

²¹⁴ *Yeni Şafak*, 7 May, 1995

Certainly, cooperation between Turkey and Russia could not be limited to only the economical dimension. If two traders expect huge profits from bilateral economic relations but there are some geo-political barriers to that, those barriers are usually removed. Following the 96 Memorandum Turkey and Russia signed other agreements that were to strengthen bilateral cooperation equally in economic and geo-political areas. The Russian-Turkish Declaration on the Fight Against Terrorism signed in November 1999 and the Action Plan for Cooperation between Russia and Turkey in Eurasia signed in November 2001 demonstrated both states' willingness and determination to cooperate fruitfully in all fields. The effects of such cooperation on the Chechen issue were perceptible when Ecevit government limited the activities of pro-separatist organizations and restricted their ability to raise funds by closing their bank accounts.²¹⁵

Public opinion in Turkey towards the Chechen case also started to change when the Turkish people got to know better what actually separatist Chechnya really was about. Following the cease-fire agreement in 1996 and the withdrawal of Federal troops Chechnya as in the time of Dudayev was again the place where no one was protected from arbitrary violence and kidnapping for ransom was the primary business. Maskhadov, who won the presidential elections in Chechnya in 1997 proved to be a poor administrator and law-enforcer and was unable to do anything with the gangs that starting from the end of 1996 to October 1999 kidnapped more than 1.100 people including journalists, missionaries and businessmen from different countries.²¹⁶ Turkey was no exception and its citizens got an opportunity to feel the "gratitude" of the Chechen

²¹⁵ Sinan Ogan, "Türk – Rus İlişkilerinde Algılama Sorunu," paper presented to the Turkish Democratic Foundation and the Embassy of the Russian Federation Workshop on Cooperation in Eurasia, Ankara, March, 2004

²¹⁶ Lieven, Çarpıtan Bir Mercekten: Çeçenistan ve Batı Basını," in *Çeçenistan: Yok Sayılan Ülke*, ed. Özcan Özen – Osman Akınhay (Everest Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002) , p. 68

separatists for the assistance during the warfare when three Turkish businessmen that went to Chechnya to invest in its economy were kidnapped and faced demands for ransom from their families.²¹⁷ Furthermore, the hostage-taking incident at Swissotel in Istanbul further alienated Turkish public opinion from Chechnya. As the ambassador of a leading western state correctly noticed “[T]he Chechens hardly had many friends in the world. And with this move, they will be getting adverse reactions also in Turkey where they had enjoyed a relatively warm and friendly climate.”²¹⁸ As a result, in marked contrast to the situation in the first conflict, the second military campaign in Chechnya that was provoked by the Chechen Wahhabis’ attack on Daghestan did not cause mass indignation in Turkey and public opinion in Reynolds’s words was “apathetic to the Chechen cause.”²¹⁹

After all, it can be said that although with some difficulties Russia and Turkey managed to overcome the barrier represented by the Chechen issue in their relations due to their interdependence and the common attributes in their geopolitical structure. And there is a hope that mutual understanding in resolving such problems would lead to the multidimensional partnership that in turn would enable both states to, in Nabi Şensoy’s words, “play a crucial role in disproving the existence of a so-called clash of civilizations, or between Islam and Christianity.”²²⁰

²¹⁷ See *Hürriyet*, 17 April, 1998

²¹⁸ *Turkish Daily News*, 25 April, 2001

²¹⁹ Michael Reynolds, “Russian-Turkish relations and Chechnya,” *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 60

²²⁰ Nabi Şensoy, “Turkish-Russian relations: from bilateral co-operation to multidimensional partnership,” *Insight Turkey* (Vol. 4, No. 2, April – June 2002), p. 14

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APPENDIX

NOXCIJN RESPUBLIKA

Сов. секретно

Экз. № 1

Чеченская Республика



Chechen Republic

ДЕПАРТАМЕНТ
ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

Расчетный счет № 031134596 в Грозсоцбанке

384051, с. Грозный пр-г Орджоникидзе 19172

Телефон № 22-20-85

7 января 1995 г.

№ 1/18

Президенту Чеченской Республики

Ичкерия

Дудаеву Д.М.

Докладываю, что согласно Вашего разрешения ДГБ ЧРИ в декабре 1994 года на оплату журналистов было израсходовано 1,5 /полтора/ миллиона долларов.

В последнее время российские власти приняли меры по облегчению работы российских и иностранных журналистов, что существенно затруднило их использование в наших интересах. В связи с этим прошу Вас дать распоряжение о выделении дополнительно одного миллиона долларов ДГБ ЧРИ.

Начальник Департамента
государственной безопасности

ЧРИ

Гелисханов С.С.