MUSLIM COMMUNITIES OF THE ROSTOV REGION

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A vast body of works has recently appeared by Russian social scientists who look into the dynamics of religious revival and re-Islamization in Russia. They mainly concentrate on administrative units with autochthonous Muslim populations, conflict areas, and non-Muslim regions, some of them fairly developed economically, which have found themselves at the receiving end of the "migration assault."

There are territories with predominantly Russian-speaking populations which, while subjected to migration pressure, have never experienced obviously ethnic-related problems. The Rostov Region (about which much less has been written[1]) is one such place: this does not mean, however, that it does not have its share of dynamics in ethnic and confessional relationships. There are such dynamics, which call for a detailed investigation to obtain a clearer picture of the changes in the ethnic and religious balance on the Don.

Shortage of empirical data has forced me to combine traditional sources with the participant-observer method and information from regional Internet publications and the local media. Meetings with members of Muslim communities of Rostov and the Rostov Region, as well as contacts with regional bureaucrats responsible for ethnic policies also provided a wealth of information.

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The Turkic-speaking peoples, one of the traditional elements of the Cossacks, are among the autochthonous Muslim groups in the Don area. Without going too far back into the past of the nomadic tribes and ethnic origins of the local people, I shall limit myself to saying that the earliest information about the Tatar-Cossacks on the Don dates back to the 17th century. "The Tatar settlements on the Don appeared no less than 400 years ago after the Russians had captured Kazan. Some of the Tatars moved to Bashkiria, Siberia, the Kazakh steppes, Central Asia and the Don."[2] They formed one of the ethnic groups and, "while being Cossacks in terms of social affiliation, the Don Tatars preserved all their cultural and everyday specifics, including religious (Islam) features."[3]

Relations with the neighboring mountain people played an important role in the life of the Don Cossacks, yet there were no deep-rooted Caucasian ethnic groups there, while those who did live in

[1] See: "Islam na Donu i Kubani," in: S.E. Berezhnoy, I.P. Dobaev, and P.V. Krayniuchenko, *Islam i Islamizm na Iuge Rossii,* Rostov-on-Don, 2003, pp. 202-208.

[2] V.S. Brezhnev, "Religiozno-etnicheskie gruppy Rostovskoy oblasti," in: *Mezhnatsional'nye otnoshenia segodnia,* Rostov-on-Don, Tbilisi, 1997, p. 54.

[3] *Donskaia istoria v voprosakh i otvetakh,* ed. by E.I. Dulimov and S.A. Kislitsin, Vol. 1, Rostov-on-Don, 1997, p. 86.

the region became assimilated into its social and cultural environment. The geographic location of the free people of the Don area, rightly called "the North Caucasian gates," made contacts between the local Turkic-speaking peoples and Caucasian Muslims easier, which added certain specific features to the local Muslim community.

People from the village of Tatarka close to Novocherkassk (Tatars and Nogais whose ancestors had served in the Don Cossack Army) were the region's earliest Muslims: the village had a mosque, while local self-administration was organized according to the Cossack pattern.[4] Over time, however, the village lost its mono-confessional image. Today it is mainly populated by Russian-speakers.[5]

It seems that until the late 19th century, the Don Tatar-Cossacks comprised the bulk of the local Muslims when Tatars from other gubernias, mainly from the Penza Gubernia, were invited to settle there. The contacts established at that time helped the Penza Tatars flee to the Don to avoid the dekulakization and repressions of Stalin's time. The wave mounted by the late 1930s. These people formed the backbone of the Muslim community of the Rostov Region.

Another Muslim wave reached the city of Rostov and the Rostov Region after the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) and in the years of the Komsomol construction projects. The local plant of agricultural machines and other industrial projects were built by those who came from all corners of the Soviet Union. There was a large group of Penza Tatars among them, attracted by kindred ties with the local Tatars. Since the late 1960s, people of Caucasian origin have been arriving in fairly large numbers to settle mainly in the region's eastern districts: Zimovniki, Remontnoe, Zavetnoe, and Dubovskoe. A large number of young men and women from the Caucasus came to Rostov to study; many of them, after forming families, settled there permanently.

Disintegration of the Soviet Union caused another Muslim migration wave, predominantly from the Caucasus and Central Asia: many were prompted to migrate by the conflicts in the post-Soviet expanse, others moved for economic reasons in search of a better life.

