

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_sbct-01.php

Islam and Muslims in Russia Since the Collapse of the Soviet Union

GASYM KERIMOV

After the collapse of the Soviet Union sovereign Islamic states arose in the traditional Islamic regions of the USSR, although Islam was not declared to be an official or state religion in the constitutions of these states, since, as before, religion was separated from the state. These states were: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. With the exception of Kazakhstan, these Muslim republics have become members of international Islamic organisations and societies. Since almost half the population of Kazakhstan are not Muslims, this state takes part in international Islamic organisations as an observer or guest.

The collapse of the Soviet Union separated more than 65 million Muslims in the Muslim regions of Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan from Russia. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not mean that Russia ceased to be a state with a large Muslim population. Within Russia there remain nine Muslim republics: Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Adygeya, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Northern Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachayevo-Cherkessia, with a population of more than 20 million Muslims.

The Muslim Legacy from the Communist Regime in Russia

For more than 1400 years of Islamic history before the arrival of the communist regime in Central Asia and Turkmenistan, in the Volga region and the Urals and in the Caucasian regions, Islam was the sole regulator of social and economic matters and of culture, morality and family life. For the first time in the history of the Muslim peoples Soviet power not only denied Islam the right to regulate the social and spiritual life of society, but also imposed a concrete task – to eradicate Islam and replace it by a communist world outlook. The entire political apparatus, legal and social institutions and the activity of party and ideological workers and the educational system were directed towards achieving this end. The domination of the communist regime in the regions of traditional distribution of Islam in the Soviet Union has left its mark, and its wounds. Islam and Muslim organisations have been obliged to endure 70 years of persecution and oppression.

The whole period from 1917 to 1985 was characterised by struggle, oppression and persecution of religion and religious organisations, although from time to time the party and state to a degree softened their oppression of religion and changed their

tactics. This applies especially to the period of the Great Patriotic War (1941–45) and after the death of Stalin (1953–85).

It is possible to identify various stages in the relationship between Islam and the Soviet authorities. Open mutual hostility between Islam and the Soviet state was replaced by obligatory Islamic loyalty to the Soviet regime. It should be noted that in this period the Communist Party and the government succeeded in isolating part of the mass of poor and landless peasants of Central Asia and the Volga region from the more prosperous Muslim leaders and clergy with various socio-economic and class slogans. ‘Red mullahs’ appeared from the lower ranks of the Islamic clergy; they openly adjusted the ideology of Islam to the requirements of the time and strove to coordinate the dogma of Islam with the ideals of socialism. This Islamic movement, advantageous to the Soviet regime, was supported in every way, overtly and covertly, by party and state bodies. Thus from 1920 to 1924 the Muslim clergy of Central Asia and the Volga region officially recognised Soviet power and proclaimed ‘all actions of the opposition Muslim movement and *basmachi* [members of the anti-Soviet movement in Soviet Central Asia—Ed.] as sinful and contrary to the *sharia* [Islamic law]’.¹

The construction of socialism in the republics of Soviet Central Asia came up against great difficulties. In the struggle for socialism the slogans and calls for intensifying the class struggle carried over into the field of Islam. Islam and Muslim organisations were regarded as potentially class enemies. Thus a lecturer on basmachism at the 4th Plenum of the Turkestan Central Executive Committee on 18 July 1922 stated:

With the establishment of Soviet power in Ferghana our slogan ‘Down with the old world, down with the bourgeoisie’ was translated: ‘Back to the old world’. We have taken all the mosques and madrassahs which we have closed, we have arrested the kazis and ulama and in the struggle with religious prejudices the Quran, holy to Muslims, has been burned in Margelan.²

Between 1928 and 1941 the sharia courts were dissolved. The Muslim clergy were totally removed from participation in citizens’ judicial and legal affairs. From 1924 to 1928 the Muslim clergy received yet another blow. The Soviet government enacted a measure on the gradual transition from the Arabic written language to the Latin alphabet (and subsequently to the Russian alphabet) in regions where Islam was predominant. The Georgians and Armenians were allowed to retain their alphabets. Teaching in *mekteb* (Muslim primary schools) and madrassahs was one of the basic means of preserving Muslim culture and Islamic traditions in Russia. The appearance of new schools and new scripts deprived religious leaders of the possibility of engaging in the Islamic education of the next generation. This act on the part of the Soviet government also deprived the clergy of their material resources.

