



# **Resignification of Borders: Eurasianism and the Russian World**

Nina Friess / Konstantin Kaminskij (eds.)

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## The Imperial Paradox

### Islamic Eurasianism in Contemporary Russia

This chapter discusses the appeal of (Neo-)Eurasianism<sup>1</sup> among Muslim elites in Russia. Muslim leaders—official Muftis and private Islamic intellectuals—employ elements of Eurasianism as an instrument for promoting their interests, and tailor Islam and its history in Russia to fit the overall ideology. The inherent paradox here is that Eurasianism is commonly described as an “ideology of empire”<sup>2</sup> that centers on ethnic Russians and on Orthodox Christianity; Muslims are not usually presented as the backbone of Russia/Eurasia. In fact, neither the Tsarist Empire nor the Soviet Union were particularly sympathetic to Islam; and also in post-Soviet Russia, the Kremlin has been very ambiguous about Russia’s Muslims and their aspirations.

The Russian state started to incorporate Islam into its policies with Catherine the Great’s decree of religious tolerance, which made a formal end to the campaigns of forced Christianization that were conducted under her predecessors. In 1788, the Empress established the Orenburg Spiritual Assembly in Ufa, an Islamic administration for the Muslims of European Russia and Siberia under the authority of a state-appointed Mufti. With this move, she granted some internal autonomy to Islam, especially in the management of mosques and Islamic education, but also gave imams the formal right to document births, marriages, divorces and inheritance issues. This new tolerance led to a blossoming of the Islamic elite, with many new works on Islamic law, theology,

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1 Usually a distinction is made between Eurasianism, as the ideology developed by exiled intellectuals in the 1920s, and Neo-Eurasianism, as the umbrella term for contemporary ideologies that pretend to further develop the original Eurasianist ideas. In this paper, we only refer to contemporary Neo-Eurasianism, and for the sake of convenience take the liberty of using the terms interchangeably.

2 Marlene Laruelle, “The Orient in Russian Thought at the Turn of the Century,” in *Russia between East and West: Scholarly Debates on Eurasianism*, ed. Dmitry Shlapentokh. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 9–37; Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: an Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2008).

and Sufism being produced (and some even printed) over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> As some scholars have argued, this imperial support gave Muslims in Russia the general idea that the Tsar was also defending their interests.<sup>4</sup> Yet the Empress (and all her successors) also employed the Muftiate in Ufa and Muslim community leaders to administer and control Russia's Muslim communities.<sup>5</sup> While the empire acknowledged that Muslims cannot simply be converted (as had been attempted in earlier times, starting with the conquest of Kazan in the mid-sixteenth century), nineteenth-century Tsarist Russia clearly identified itself with the Russian "ethnicity" (*narodnost'*) and with Christian Orthodoxy, hence setting clear limits on the agency of Muslims in politics. In the first place, the policy was geared towards containment of Islam as a political threat to Russia's stability, and to avoid rebellion and Tatar partisanship for the Ottomans. No wonder that after 1905, progressive Muslim intellectuals and community leaders sided above all with the liberal Kadet party, and then with the Bolsheviks, whose initial program included a promise of emancipation for Muslims. In 1917, a new Mufti was elected for the first time by a congress of Muslim representatives, and the 1920s saw a limited resurgence of Islamic communities, including in the sphere of Islamic education.<sup>6</sup> Yet Stalin's collectivization and the culture wars of the 1930s brought an end to any public forms of Islamic worship and education, and the Muftiate in Ufa was practically dismantled, with most of its employees exiled, imprisoned, or executed.

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3 Michael Kemper, *Sufis und Gelehrte in Tatarien und Baschkirien, 1789–1889. Der islamische Diskurs unter russischer Herrschaft* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 1998).