According to different estimates, there are about 110,000 Muslims, or 2.5 percent of the region's total population, in the region. The majority are Sunnis. (Today, there are 43,000 Muslims in the city of Rostov.) According to the 1989 population census, Chechens and Tatars were the two main ethnic groups of Muslims; the latter settled mainly in Rostov and other cities.

The events of recent decades changed the region's ethnic composition and added new, specific features to the Muslim community. According to the All-Russia Population Census of 2002, the Meskhetian Turks are the largest ethnic Muslim group in the region; Tatars predominate in towns, even though the Azeri group is slightly bigger. The number of Chechens has dropped somewhat; most of those who stayed behind live in the countryside, there are no more than 2,000 of them in towns and cities. The number of people belonging to other Caucasian ethnic groups increased. This is especially true of the Azeris.[6]

A mosque built in Rostov in 1906 continued functioning until 1963 when it was transferred to the military and partly destroyed to provide a place for a military club. In exchange, the community was given a small dilapidated structure which it used as a mosque. The prayer house on Bartholomew St. functioned until the late 1970s when the community received another building on Turkestanskaia St.

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[4] See: *Islam na Donu i Kubani,* p. 205.

[5] See: M. Bondarenko, "V stanitse Tatarskoy ostalos chetyre doma." An interview with Khashim Devet'iarov, deputy chairman of "Nur," the Tatar Public-Cultural Organization of the Rostov Region [http://regions.ng.ru/far/2001-04-10/2_house.html].

[6] Here and in the Table, the returns of the population census were used (see: *Kratkaia sotsial'no-demograficheskaia kharakteristika naselenia Rostovskoy oblasti: Po dannym Vsesoiuznoy perepisi,* Part 1, Rostov-on-Don, 1991, pp. 198-201; *Rostovskaia oblast v tsifrakh 2003. Statisticheskiy ezhegodnik,* Rostov-on-Don, 2004, p. 44).

Size of the Main Muslim Ethnic Groups in the Region

According to the 1989 Census		According to the 2002 Census	
Chechens	17,181	Meskhetian Turks	28,285
Tatars	17,132	Tatars	17,866
Azeris	10,215	Azeris	16,498
Darghins	6,179	Chechens	15,469
Avars	4,073	Darghins	6,735
Kazakhs	3,865	Avars	4,038
Lezghians	3,260	Lezghians	3,659
Uzbeks	2,174	Kazakhs	3,021
Kumyks	2,070	Tabasarans	2,231
Kyrgyz	1,665	Uzbeks	1,820

In Soviet times, young people showed no interest in religion, yet during the major Muslim holidays (Ramadan, Kurban Bayram, etc.), several thousand people, mainly Tatars, gathered together in the mosque and outside it. Foreign students (nearly all of them from the Middle East, who came to study medicine at the Rostov Medical Institute) frequented the mosque.

The situation changed in the early 1990s when a religious revival began across the former Soviet Union. People from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus—those who had come earlier, guest workers, students from the local higher educational establishments, and refugees—started attending the mosque regularly. Meskhetian Turks, Chechens, Azeris, and Daghestani peoples became part of the Muslim community of the city and region. Citizens of Turkey, Arab countries, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan (mostly students and businessmen) preferred joint (primarily Friday) prayers, yet the local Tatars were still in the majority. In the early 1980s, Friday prayers attracted no more than 20 people (mostly elderly Tatars); 10 years later, attendance grew to about 100; on holidays over 1,000 people come. It is mainly young Caucasian and Central Asian migrants, as well as students from Muslim countries, who are swelling the ranks. The share of the local Tatars dropped considerably, yet most women attending the mosque are Tatars.

In the past, the mosque functioned under the aegis of the Mukhtasibat (Local Administration) of the Muslims of the Rostov Region, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic Republics and de jure belonged to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the European Part of the U.S.S.R. and Siberia (SAMES). In Soviet times, the local administration was the central one for the Muslims of the Union republics (later they became independent), but in fact the administration's activities were limited to the Rostov Region. When the Spiritual Administration to which the Mukhtasibat belonged fell apart, the local administration went through several legal restructurings.

The official Muslim clergy of the Russian Federation split after several transformations and set up new structures: the SAMES fell apart and was transformed into a Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia (CSAM) with its headquarters in Ufa (according to tradition); the Spiritual

Administration of the Muslims of European Part of Russia (SAMER) and, sometime later, a Council of the Muftis of Russia (CMR) were set up with headquarters in Moscow. The split was also caused by the fact that in different regions officially registered communities followed different centers and acted simultaneously, often duplicating each other. This rivalry sometimes develops into mutual accusations of Wahhabism, which naturally affects ethnic and confessional relations (this happened in the community of the Rostov Region).

A Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Rostov Region and the South of Russia, which follows CSAM, was set up on the basis of the local mukhtasibat, which has been headed by Tatar Djafar Bikmaev since 1982. The appearance of new leaders in the local community resulted in a Main Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Rostov Region (MSAM RR) being set up in Novocherkassk to counterbalance the traditional structure. The new structure is headed by another Tatar, Fliur Arslanov. The new structure supports the SAMER and is part of it. Later the traditional structure was given a new name—the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Rostov Region (CSAM RR). Today it unites about eight communities of the city and region which have no influence beyond this territory. The communities mainly unite Meskhetian Turks living in the Zernograd, Neklinovka, Vesely, and Egorlykskaia districts; the community registered in the Dubovskoe District is dominated by Chechens and Ingushes. In the not so distant past, the MSAM RR also had about eight communities—in Novocherkassk, Shakhty, Gukovo, and some other places. On a decision of the law enforcement bodies, two of them were closed down.

It should be said that the larger part of the communities (especially in cities and towns) which follow either the MSAM RR or CSAM RR are formal structures set up according to the law, which gives centralized spiritual administrations alone the right to engage in economic activities and financial transactions. A large part of the money comes as donations and is mainly used for everyday needs, such as paying for public utilities, business trips for officials, etc. In fact, only the CSAM RR is engaged in permanent economic activities.

One of the present leaders of the Rostov communities, Avar Akhmed Abusupianov, represents the Coordinating Center of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus (CCMNC) in Rostov and also has good contacts with the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan (SAMD). He is mainly supported by people from the Caucasus and some of the local Tatars, his authority being partly based on his reputation as a supporter of unity of the city community. As distinct from F. Arslanov, he did not set up (legally) individual communities oriented toward other centers, in particular, the CCMNC and SAMD. The CCMNC has no official office in Rostov.

Muslim leaders of the Rostov Region are often invited to religious ceremonies of other ethnic groups. Djafar Bikmaev, for example, regularly visits communities of Meskhetian Turks and Caucasian diasporas to take part in religious, frequently burial, rituals. Avar Akhmed Abusupianov frequently visits members of the Tatar community; until recently F. Arslanov was supported by people from the Caucasus and Central Asia, which aroused the displeasure of the Tatar community of Novocherkassk.

The traditional and new leaders have different educational backgrounds. The most educated among them is mufti Bikmaev, who has been working in Rostov since the early 1980s. He graduated from the Mir Arab madrasah in Bukhara (one of the few that stayed open under Soviet power); spent several years studying at the Higher Theological Courses of the Theological Department of History and the Humanities at the Morocco Royal University in Fès; worked as deputy Supreme Mufti of the Muslims of Russia Talgat Tadjuddin; and represented the CSAM RF in the presidential administration and the Federal Assembly of Russia. It was due to his personal involvement that the Rostov community received a plot of land at the Northern City Cemetery in the mid-1980s. In 1993, he organized a direct flight from Rostov to Saudi Arabia for pilgrims.

Akhmed Abusupianov, on the other hand, has no religious education, but he is sufficiently erudite: born in Daghestan, one of the most religious (Muslim) regions of Russia, he learned the basics of Islam from his father and studied at a semi-secret religious school in Soviet times; he knows Arabic, has good knowledge of the Koran and Sunnah, and is a trained engineer.

F. Arslanov obtained a much more modest education: he only took religious courses at the Kiev madrasah (Ukraine). He compensates for his comparatively poor religious knowledge with hectic activities which sometimes disconcert both the faithful and officials. Still, he has earned the confidence of the SAMER leaders, who conferred on him the title of akhun of the Rostov Region.

The fact that F. Arslanov was appointed official representative of the Council of the Muftis of Russia in the Southern Federal Okrug showed the confrontation between the central spiritual administrations.[7] The CSAM responded by appointing Djafar-khazrat Bikmaev as the official representative of the supreme mufti in the same okrug.[8] These appointments, however, should not be taken to mean that the two structures have increased their influence on the spiritual administrations of the Northern Caucasus; the very existence of the CCMNC has not removed the contradictions between the structures that split for ethnic reasons.