All taxes and contributions required by Islam were abolished. In this way Islamic organisations were deprived of the possibility of engaging in charitable work. Islamic organisations and mosques were forbidden to concern themselves with peoples’ needs and to provide aid to the elderly, invalids and orphans. Thus the Communist Party and the Soviet government had, as early as 1930, relieved Islam and its organisations of their social functions and forbidden Islamic theologians to produce their theological works. The 70 years of existence of Soviet Muslims was not reflected in theological works, because for the whole of that period Islamic theology was dead. But Islam lived on in the lives and minds of the people. Popular Islam was simple in

comparison with the Islam of the theologians but with the weakening of communist and party control it immediately began to manifest itself with surprising vigour.

The Soviet system created yet another unusual situation for Muslims. An unofficial, totally unregistered Islam – so-called ‘parallel’ Islam – grew up all over Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Volga region. The authorities hoped that the few registered mosques and Islamic associations would be easier to control and that with the help of official Islam it would be possible to paralyse unofficial Islam. The official mosques and the registered clergy, dependent on Soviet legislation, struggled with their rival, ‘parallel’ Islam; but it turned out to be necessary to use the destructive powers of the administrative organs. At the same time it would be a mistake to think that registered Islamic organisations would be continually reliable as far as the party organisations and the authorities were concerned. The Soviet government and the party limited and repressed official Islam also. Not infrequently, official Islam shielded parallel Islam and acted in concert with it, because the people knew very well of the contacts of official Islam and the clergy with the administrative organs.

We may sum up the evolution of Islam to the start of *perestroika* in 1985 as follows. Having deprived Islam of all social functions and limited believers to satisfying only their religious requirements, the party and the government did not succeed in achieving their aim, and Muslims in Russia and the CIS did not lose their faith. Official data to the effect that by the 1960s the Soviet Union had become a land of mass unbelief did not correspond to the truth. Sociological research carried out in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan after 1985 confirmed that from 60 to 80 per cent of those questioned replied that they considered themselves Muslims.³ Thus adherence to Islam in Russia and the CIS bears a mass character.

With the weakening of Moscow’s control and the removal of support for local parocracies, practical Islamic organisations moved into the foreground. At present, somewhat curious situations are to be found in Russia. When the Communist Party was in power Islam and Muslim organisations were effectively isolated. Politicians and ideologists avoided contact with Islam and Muslims. Now, however, many opposition parties, organisations and movements are seeking support from Islam in the struggle for deputies’ places in the Duma and parliament. Thus some young Muslim politicians, though not particularly interested in Islam, are nonetheless making attempts to reach parliament via Islamic organisations. The Islamic Party of Russia and the Islamic Party *Nur* (Light) in Russia, for example, have been used in this way.

The fall of the communist regime and the collapse of the Soviet Union had a destructive effect on old Islamic organisations in Russia and the CIS. These events strengthened nationalism and exacerbated ‘inter-national’ relations, which shattered the Muslim Boards in the Northern Caucasus and the Volga region. To replace the single Muslim Board in the Northern Caucasus, new national and territorial Boards arose in Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Adygeya, Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Northern Ossetia, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria; and in Moscow, Saratov and elsewhere. At present the number of Muslim Boards in Russia is 17.

In Russia and republics of the former Soviet Union new Islamic communities and mosques have appeared which refuse to subordinate themselves to the Muslim Boards. Whereas formerly imams were appointed to mosques by the leaders of the Muslim Boards, now the believers themselves not infrequently elect imams for their mosques. Increasingly, mosques are refusing to transfer their income to the budgets of the Muslim Boards.