4 Robert Crews, "Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-century Russia," *The American Historical Review* 108:1 (2003): 50–83; Robert Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar: Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

5 Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy: Mission, Governance, and Confessional Politics in Russia's Volga-Kama Region, 1827–1905* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert P. Geraci, *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Allen J. Frank, *Muslim Religious Institutions in Imperial Russia: The Islamic World of Novouzensk District and the Kazakh Inner Horde, 1780–1910* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

6 Dmitrii I. Arapov, *Islam i Sovetskoe gosudarstvo (1917– 1936)* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Mardzhani, 2010); Christian Noack, "State Policy and Its Impact on the Formation of a Muslim Identity in the Volga-Urals," in *Islam in Politics in Russia and Central Asia*, eds. Stéphane A. Dudoignon and Komatsu Hisao (London: Kegan Paul, 2009), 3–26.



The fate of Islam continued to depend on the whims of the Party line: in 1943, Stalin allowed a renewal of Catherine's system of a self-governing Spiritual Assembly, obviously to win the support of the USSR's Muslims for the war effort. Along with the Muftiate for Russia and Siberia, in Ufa, new regional Muftiates were set up in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and an Islamic school for training loyal imams—the Mir-i Arab—was reopened in Bukhara, under heavy KGB surveillance. Only the end of the old dogmas, through Gorbachev's perestroika, opened the way for a revival (and transformation) of Islam in the USSR and its successor states. The 1990s saw an unprecedented boom in mosque construction, and in Islamic education,<sup>7</sup> and the establishment of new Muftiates in Russia's regions. Against this historical background, why would Muslims today sympathize with a new "ideology of empire", which has clear traits of the Tsarist and Soviet ideologies, and which might pose a threat to the liberties acquired since perestroika?

We argue that the Tsarist and Soviet system of administering Islam has survived the end of the USSR. In fact, Catherine's and Stalin's system of a state-supported Islamic administration to help control Russia's Muslim society still functions in the same old ways, even if Muftiates, mosque communities, and Islamic teaching institutions have multiplied. Modern means of communication have revolutionized the Islamic discourse in Russia, and provide the means and forums for establishing alternative Islamic visions. However, the state still tries to control this discourse through the outlets of the various Muftiates (officially referred to as "spiritual administrations of Muslims", DUM). The Kremlin's goal is to produce a vision of Islam that is in full conformity with the state's ambitions.

This opens the door for positive references to Islam as a contributor to Eurasianism—in the same ambiguous manner that characterizes the state's references to Eurasianist ideas. Just as the authorities draw on Eurasianist clichés when they come in handy, without ever openly identifying with Eurasianism, so do various Muslim leaders toy with the concept, too. Eurasianist ideas are not accentuated when they challenge the officially endorsed ideas of democracy and civic nationalism. Equally, Muslim Eurasianism is in general not meant

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7 Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Michael Kemper, Raoul Motika and Stefan Reichmuth, eds., *Islamic Education in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

to challenge the entrenched national autonomies that the Russian Federation inherited from the RSFSR, in the form of autonomous republics such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chechnya, and Daghestan. However, Eurasianism is fully available when it comes to foreign relations, that is, when Russia's Muslim leaders feel they have the opportunity to function as bridge-builders to Muslim nations and governments abroad, and influence them in a way that benefits the general course of Russian foreign policies. The Eurasianist aggrandizement of Russia in its "near and far abroads" thereby also enhances the status of Russia's Muslims in the Muslim World.

Eurasianism is not only a powerful tool to attain recognition for Islam's positive contribution to state ideology and national identity: it also generates money. Of all the presidential grants to civil society organizations awarded in 2006–2015, most went to the Russian Orthodox Church (subsequently referred to as ROC) and to institutions that promote ideas of Eurasianism.<sup>8</sup> The lesson is clear: ideologies that appeal to Russia's patriotism and defend it from Western liberalism, and that directly or indirectly promote Russian aims abroad, can bring much benefit, even if the government line only endorses Eurasianism selectively, preventing it from appearing as the Kremlin's official ideology. No wonder then that Russia's official Muslim leaders, especially the leading Muftis but also a number of Muslim political activists, also experiment with Eurasianism.