It should be said that rivalry over official leadership does not affect common Muslims; only those parishioners who are actively involved in the life of their communities and take active part in all collective events are concerned about it. In the recent past, the continued rivalry between the central administrations was embittered by heated discussions of the plans to restore the old mosque to the Muslims and build another mosque in Taganrog; this negatively affected the communities of the city and the region. The heads of various communities vehemently accused one another of being incapable of dealing with the problem or of excessive haste when addressing it: there was the opinion that the pressure worsened the situation.

I have already written that the old mosque on the grounds of a military unit was partly destroyed and reconstructed. The military allowed the faithful to use it for festive prayer meetings which toward the end of the 1990s gathered a crowd of 1,500, yet the decision to transfer it to the Muslims was suspended. The Spiritual Administration headed by Bikmaev obtained a plot of land in the very center of Rostov, yet for want of money the project did not progress beyond the ceremonial laying of the first stone. A new mosque appeared in 2002 in a different place, on Furmanov St., making the question of giving the old mosque back to the Muslims redundant.

Both construction projects provoked a lot of conflicts with those who lived nearby and who were concerned that the new mosques would be frequented mainly by "people of Caucasian origin" (on the whole, the local people are loyal toward the local Tatars). This can be said about nearly all the mosques built in areas with a predominantly Russian-speaking population. In fact, this is not a manifestation of religious intolerance, but rather of elements of Islamo-phobia and Caucasus-phobia in the country.

Turkish businessmen with whom mufti Bikmaev had good contacts and local Muslims (local businessmen among them) helped build the mosque. Some of the local enterprises, the Rostov Helicopter Plant was one of them, deemed it necessary to help too. The new mosque can hold about 1,500 in its two halls—for men (accommodating 800 people) and for women—the women's hall being somewhat smaller; and there are rooms for Sunday classes.

Since the very first day, the Friday prayer meetings have been gathering 300 to 400 people, while the main religious holidays attract over 2,000 (some of them coming from the region's distant cor-

[7] See: "Sovet muftiev Rossii naznachil svoego predstavitelia v Iuzhnom okruge" [http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/print-news/news/id/560533.html].

[8] See: "Djafar-khazrat Bikmaev naznachen predstavitelem predsedatelia Dukhovnogo upravlenia musul'man Rossii po Iuzhnomu federal'nomu okrugu v dukhovnom zvanii naiba verkhovnogo muftia" [http://www.rostov-gorod.ru/index.php?nid=7332].

ners). Even though the region's faithful belong to various ethnic groups and various madhabs within Sunni Islam, there are no conflicts among them. Starting in the mid-1990s, the Russian language has been used for preaching in the central mosque of Rostov (in the old and later new building)—it is a major unifying factor. Since some of the elderly Tatar women who had problems with understanding objected to this, Bikmaev preaches in the Russian and the Tatar languages.

This mosque demonstrates a certain syncretism of the Hanafi and Shafi'i madhabs. The religious ceremonies are carried out according to the former, yet the collective "amen" that ends the reading of the obligatory Surah Al-Fatihah speaks of the Shafi'i influence. It was the Arab faithful, most of whom belong to the Shafi'i madhab, who introduced this tradition; it was supported by people from the Caucasus, who are mainly Shafiites. In mosque attendance the local Tartars are trailing behind the North Caucasian and Central Asian Muslims, even though there are many more elderly Tatars among the mosque-goers; on Fridays, young men from the Caucasus and Central Asia prevail.

Taganrog, too, had its share of a mosque-related scandal: at first the local administration gave permission to start the construction. Later, however, when construction began before the project was endorsed, the city officials recalled their permission, accused mufti Bikmaev of unsanctioned construction work, and took the case to the City Court of Arbitration. On 18 December, 2000, the court ruled that the unfinished building should be removed. The faithful appealed to the Regional Court of Arbitration, which left the earlier ruling in force.[9] The criminal charge instituted against Bikmaev on the fact of illegal construction was soon dismissed due to the absence of components of a crime. The local Cossacks added fuel to the fire by beating up the watchman who guarded the construction site.

In fact, the Don Cossacks at all times have been against building more mosques—they regard them as a conflict factor. In 2002, the Smaller Cossack Meeting addressed three governors, including the governor of the Rostov Region, with a petition that said in particular: "The Don Cossacks are deeply concerned with the attempts of immigrant religious-ethnic groups to create seats of tension by building mosques." In an effort to justify certain decisions, the local Cossacks gave rather erroneous reasoning that: "There have been no mosques on the Don from time immemorial and people have lived in peace and harmony."[10]

These protests notwithstanding, the region is acquiring more and more mosques. In 2004, mosques in Proletarsk and Salsk, mainly attended by the local Ingushes and Chechens, were completed. In Salsk, members of the regional and district administrations attended the opening ceremony along with A. Abusupianov, one of the religious leaders.[11] Both mosques registered as autonomous religious communities, in fact siding with the official representative of CCMNC.