Turkic Organisations in Russia and the CIS

Since in the former Soviet Union the overwhelming majority of Muslims (more than 90 per cent) were of Turkic descent, the problem of Turkic unity and Turkism took on a special immediacy and urgency. In connection with this it should be noted that in Moscow over 20 national cultural Muslim centres have been founded. In the cultural centres of Turkic peoples in Moscow—Tatars, Azerbaijanis, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Turkmens and others—particular attention is paid to studying the cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples, the spiritual and cultural values of Islam and the Arabic and Turkish languages. Perhaps the most notable example of this is the excellent monthly journal *Türk Dünyası* (*Turkic World*), the first number of which was published in April 1991. It is to be published in the Azeri and Russian languages in Baku, in the Turkish language in Istanbul, and in German, English and French in Frankfurt. The journal has correspondents in Ashgabat, Baku, Tashkent, Almaty, Bishkek, Kazan', Ufa, Yakutsk, Abakan, Derbent, Bakhchisarai (Crimea) and elsewhere. Unfortunately, because of financial difficulties and organisational questions, publication of the journal is being delayed. In the first issue of *Türk Dünyası* the aims and tasks of Turkism are set forth. Publicistic, cultural, historical, linguistic and religious issues, and prose and poetry, will be featured in this independent journal. Acute socio-political issues will be discussed objectively.

Perhaps the most remarkable event in the history of the Turkic peoples took place from 19 to 21 September 1995. The founding conference of the Congress of Turkic Peoples of Russia was convened in Moscow. It is notable that representatives of all the Turkic peoples of Russia took part. Another particular feature of the Congress was that Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish and Karaite Turks amicably discussed general Turkic questions. The Congress firmly decided that religious adherence was the private affair of any Turkic person. It was no coincidence that a representative of the Altai people, an ancient homeland of the Turks, was elected chairman of the Congress.

Islamic Parties in Russia

With the fall of the communist regime in the Soviet Union the one-party system collapsed. In Russia and other states of the CIS new secular and religious parties and organisations arose and revived old ones forbidden in the years of Soviet power: *Birlik* (Unity) in Uzbekistan; *Rastakhiz* (Revival) in Tajikistan; *Musavat* (Equality) in Azerbaijan; the National Front *Alash* in Kazakhstan, and others. Although these parties are secular they have enriched their programmes and plans of action with Islamic spiritual values.

The Islamic Revival Party (IRP) and the Islamic Democratic Party of Dagestan (IDPD) have aroused great interest among citizens of Russia (*Rossiyane*). The Islamic Revival Party was formed in spring 1990 by a group of enthusiastic young Muslims. At first they were active in Dagestan, Astrakhan' and Moscow, although among the party's founders were immigrants from Central Asia, Azerbaijan and other regions. One of the IRP's founders, Valiakhmed Sadur, said that initially it was planned to create three regional sections of the party, in Central Asia, in the Northern Caucasus and in the European part of the Russian Federation.⁴ However, international conflicts and a negative attitude on the part of the administrations of the Central Asian republics and Kazakhstan towards the IRP have not allowed it to broaden its activity. For example, in the second half of 1990 the Supreme Soviets of

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan prohibited the activity of the IRP on their territories. Quite often this party has joined ranks with the democratic movement and the movement in defence of human rights. Evidently this kind of political activity by the IRP does not suit the leaders of the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union, where the influence of former communists is still strong. It is no coincidence that the President of Uzbekistan, I.A. Karimov, does not believe that his republic is ready for democracy yet;⁵ the leaders of Uzbekistan are apprehensive that more than a million young unemployed people could prove beyond their control. Democracy and freedom could untie the hands of these people and direct them towards destructive activities. For not everyone understands the significance of democracy and not everyone knows how to make use of it. Quite often, therefore, Islamic organisations in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan appeal to democratic forces in Russia to bring pressure to bear upon communists in Muslim republics.

In its programme documents the IRP points to the necessity for the restoration of Islamic values among the Muslim peoples of Russia and the CIS, the purging of alien elements from the Muslim religion, and its return to the primary sources of Islam, the Quran and the Sunna (the practices and sayings of the Prophet).

From 11 to 12 April 1992 a regional conference of the IRP took place in Saratov, as a result of which a series of regional structures was set up in places where Muslims of the former USSR were living together. In Tajikistan the IRP became an independent party. Regional structures of the IRP operate in the Northern Caucasus, Central Asia and some other regions of Russia. The IRP organisation in Chechnya functions independently.