Since around 2001, when political Eurasianism became a powerful point of reference in Russia, several Muslim leaders of Russia proposed ways to pronounce the role of Muslims in Eurasianism. Most of these projects emphasize their loyalty to the Kremlin; they portray the Volga Tatars as bridge-builders within the Eurasian space, ascribing to them a function that Tatar traders, Islamic authorities, and Muslim intellectuals already claimed for themselves in the nineteenth century. On the whole, this Muslim Eurasianist mission is accepted in public discourse as being good for Russia, and it has helped their Muslim authors to survive the political and social turbulences of Russia in the twenty-first century. But there are also less conformist and even oppositional versions of Eurasianism that have solicited a lot of support, usually from mar-

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8 Gazeta, "Doklad: bol'she vsego prezidentskikh grantov poluchayut RPTS i evraziitsy," *Gazeta.ru*, December 21, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2015/12/21/n\\_8037287.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2015/12/21/n_8037287.shtml).

ginalized Islamic intellectuals in Russia. In what follows, we first discuss the Muftis' Eurasianist projects, then also presenting dissident cases.

## Neo-Eurasianism and Mufti Tadzhuiddin's myths about the Bulgars

The 1990s and 2000s saw the creation of at least sixty DUMs ("spiritual administrations of Muslims") in the Russian Federation, partly with overlapping geographical coverage. These new Muftiates superseded the single Islamic umbrella organization for European Russia and Siberia (that is, excluding the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Central Asia) that had existed since 1788 in Ufa. This old Muftiate (known since 2001 as the "Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia", TsDUM) still claims to be the major authority of Islam in the Russian Federation, and has several important regional Muftiates under its wings. Its chairman, Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin (b. 1948), has been in office since 1980, and thus is a representative of the Soviet "turbaned elites": he constantly emphasizes his full obedience to the Kremlin and also his reverence for the Russian Orthodox Church as Islam's major brother in Russia. But since the early 1990s, many regional Muftiates have broken away from Tadzhuiddin's TsDUM in Ufa, and Tadzhuiddin's prestige has been eroded by scandals, accusations, and by his increasingly erratic behavior.

Tadzhuiddin's major rival is his former disciple, Ravil' Gainutdin (b. 1959), who in 1994 set up the "Spiritual Administration of the Central European Part of Russia" (DUMTsER) in Moscow. Two years later, Gainutdin established a new umbrella organization, the Council of the Muftis of Russia (SMR), as an alliance of several regional DUMs in European Russia and Siberia in competition with Tadzhuiddin's TsDUM in Ufa. The parallel existence of these two major umbrella Muftiates with their regional networks is fed by the personal rivalry between the two leaders "for the position of 'court' Mufti to the Russian president"<sup>10</sup>. Russia's North Caucasus republics have their own Muftiates,

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9 Michael Kemper, "Mufti Ravil Gainutdin: the Translation of Islam into a Language of Patriotism and Humanism," in *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, eds. Alfrid K. Bustanov and Michael Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 105.

10 Galina Yemelianova, "Muslim-State Relations in Russia," in *Muslim Minority-State Relations: Violence, Integration, and Policy*, ed. Robert Mason (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 126.

beyond the purview of the Tatar Muftis in Moscow and Ufa; and the Muftiate of the Republic of Tatarstan, under the young Mufti Kamil' Samigullin (b. 1985), maneuvers between Moscow and Kazan.

This fragmentation of Islamic authority coincided with the rise of contemporary Eurasianist thought, which was projected as a potential replacement for Communism and an inclusive and viable national ideology. When Eurasianism became a policy platform for political intellectuals, some Muslim leaders attempted to ride the tide and began to emphasize the potential that Russia's Muslims represent for Russian Eurasianism.