The head of the MSAM RR was directly involved in the project to build a mosque in an old Tatar cemetery in the village of Tatarka in Novocherkassk. The local community objected to this: some of its members believed that it violated the Shari'a. This problem, like similar others elsewhere, was resolved in the usual way: the project was dropped for want of money.

There was information that the Muslim community of Shakhty wanted a mosque of its own; while waiting for permission, a private house was used for religious purposes.[12] For some time the Muslims of this coal-producing town sided with the MSAM of the Rostov Region, after a while,

[9] See: "Sud v Taganroge postanovil snesti nedostroennuiu mechet" [http://www.religio.ru/arch/03May2001/news/1113_print.html].

[10] Iu. Tumanov, "V Rostove-na-Donu sostoialsia Maly Krug Voyskovogo kazach'ego obshchestva" [http://kavkaz.memo.ru/newstext/news/id/491903.html].

[11] See: "Na Donu otkrylas eshche odna mechet" [http://www.rusk.ru/newsdata.php?idar=710545].

[12] See: "Mechet v kazach'em domike" [http://www.relga.rsu.ru/n69/vita69.htm].

however, F. Arslanov's attempt to sell the prayer house cost him his prestige among the community members.

For some time a small prayer house functioned in the western part of Rostov; it was mainly attended by Azeris and newly converted Russian speakers. Azeri Elman headed the community; some time after 2000 the community functioned independently, then it fell apart. The Azeri diaspora of Rostov is over 10,000 strong, yet it hardly affects the religious life of the Muslim community there. The level of religious feelings among the Azeris is low—they follow Shi'a-Sunni Islam at the everyday level by obeying some of the rules—while their national-cultural regional autonomy is much more active.[13]

There are mosques in the region, yet a large number of religious rituals are performed in private houses: apart from the traditional rituals of commemoration of the dead, Muslims frequently gather for collective Friday services in their own homes. The heads of the Rostov Medical Institute let its Muslim students, the larger part of whom are from the Near and Middle East, use a small room in the student's hostel. Most of the medical students, however, who come from the Far Abroad, prefer to attend Friday and holiday prayers in the city mosque. They do not influence the community life in any way and keep to themselves. On major holidays, they gather for collective events, to which their teachers and leaders of the Don community are invited.

As a rule, the local authorities meet the faithful halfway. According to Jawad Kebarov, who heads the community of the Zernograd District, the local soviet of the Golubovka village always allows the Meskhetian Turks to use the club for religious holidays. The district community cannot do much because it is poor: it limits itself to holiday prayer meetings and helps to carry out burial and commemoration of the dead rites. Things are much better in the Neklinovka District where Meskhetian Turks regularly gather for prayers on Fridays and holidays and collect money for the Rostov mosque, while some of its members give direct financial support to the construction project.

The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Rostov Region sent several members of the community of Meskhetian Turks, D. Kebarov among them, to the Rizaetdin bine Fakhretdin Islamic Institute at the CSAM of Russia, which is believed to be a "Tatar" religious educational establishment. It should be said that the share of the religiously educated people in the community of Meskhetian Turks (even among the youth) is much higher than in the Tatar and Caucasian communities. On the whole, in recent decades, the CSAM RR sent six people to the madrasahs of Russia (three from the Tatar community of Rostov, two Meskhetian Turks, and one person from the Morozovsk District). Two of them, including Nail Bikmaev, the mufti's son, who took the Koran-khafiz course in Turkey and who knows the Koran by heart, are studying at Al-Azkhar University (in Egypt), one of the few famous religious educational institutions.

Several elderly Tatars do volunteer work at the city mosque, one of them graduated from a madrasah in Kazan by correspondence. They have enough knowledge to perform the basic Muslim rituals: marriage, burial, commemoration of the dead, etc. Some of the community members, not sent by the spiritual administrations, obtained their religious education independently. In fact, the basic religious needs of the Muslims of the Don (due to their highly inadequate religious knowledge) do not put any strain on the local clergy's religious knowledge. This, however, does not mean that their range of knowledge, normally limited to traditional orthodox thinking, should not be discussed.