The great majority of IRP members in the regional structures of European Russia and Siberia are Tatars and immigrants from the Azerbaijani community. One of the party's leading ideologists is Geidar Jamal, an Azerbaijani by nationality. Born in 1947, he entered the Arabic department of the Institute of Oriental Languages (now the Institute of Asia and Africa) at Moscow State University, but was soon expelled. Geidar Jamal is chairman of the editorial and publishing committee of the *Al-Vakhdad* newspaper, of which the IRP is the founder. Among the leaders of the party, Jamal is distinguished by his radicalism. He and his supporters oppose the more moderate educational approach of V.A. Sadur (a Tatar by nationality).

Among the members of the IRP in Moscow there are non-Muslims, for example S. Dunayev, who was born in Moscow in 1974 and was attracted by the Sufi teachings of Islam. He holds the post of coordinator for spiritual contacts with non-Muslims. Aleksei Ikonnikov, another non-Muslim, is also a member of the editorial board of *Al-Vakhdad*. In Jamal's opinion Islam is quite close to Russian culture. Historical circumstances have meant that the 'spirit of capitalism', characteristic of the West, did not arise in Russian culture. Jamal believes that Russia's only chance of avoiding political disappearance is to become an Islamic state. The radical wing of the IRP to which Jamal belongs believes that Russia has a chance to escape from its spiritual crisis by means of Islamic spiritual values. IRP radicalism is also expressed in Jamal's belief that 'Jamaat ul-Islami' in Pakistan, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and the Association of Muslim Brothers 'Ikhvan al-Muslimin' are fraternal organisations.

Jamal believes Iran to be the only Muslim country with a genuinely Muslim government. Saudi Arabia enjoys far less sympathy in IRP ruling circles. It is saved only by the fact that the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are on its territory. The IRP leaders have in general a negative attitude to monarchical governments. Finally, the IRP leaders' greatest hostility is aroused by Turkey, where religion is separated from

the state, which is more Europeanised and which is a member of NATO. In the opinion of the IRP leaders Turkey is trying to create a Christianised Islam, which is a blind alley along which the Muslims of the former Soviet Union must under no conditions go. Europeanisation in Turkey was brought about by force. Now, though, the socio-economic and spiritual level of life in Turkey is approaching that of European states. Turkey ought now to bring in a genuinely democratic government, as a westernised system will immediately expire and it is impossible to make an eastern society into a western one.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had a powerful influence on the IRP. In the majority of cases the regional sections of the IRP felt the effect of the influence of this disintegration and took the path of 'sovereignisation' when setting up their political parties.

The Islamic Democratic Party of Dagestan (IDPD) was founded at the end of 1989 and beginning of 1990 by the human rights activist Abdurashid Saidov. It is one of the largest parties in Dagestan and is regarded as one of the most influential. The muftis of Dagestan unofficially support it.

Saidov is in close contact with the democrats of Russia. In the 1980s he worked with human rights organisations and was admitted to the International Society for Human Rights. In 1988, at one of his first public meetings, Saidov made a radical speech, attracting the attention of his compatriots. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the KGB began to persecute him and the regional committee of the Dagestan Party, having decided to open criminal proceedings, arrested him. Saidov was obliged to appeal to democratic public opinion in Moscow to defend him against this arbitrary persecution. The newspaper *Moskovskiyе novosti* in the person of its editor Yegor Yakovlev responded and raised its voice in his defence. At the end of 1989 the Dagestanis nominated him as a candidate for people's deputy of the Russian Federation. In his campaign speeches Saidov did not depict a happy future for any single voter but spoke the bitter truth. This was naturally regarded as militant anti-communism, as a result of which the party *apparatus* impeded his work. He lost the election, but this did not stop him. During the election campaign Saidov travelled throughout Dagestan and met many who supported his ideas. It was then that he decided to found a socio-political party, which he named the Islamic Democratic Party of Dagestan. From the very start Saidov believed that the party should be a union of Muslim believers and those democrats whose work corresponded most closely to the norms of Islam, to Islamic ethics. Saidov believed that it was necessary to form a union of Muslim communities of Dagestan with the democratically-inclined intelligentsia, since to think of creating some kind of sharia-based state without the secular intelligentsia was just a dream, mere good intentions; and to create a purely democratic state without taking believers and religious communities into account was also an absurdity. The creation of the IDPD was proposed precisely as a means of finding a compromise between the religious community and democratic public opinion.