In 2002, Tadzhuiddin joined the newly created "Eurasia" (*Evraziya*) party, which aimed at uniting Neo-Eurasianists and conservatives of various colors and shades. This Eurasianism of the early 1990s offered a framework for a positive reappraisal of Russia's imperial and Soviet experiences. Its messianic framework combined ideas derived from doctrines of the Eurasianist classics of the 1920–1930s, as well as from Lev Gumilev's (1912–1992) theory of passionarity. This shared vocabulary was, however, filled with new meaning. Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962), the key figure behind this Neo-Eurasianism, relies on the ideas promoted by the German conservative revolutionary movement and the French and Italian new right.<sup>11</sup> In order to make Eurasianism more appealing to broader academic and political circles, Dugin downplayed his anti-Semitism and Nazi inspirations and dropped the most outrageous, esoteric, and radical elements of his philosophy from his earlier writings (of 1985–1990). Despite his fascist pedigree, Dugin gained popularity in the 2000s and successfully forged close ties with several influential political and intellectual circles.<sup>12</sup>

One possible reason for this popular backing is that Neo-Eurasianism embraces the jealously defended ideas of Russia's uniqueness, calls for Russia's restoration as a great power on a global scale, and defends authoritarian forms

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11 Marlene Laruelle, *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (New York and London: Lexington Books, 2015a), 68; Shekhovtsov, Anton, "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: The New Right à la Russe," *Religion Compass* 3:4 (2009).

12 Cf. Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*; Shekhovtsov, "Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism"; Dmitry Shlapentokh, "Islam and Orthodox Russia: From Eurasianism to Islamism," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41:1 (2008); Andreas Umland, "Alexander Dugin's Transformation from a Lunatic Fringe Figure into a Mainstream Political Publicist, 1980–1998: A Case Study in the Rise of Late and Post-Soviet Russian Fascism," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1 (2010).

of rule. These political goals are embedded in a spiritual rhetoric of religious traditionalism. Dugin, himself a former dissident, came into vogue following Putin's rise to power in 2000. The "Eurasia" party successfully mobilized several well-known academics, politicians, parliamentarians, journalists, and intellectuals from Russia and its neighbors. The party's pronounced anti-Western stance and its rejection of liberalism and individualism also appealed to the ROC leadership.<sup>13</sup> It seems that, in the beginning, Mufti Tadzhuiddin had only a vague idea of how to integrate the "Islamic factor" into the Neo-Eurasianism paradigm, so he simply adopted some of Dugin's ideas as his way in. Dugin has referred to the Golden Horde as the "White Kingdom" (*Beloe tsarstvo*)—the only part of the Mongol Empire that allegedly avoided decay ("entropy") and preserved its vital energy, its "passionarity". From here, Dugin portrayed the Muscovite state as a successor to the Golden Horde: Moscow just inherited the geopolitical mission of establishing a new Eurasian order in the post-Mongol region in order to resist Western encroachment.<sup>15</sup> Dugin also introduced the expression "White covenant" (*Belyi Zavet*), to mean a commitment undertaken by the Muscovite state and its successors to fulfill this Eurasianist mission. Mufti Tadzhuiddin took Dugin's imagined covenant as a starting point, and in a 2001 speech argued that the Russians were not "usurpers, but carriers of the White covenant". The Tsars did not pursue imperialist goals but aspired to build "a common Eurasian home"<sup>16</sup>.

Tadzhuiddin's membership in the "Eurasia" party was met with much criticism from Muslim circles, who doubted that Dugin's obviously pro-Orthodox

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 13 Atle Staalesen, "Orthodoxy and Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Opposing Confessional Cultures or Unifying Force?" In *Nation-Building and Common Values in Russia*, eds. Pal Kolsto and Helge Blakkisrud (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 316.

14 After being expelled from the "Eurasia" party in 2003, Dugin created a new NGO, "International Eurasian Movement" (Mezhdunarodnoe evraziiskoe dvizhenie), and won over his supporters, including Tadzhuiddin; since the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, when Dugin publicly called for violent suppression of the Ukrainians, his influence in Putin's circles has significantly diminished (cf. Marlene Laruelle, "Scared of Putin's Shadow: In Sanctioning Dugin, Washington Got the Wrong Man," *Foreign Affairs*, March 25, 2015b, accessed December 4, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-03-25/scared-putins-shadow>).

15 Aleksandr Dugin, "Chingiz khan i mongolosfera (po motivam knigi kalmytskogo evraziitsa Khara Davana)," 2001a, repr. in *Osnovy Evraziistva*, ed. Natal'ya Agamalyan (Moscow: Arktogeya-Tsentr, 2002), 776–777.