Religious education has been always important; when perestroika began mufti Bikmaev started teaching Arabic in Rostov (enough to read the Koran and the main prayers) and the fundamentals of Islam to his students who were mainly Tatars. Later, when the religious revival began, Sunday cours-

[13] See: V. Voloshinova, "Azerbaidzhantsy Rostova otmetili prazdnik Novruz Bayram" [http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/644548.html].

es on the fundamentals of Islam and the Arabic language were opened in the old city mosque; they were attended not only by members of the Tatar community, but also by people from the Caucasus and Central Asia. For some time, Turkish citizens who studied at Rostov State University and members of the Sufi Nurjular order were invited to teach there and in the Meskhetian communities. Upon graduation, these students preferred to go into business; those who wanted to open a Russian-Turkish educational center aroused the suspicion of the law enforcement structures; some were extradited, while the decision about the center was suspended.[14] Today, an imam of the city mosque (a Meskhetian Turk educated in Azerbaijan) and A. Abusupianov teach at the Sunday school attended by 10 to 20 mainly young people.

The changes in the region's ethnocultural structure did not affect the ethnic relations on the Don with the exception of the conflicts with the Meskhetian Turks in the Bagaevskiy District. On the whole, as distinct from the Krasnodar Territory, the situation is stable; this means that politicians stir up conflicts around "Turkish question" in their own interests.

More than once I met Meskhetian Turks at home; invariably they said they were quite satisfied with their life in the region. Many of them point out, however, that they are concerned about the ideas of certain representatives of the local Cossacks regarding their continued stay in the Don area. This explains why the Meskhetian Turks who live in one of the villages of the Neklinovka District do not want to build a mosque; on the whole, however, they live peacefully alongside their Russian-speaking neighbors.[15]

In the region's eastern part, the local people quarreled with Chechen migrants. The fight between them in the village of Bogoroditskaia on 8 March, 2001 stirred up a wave of unrest in several districts. The local Cossacks responded with demands that the Chechens be evicted from the Don area. The Chechens themselves said that "it was the Chechen migrants, not the local people, who started the fight."[16] According to the administration, all ethnic conflicts in the region's east are provoked by economic problems and lack of grazing grounds.[17]

At the same time, the relations between the Muslim clergy and the secular authorities are, on the whole, normal and constructive; they fruitfully cooperate in conflict settlement. Leaders of some of the communities are regularly invited to round table discussions and conferences attended by the city and regional administration; Muslim leaders can often be seen in the office of the President's Representative in the Southern Federal Okrug, where they discuss urgent problems, etc. On the whole, the clergy is satisfied with the situation in the ethnic and confessional sphere, describes it as normal, and says there are no radical or extremist groups and organizations on the Don.[18]

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To sum up. In the past few decades, certain ethnic and confessional changes have taken place in the region. Today, ethnic groups without historical roots in the region have taken first place among the Muslims in terms of numerical strength. This has affected relations within the Muslim communi-

[14] See: *Vecherniy Rostov,* 19 April and 10 May, 2001.

[15] See: E. Sleptsova, "Osedlye stranniki. Turki-meskhetintsy vpolne mirno sosedstvuiut s kazakami v nebol'shom sele v Rostovskoy oblasti" [http://www.newizv.ru/news/2004-03-25/5447/].

[16] S. Kisin, "Rostovskaia oblast: vesennee obostrenie khronicheskoy natsional'noy problemy" [www.strana.ru/topics/66/01/03/20/53397.html].

[17] See: "V Rostovskoy oblasti mezhnatsional'nye i khoziaystvennye protivorechia tesno sviazany mezhdu soboy" [http://kavkaz.memo.ru/printnews/news/id/655131.html].

[18] See: A. Shapovalov, "Djafar Bikmaev: 'Na Donu shakhidov net'" [http://www.ng.ru/regions/2003-09-16/4_bikmaev.html].

ty. The fact that the spiritual administrations of the Muslims of Russia became divided institutionally and legally negatively affected the power struggle inside the community. Russia's economic imbalance and the Don area's relative attractiveness for immigrants are responsible for the steady increase in the Caucasian and Central Asian diasporas' influence on the everyday life of the local Muslim community. In this respect, much depends on the position of the young Tatar clerics who potentially may claim leadership.

Despite the relative autonomy of the ethnic groups (the traditional Tatar diaspora and the newcomers), certain integration processes are underway in the Muslim community. Contrary to what researchers say about the "self-contained" nature of the Meskhetian Turk communities, they are successfully adjusting to the local conditions. The same can be said about the Caucasian diasporas as well.