Geidar Jamal, the radically-inclined leader of the IRP, does not agree with Saidov's position. In his opinion a union of the secular intelligentsia and believers would lead to the secular intelligentsia simply taking the lead, because as a rule they are politically more experienced and more trained in contacts with the party and official administration. Believers have far less flexibility in such matters. The leader of the IDPD understood this, but he affirmed that it was undesirable, even dangerous, for the Muslim community not to take account of the secular intelligentsia, just as it would be undesirable for the secular intelligentsia not to take account of the Muslim

community. They were two parts of the same society and it was impossible to reject either one or the other, but it was possible to find a compromise, to find common tasks for both. Jamal does not ignore the role of a secular intelligentsia in an Islamic movement, although he does not consider it obligatory to form a bloc with them automatically. If one speaks of a party in which there is a declared union of intellectuals and believers, one is saying that the believers will be pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the intelligentsia. He believes that Islam is an objective super-value but that this objective and unique super-value is in the hands of people who do not wish to engage in politics, do not understand politics and do not know how to fight for their rights. Jamal avers that if the civilised aims of Islam are correctly explained to educated, honest, secular intellectuals, they will take up Islamic positions. Islamic political leaders should bring their positions, that is to say the positions of political Muslims, to the notice of the broadest possible circles. Meanwhile, the IDPD leader believes that a Muslim does not have the right to sleep peacefully if his state is being ruled by unrighteous, morally dishonourable people.

The IDPD is under pressure from Dagestan's partocratic leadership. The events in Chechnya have given Moscow a thorough shock. Moscow thinks it better to have the old communists in power with their established system of channels and levers. One of the most important questions for the IDPD is that of Dagestan's relations with Russia and with Moscow. Saidov does not think that his party adopts an unreservedly pro-Moscow position. It supports changes in Dagestan's economic relations with Russia, so that it should not be, as until now, a raw materials base for Russia. For example, the Caspian basin produces a large quantity of black caviar, but as there is at present no manufacturing industry in Dagestan, it all goes to Russia, and Russia receives most of the profit. The IDPD is against this kind of 'friendship' with Russia. Dagestan extracts oil, which is also pumped across its borders, so the republic is left with no profits. Dagestanis are against such relations with Russia. The IDPD leaders believe that Dagestan should be more economically independent and should have the right to manage its own resources. If Dagestan's one-sided relationship with Russia continues, there could be a political confrontation in the future, but Saidov believes that such a confrontation would not be advantageous at present. Dagestan does not have an industrial and economic structure that could earn anything at all without ties with other countries. Economic integration with Russia is so great that it would be painful to sever it. If, in future, Dagestan does want severance from Russia it will be necessary to transfer the economy smoothly onto an independent track – smoothly, not by cutting it off with a sword.

One of the most critical questions for Dagestan and Azerbaijan is that of the position of certain groups of Lezgis and their aspiration to create an independent republic to be called Lezgistan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Lezgis, Ossetians and other peoples found themselves in different states of the CIS. Saidov thinks that his party should not support the Lezgi movement *Sadval*, which calls for the territorial dismemberment of Azerbaijan and the uniting of part of Azerbaijan and southern Dagestan to form the independent republic of Lezgistan.

Recently there have been rumours that there could be events in Dagestan similar to those of the Islamic movement in Chechnya, although Saidov thinks it unlikely that the Chechen events will be repeated in Dagestan. He explains this as follows: in Chechnya there are basically two peoples, the Chechens and the (local) Ingush. It was this binary composition of the population of Chechnya that brought about a lack of unanimous support for Dudayev. Dagestan is a multinational republic, so it is unlikely that the Chechen experience will be repeated there. Relations between the

different ethnic groups in Dagestan are tense and extremely volatile.