16 Talgat Tadzhuiddin, "Russkie stroili ne imperiyu, no Evraziyu – nash obshchii dom," 2001. Repr. in *Osnovy Evraziistva*, ed. Natal'ya Agamalyan (Moscow: Arktogeya-Tsentr, 2002), 611.

Christian ideology could be a beneficial framework for Russia's Muslim community. For Dugin, the only Islam that Russia can use as an ally is its "traditional" form, which he defines as a "deep, contemplative, mystical" Islam, an Islam that "does not pay attention to the ordinary aspects of life"<sup>17</sup>. Dugin's positive image of Islam is thus reduced to the sphere of spirituality. Dugin argued that Shi'a mysticism, Sufism, and Islamic traditionalism are close to Eurasian Orthodox Christianity, as they are "open and anti-totalitarian" and stand in opposition to "Atlanticist" Protestantism and Middle Eastern "Wahhabism"<sup>18</sup>. Dugin thereby supported the state-endorsed discourse that poses a vaguely defined loyal, 'good', and 'official' Islam against an equally vaguely defined 'unofficial' or 'Wahhabi' Islam, the latter comprising all Islamic movements that do not subscribe to Russia's political interests.<sup>19</sup> This endorses state policies, for Russia's constitutional framework also recognizes 'traditional' Islam as *de jure* equal to 'traditional' Orthodox Christianity.

For Dugin, the ideal Russian society should nevertheless be based on Orthodox Christian law. He acknowledges that Orthodox Christian law originated in the Byzantine Empire, but emphasizes that its "Russian variant" was significantly influenced by the Golden Horde (and also by the Romanovs' westernization policies). For Dugin, this law should be understood as a 'social' foundation, and not be restricted to its ecclesiastic meaning. Also, he recognizes that accepting Orthodox Christian law as a dominant system in Russia's multi-religious society may incur the displeasure of other, equally 'traditional' faiths. So Dugin suggested introducing it in a "delicate" way.<sup>20</sup> In a transitional phase, for instance, Russia's Muslims could adapt to or even merge with communities of Old Believers (*starovertsy*), who, in his eyes, have similar regula-

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17 Aleksandr Dugin, "Islam i geopolitika." Paper presented at the conference "Islamskaya ugroza ili ugroza islamu?" Moscow, June 28, 2001b, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://evrazia.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=622>.

18 Ibid.

19 Cf. Kristina Kovalskaya, "The Traditional and the Non-Traditional in the Religious Life of the Russian Federation," *Mundo Eslavo* 12:69–78 (2013); Roland Dannreuther, "Russian Discourses and Approaches to Islam and Islamism," in *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, eds. Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (London: Routledge, 2010), 9–25.

20 Aleksandr Dugin, "Islam i etnarkhiya," *Russkii zhurnal*, July 19, 2002, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://old.russ.ru/politics/20020719-dugin.html>.

tions on clothing and food, and common elements in prayer.<sup>21</sup> Dugin's ultimate goal seems to be the elimination of Islam by its incorporation into Christian traditionalism. Understandably, this is not an appealing prospect to Muslims, whether believers or not.

Since the late 2000s, Tadzhuiddin has been in search of an alternative vision of Christian-Muslim cooperation within the Neo-Eurasianism paradigm. The Mufti has moved away from the emphasis on the Golden Horde heritage and is focused on constructing a particular Volga-Bulgar identity, in an alternative "Eurasian Islamic ideology". Now silent on the positive influence of the Mongol heritage on Russia, Tadzhuiddin attempts to create a historical narrative of a peaceful Islam in Russia by going to the period before the Mongol conquest in the 1200s. He argues that the Volga Muslims (who were Muslims by the tenth century) suffered at the hands of the barbarian Mongols as much as the Russians did; the Mongols "attacked our state, and destroyed the mosques that the *sahaba* [companions of Prophet Muhammad] had set up [in the Volga-Urals region; G.S., M.K.]". Despite the conversion of the Mongol rulers to Islam around 1313, the Golden Horde period is now portrayed as dark age of Tatar history, when "our ancestors came here [to the ruins of mosques in the city of Bolgar, Tatarstan] crying, and read their prayers in grief."<sup>22</sup>

