The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Kadyrov Aide Calls for Establishing 'Radio Caucaus' to Fight Extremism

By Paul Goble

December 02, 2009



In order to counter extremism in the North Caucasus and prevent young people from joining Islamist radicals, the Russian government should set up a special Caucasus Radio where experts on the region could freely discuss even the most difficult and sensitive problems, an adviser to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov says.

Timur Aliyev, who also works as a journalist, made this proposal Monday to a session on "interconfessional and interethnic dialogue in the media" at a Nalchik forum on "The Caucasus: Tradition and Modernization" that attracted officials, journalists and specialists from across that region and from Moscow as well.

His comments came after other participants highlighted the extent to which the media, both regional and Moscow-based, are failing to win the "counterpropaganda" battle with Islamist and nationalist groups, either because the former are unwilling or unable to discuss many subjects or because the latter are better positioned to appeal to the often alienated young.

Inal Gashokov, the deputy chairman of the Cherkessk city Duma, said regional media must not be "afraid" to talk about nationality problems and "expressed concern" about a disturbing pattern in his own United Russia party. Many of its members, he said, "speak not from ideological positions but from ethno-national ones," thus exacerbating local feelings.

Dzhambulat Umarov, an adviser to the chairman of the Chechen Republic, criticized the media for failing to "explain to young people what jihad is, how the greater jihad is different than the lesser one," and so on. Such explanations are necessary so that young people will "think before going into the forests."

He added that the media must lay more stress on "that which unites people." In particular, he said, the media should stress that "all religions have one foundation, that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are Abrahamic faiths, [descending from a man] who was neither a Jew nor a Christian but rather a *hannif*, that is, a follower of a single God."

"It would be a good thing to propagandize this Abrahamic religion in the context of the unity of the spiritual values of humanity," he continued, thus introducing into yesterday's discussion at Nalchik ideas that have been discussed in the Moscow Patriarchate since Kirill took over.

Aleksei Malashenko, an expert at the Moscow Carnegie Center, agreed on the need for the media to deal with difficult questions. "If we avoid these subjects," he told the group, "then others will take them up" and define them in a different way, especially via the Internet, where "one can say whatever one likes, including the most provocative things."

But one participant in the discussion was skeptical about what the media could achieve. Orkhan Dzhemal, a correspondent for "Russky Newsweek," argued that most interethnic conflicts in the North Caucasus reflect not ideological differences but disputes over land that were triggered by the Russian law regarding "the rehabilitation of repressed peoples."

The media can do only so much about that act and its consequences, Dzhemal suggested, but he nonetheless called for the creation of "national newspapers in Russian associated with the interests of one group or another, on the pages of which it would be possible to conduct 'a certain dialogue'" lest the field be ceded to extremist groups.

The Nalchik meeting was about far more than the media, however, and as today's Vremya Novostei points out, many of the speakers offered some interesting perspectives on the situation in the Caucasus and Moscow's role there. Three speakers made particularly intriguing comments.

First, Kabardino-Balkaria President Arsen Kanokov argued that the North Caucasus could be "an advanced post for modernization" but said some of its traditional values, such as large families and respect for elders, must be preserved. Moreover, he insisted, the much-criticized clans play a useful role by helping officials to identify the best candidates for jobs.

Second, Nikolai Fedoryak, the deputy residential plenipotentiary to the Southern Federal District, said he very much supported the idea of a new official to oversee the North Caucasus, "especially if he receives control over financial flows [to the republics of that region], which the plenipotentiary representative does not have."

And third, Frants Klintsevich, a United Russia Duma deputy, said "unfortunately, it often happens that one responsible group from the region reaches an agreement in Moscow with one set of people, and another group at the very same time reaches one with another," leading "to conflicts which could be avoided if everyone would just live according to the law."

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2009/12/02/kadyrov-aide-calls-for-establishing-radio-caucaus-to-fight-extremism-a35076