Islamic parties and organisations became very active before the elections to the Russian parliament at the end of 1995: the Union of Muslims of Russia, the Islamic party *Nur* and others. These little-known parties have been able to accomplish very little for the Muslims of Russia, but their leaders made great efforts to enter the Russian Duma. These parties did not choose to create a common platform to unite Muslims because personal ambitions predominated. The former leader of the Muslim Union, Khalidov, was accused of having overly close relations with Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the LDPR (Liberal Democratic Party of Russia). At present the general secretary of the Union of Muslims of Russia is Sheikh Mukaddas Bibarsov, the imam of the Volga Muslims, who is trying to revive the activity of the Union. As for the Islamic *Nur* party, whose chairman is Khamid Akhmedovich Yakhin, it faces a big task in becoming a focus for the Muslims of Russia.

In speaking of the Islamic parties of Russia, note must be taken of Akhmedkadi Magomedovich Akhtayev. He was born in 1942 in the village of Kudal', Gunibek district, in the republic of Dagestan. From his earliest years he studied the Arabic language and Islamic doctrine with leading local Islamic scholars. He graduated from the Dagestan medical institute in 1970. At the founding congress of the Islamic Revival Party in 1990 he was elected *amir* (chairman). The party has sections in nine republics of the former Soviet Union. At present Akhtayev is the leader of the Islamic Centre of Dagestan (in Makhachkala). He has performed the *haj* more than once and has taken part in international conferences in Istanbul, London and Khartoum, and in other Arabic countries.

Islamic Charitable Organisations in Russia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the communist regime Muslim charitable organisations grew up in the Muslim republics of Russia—Adygeya, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkiria, Northern Ossetia, Karachayevo-Cherkessia, Tatarstan, Chechnya and Ingushetia—and in large cities where there are close communities of Muslims. Charity is an important social and moral function of Islam. Mosques, especially in rural areas, were centres of a free hiring service: Muslims could obtain carpets and crockery free of charge for funerals, weddings and entertaining guests. Mosques were not only for services of worship, they also organised help for the needy far better than any trade union or party. They would hold a *khashar*, that is to say a voluntary day of work, when Muslims would gather together as a community to help a needy person build a house. When the communist regime totally deprived the Muslim religion of its social function, Muslims suffered both materially and spiritually. Today Muslims are reviving the social function and charitable activity of Islam in Russia.

We must note at once that the general economic difficulties in Russia do not permit the development of large-scale charitable activity. The financial possibilities of Muslim organisations are limited at present. International Muslim organisations are carrying on important charitable work in Russia – the International Muslim League, and organisations from Arab countries (especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait), Iran and Turkey. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait finance the studies of young Russian Muslims abroad, partially support the expenses of *haj* pilgrims from Russian and the CIS and send Islamic literature to Muslims in Russia.

Naturally, Russian Muslims themselves are also setting up charitable centres, albeit modest ones. The Muslim Boards in Russia provide material help to pension-

ers, large families and orphans. Mosques in Russia are involved in charitable work. In Moscow, Sheikh Ravil Gainetdin, the imam of the Central Mosque and chairman of the Muslim Board of the Central and European Region, Sheikh Makhmud Velitov, imam of the historical mosque in Moscow and head of the *Beit Allah* Muslim society, and other Islamic organisations are involved in charitable activity.

A 'Sunnat Centre' has been founded in the Russian House of Charity *Dom Miloserdiya*. Its leader is the well-known surgeon Dr Magomet Abdulkhabirov. Highly-qualified surgeons and nurses work in the centre, and there is modern equipment and, of course, sterile conditions. The centre is qualified to perform ritual circumcision. In the centre consultations are also provided about the hygienic significance of circumcision. The centre does not of course take upon itself all the expenses of surgical operations. However, poor Muslims and refugees receive medication free of charge, and boys from poor families receive ritual circumcision *gratis*.