By depicting Volga Muslims and Russians as victims of a foreign aggressor—the Golden Horde—Tadzhuiddin provides a historical justification for the contemporary denunciation of all foreign elements as dangerous, which fits perfectly with state policies since 1997. Tadzhuiddin claims that the Volga Bulgars converted to Islam already in the seventh century, on the orders of none other than the Prophet Muhammad, who sent his *sahaba* to the region; according to this tale (based on local legends that have long been identified as lore from later centuries), the advent of Islam is not perceived as a foreign intrusion. In this vision, the Volga area is a cradle of Islam, not its later recipient. Islam flourished on what is now Russian soil right from the time of its emergence, and it has remained 'Bulgar' despite the Mongol intervention.

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21 Ibid.

22 Talgat Tadzhuiddin, "Ne tol'ko etot 12 metrovyi pamyatnik, s vosem'yu sis'kami, no i u ego ottsa so vseimi prichindalami stoiat' est' parvo..." *Islamtoday*, June 13, 2012, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://islamtoday.ru/islam\\_v\\_rossii/talgat\\_tadzhuiddin\\_ne\\_tolko\\_etot\\_12\\_metrovyj\\_pamyatnik\\_s\\_vosemyu\\_siskami\\_no\\_i\\_u\\_ego\\_otcza\\_so\\_vseimi\\_prichindalami\\_stoyat\\_est\\_pravo/](http://islamtoday.ru/islam_v_rossii/talgat_tadzhuiddin_ne_tolko_etot_12_metrovyj_pamyatnik_s_vosemyu_siskami_no_i_u_ego_otcza_so_vseimi_prichindalami_stoyat_est_pravo/).

Tadzhuiddin's idea to create a new sacred place for Tatar 'traditional' Islam resonates with the Tatarstani authorities who envisage the remote rural settlement of Bolgar as the perfect site for establishing a new Islamic center in Russia. In 2012, Tadzhuiddin participated in the opening ceremony of the White Mosque (*Ak mächet*) there, which was obviously designed to overshadow the grandiose "Heart of Chechnya" mosque in Grozny, built on the orders of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. While remote from Kazan and other cities, the site of Bolgar has the advantage of being a place of traditional sanctity, as described in those popular legends about the Muslim saints who were allegedly buried there.<sup>23</sup> This spiritual appeal was enhanced in 2015 by relocating the biggest printed Quran in the world to the new Bolgar mosque, along with hairs that are believed to be those of the Prophet himself.<sup>24</sup> The Mufti also oversaw the construction of an Islamic academy on the site, which was formally inaugurated in September 2017. Hence, Bolgar might become a place of Tadzhuiddin's retirement; it is not for nothing that in late 2015 Tadzhuiddin attempted to appoint the Mufti of the DUM of the Republic of Tatarstan, Kamil' Samigullin, as "Russia's chief Mufti", i.e., as his immediate successor. This unexpected move met the resistance of the other Muftis in Tadzhuiddin's network (who insisted that the new Mufti must be elected, not appointed by his predecessor), and Tadzhuiddin withdrew his 'appointment' of Samigullin. Yet such a construction has a certain appeal, for it would break the current stagnation in the fragmented landscape of Russia's official Islam by establishing a new powerful "All-Tatar" Muftiate, where the mosques of Tatarstan would unite with those of Tadzhuiddin's TsDUM.<sup>25</sup>

By placing his hopes on Tatarstan, Tadzhuiddin is again in line with Dugin, who sees the Tatarstan republic as the "heartland" and center of Eurasia. Yet in Dugin's imperialist schemes, Tatarstan is not a Muslim republic but a "Kazan Rus" (*Kazanskaya Rus*), and supposed to cooperate with Moscow in building

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23 Allen J. Frank, *Islamic Historiography and "Bulghar" Identity among the Tatars and Bashkirs of Russia* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

24 Khafiz Andzerzhanov, "Relikviya iz Bashkirii pereekhala v Tatarstan," *IslamRB*, July 3, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://islamrb.ru/relikviya-iz-bashkirii-pereekhala-v-tatarstan/>.