The Open University of Islamic Culture in Moscow also undertakes charitable work. The rector of the University, Dr Said Kyamilov, and the pro-rector, Kharis Akhmedovich Saubyanov, give financial aid to invalids and the sick, and the funeral expenses of deceased Muslims are also provided. The University of Muslim Culture also organises charitable receptions at Muslim festivals.

Muslim educational institutes in Russia

Under the Soviet regime there was not a single Muslim educational institute in the whole of Russia. At present hundreds of madrassahs and open Muslim universities are functioning in the Northern Caucasus, the Volga region, the Urals and other places in Russia.

The Islamic University 'Al-Fatih'

This university is in Kazan'. At the beginning of 1995 a group of Tatar scholars, with the support of the Muslim Board of Tatarstan, received a certificate of registration as the Independent Open Al-Fatih Islamic University of Kazan'. The university has five faculties: theological (Islamic), financial and economic, medical, juridical and technological. The cycle of humanitarian disciplines is based upon the philosophy and practice of Islam. Graduates will work in various areas of the economy. The university has courses in Islam and science, Islamic economy, philosophy, the Quran, commentary on the Quran, the Hadith, Muslim law and other basic educational subjects. By the end of their studies graduates will know Arabic, Turkish and English as well as the Tatar language.

The Open University of Islamic Culture

This university was opened on 12 January 1995 in Moscow. The rector of the university is Dr Said Kyamilov, an Arabist and philologist and a senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Russia. The pro-rector is Kharis Akhmedovich Saubyanov. Lectures in the university are given by Professor G. M. Kerimov, N. Gainullin and other teachers of Arabic. The university's programme includes a broad range of Islamic disciplines. There are two courses of studies. Three groups are studying the Arabic language. There are over 150 students at the university. The age and professions of the students vary; there are doctors, engineers, researchers from academic institutions, students in higher education, sec-

ondary school students and pensioners. The university is financially supported by Kuwait. Lectures take place twice a week. The programme of studies includes the following subjects: the Quran, the Hadis, the Arabic language, the Life (*Sira an-Nabi*) of the Prophet, the Arabian peninsula as the cradle of the prophet, the sharia and the Muslim way of life, Islam in the history and culture of Russia and other subjects.

The madrassah in Karachayevo-Cherkessia

A madrassah has been functioning since 1991 in the village of Uchkeken in Malo-Karachayevo district. Even before the madrassah opened, a council of imams was formed in Uchkeken, which coordinated eight Muslim communities. Abu Yusuf Efendi Ebzayev was elected the leader of the council: he is very knowledgeable about the Quran and the Sunna. As early as 1990 he began active work teaching people Islam and calling for observation of sharia laws. In summer 1991, at the request of Abu Yusuf, a temporary class in the house of pioneers was acquired for studying Islam in the village of Uchkeken. The influx of people wanting to study was so great that from the first week it became necessary to think about organising a madrassah. Men, women and children and even old people wanted to learn about Islam. More than 150 people attend the madrassah.

A crisis grew up around the madrassah: the authorities banned it. More than 7000 people signed a letter to the local soviet demanding that studies should continue. The council of imams sent the letter to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation. Finally permission was given for studies to resume. A programme has been established in the madrassah: lectures are given regularly, a faculty of lecturers has been formed and there are even lecturers invited from Jordan. In some republics of the Northern Caucasus there are women's madrassahs.

Notes and references

- ¹ R.M. Madzhidov, *Preodoleniya religioznosti v usloviyakh perekhoda k sotsializmu minuya kapitalizma* (Dushanbe, 1973), p. 7.
- ² See *Izvestiya AN Tajikistana*, series *Filosofiya, ekonomika, pravovedeniye*, no. 4, 1988, p. 70.
- ³ *Sostoyaniye religioznosti i ateisticheskogo vospitaniya v regionakh traditsionnogo rasprostraneniya Islama: materialy sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniya* (Akademiya obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS, Sovetskaya sotsiologicheskaya assotsiyatsiya, Moscow, 1989), pp. 143–64.
- ⁴ N. Kamil, 'Imenem Allakha', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 August 1991.
- ⁵ *Izvestiya*, 7 September 1991.

(Translated from the Russian by Jane Ellis)