25 Vladislav Mal'tsev, "Poyavitsya li muftii vsekh tatar?" *NG Religii*, January 20, 2016, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2016-01-20/2\\_mufti.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2016-01-20/2_mufti.html).



the “inner-Russian axis”<sup>26</sup>. For Dugin, Tatars are the most Eurasian of all Turkic peoples—if they do *not* follow the Tatarstani officials, whom he accuses of “soft separatism” and of “Russophobe [Tatar] nationalism”<sup>27</sup>. In fact, since the 1990s, the Tatarstani government has offered various ideological constructs to co-opt Islam for the secular political order, including a Tatar liberal “Euro-Islam”.<sup>28</sup> Dugin sees such constructs as not more than expressions of “Mongol- and Turkophilia” against the benevolent Russian influence.<sup>29</sup>

In his statements about Russia’s foreign policy, Tadzhuiddin mainly employs popular anti-Western rhetoric: after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, he declared *jihad* against the United States and Great Britain, and in 2015 he suggested that Putin should deal with Syria and Israel “like he did with the Crimea”<sup>30</sup>, i.e., by uniting them with Russia. Such erratic proclamations obviously strengthen the image of him as closely connected to the Russian government and the Orthodox establishment.<sup>31</sup> Tadzhuiddin is less explicit when it comes to possible “Eurasian” allies for Russia, and does not follow Dugin, who has repeatedly argued for a strong alliance with Iran. Shi’a Islam, Dugin believes, is similar in “flexibility and openness (as well as in its mystical orientation)” to the Hanafi Islam of the Tatars, and also to Orthodox Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Dugin also emphasizes that the Iranian political establishment supports Russia’s idea of a multi-polar world and a traditional society.<sup>33</sup>

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26 Aleksandr Dugin, “Tret’ya stolitsa,” *Zavtra*, May 24, 2000, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://zavtra.ru/blogs/2000-05-2481>

27 Ibid.

28 Cf. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, “Russia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, ed. Jocelyne Cesari (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 537.

29 Aleksandr Dugin, “Evraziiskii proekt ot islama,” 2002b, repr. in *Osnovy Evraziistva*, ed. Natal’ya Agamalyan (Moscow: Arktogeya-Tsent, 2002), 619.

30 Tom Porter, “Russia: Grand Mufti Calls on Vladimir Putin to Annex Israel and Mecca as It is ‘the Will of Allah,’” *International Business Times*, November 25, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/russia-grand-mufti-calls-vladimir-putin-annex-israel-mecca-it-will-allah-1530436>.

31 Cf. Shireen Hunter, *Islam in Russia: The Politics of Identity and Security* (Armonk, NY: M. E.Sharpe, 2004), 110.

32 Aleksandr Dugin, “Russkoe Pravoslavie i initsiatsiya,” *Milyi Angel* 2, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://angel.org.ru/2/pravini.html>.

33 Aleksandr Dugin, “Os’ Moskva-Tegeran: Real’nosti i vozmozhnosti geopolitiki,” *Iran.Ru*, September 9, 2011, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.iran.ru/news/analytics/75404/Aleksandr\\_Dugin\\_Os\\_Moskva\\_Tegeran\\_realnosti\\_i\\_vozmozhnosti\\_geopolitiki](http://www.iran.ru/news/analytics/75404/Aleksandr_Dugin_Os_Moskva_Tegeran_realnosti_i_vozmozhnosti_geopolitiki).

## Eurasianism and political Islam

Dugin's ambitions to establish a monopoly on political Eurasianism were challenged by another Eurasianist political party that has emerged onto the Russian political landscape. In 2001, the Muslim sociopolitical movement "Refakh" (Prosperity) announced the creation of the "Eurasian Party of Russia" (*Evraziiskaya partiya Rossii*, EPR). Its leader, Abdul-Vakhed Niyazov (b. 1969 as Vadim Medvedev) is an ethnic Russian convert to Islam.<sup>34</sup> Niyazov's party gained backing from several influential political and religious leaders, including the then-president of Tatarstan, Mintimer Shaimiev, and then-governor of Kemerovo, Aman Tuleev, along with some forty State Duma deputies.<sup>35</sup>

Niyazov boldly challenged Dugin's and Tadzhuiddin's visions of Eurasian Russia that project Orthodox Christianity as the unifying 'Big Brother' of Russia's other confessions. Niyazov rejected the Russian claim to dominance in Eurasia and predicted an inevitable physical decline of the ethnic Russians, which would force them to relinquish their leading role over non-Russian Muslim peoples.<sup>36</sup> Niyazov saw the purpose of his party as to "stress that Russia is a Christian-Islamic power, and not only a Slavic-Christian country"<sup>37</sup>.

Such understandings of Eurasianism also implied close ties with Central Asian republics. Grounding his ideology primarily in works of the classical Eurasianists, Niyazov acknowledged contributions of Central Asian intellectuals, like Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008) and Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1936), in the development of Eurasianism.<sup>38</sup> For Niyazov, Eurasianism was first of all a tool to "restore the Union", but he refused to see it as a restoration of empire. Niyazov believed in a "reconstruction of the unity" among Eurasian people of Russia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea region.<sup>39</sup>

The EPR positioned itself as a Muslim political party, and Niyazov engaged Muftis Ravil' Gainutdin and Nafigulla Ashirov (b. 1954) to add some political

34 Umland, "Alexander Dugin's Transformation", 146.

35 Lampsi, Aleksei. "Dvizhenie 'Refakh' vyshlo iz 'Edinstva,'" *NG Religii*, March 28, 2001, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2001-03-28/3\\_movement.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2001-03-28/3_movement.html).

36 Laruelle, "The Orient in Russian Thought", 15–16.

37 Staalesen, "Orthodoxy and Islam", 315.

38 Shlapentokh, "Islam and Orthodox Russia", 32–33.

39 Abdul-Vakhed Niyazov, "Velichie Rossii – velichie ee narodov," Interview to *Ekho Moskvy*, September 26, 2003, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://echo.msk.ru/programs/beseda/23481/>.

weight to his establishment.<sup>40</sup> Gainutdin had already cooperated with Niyazov back in the 1990s, when in 1993 the Islamic Cultural Center of Russia was opened in Moscow. The actual impact of the Center and of Niyazov's personality on Muslims was minimal: in the parliamentary elections of 2003, the EPR did not poll enough votes to enter the Duma and soon vanished from the political landscape.<sup>41</sup>

For Mufti Ravil Gainutdin in Moscow, Niyazov's political project was a way of testing the waters of getting involved with Eurasianism while still rejecting Mufti Tadzhuiddin's Eurasianist authority as the leader of Russia's Muslims. Although Niyazov's scenario of Muslims becoming the dominant part of Russia's population was obviously too radical to be accepted by the political elites, at that time it did fit the image of Gainutdin as an assertive and independent leader, in contrast to Tadzhuiddin's increasing oddity and conformity.

Since the mid-1990s, Gainutdin also established relations with high-ranking Russian politicians. The support by Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov allowed Gainutdin to develop the project of a new grand mosque in the capital.<sup>42</sup> But Luzhkov was at that time a serious contender to Yeltsin; and when Luzhkov was forced out of office in 2010, Gainutdin faced a difficult situation, aggrandized by several scandals around him.<sup>43</sup>

On the international level, Gainutdin started to build relations with the Religious Directorate of Turkey (Diyanet), which in 1995 established a Eurasian Islamic Council to unite the various spiritual boards of Muslims in Eurasia. Later, Gainutdin became involved with the *Wasatiyya* movement, and with its major propagator Yusuf al-Qaradawi—the Muslim Brotherhood authority who runs the al-Qaradawi Center for Islamic Moderation and Renewal in Qatar.<sup>44</sup> In Russia, the movement is represented by the prominent Islamic writer Ali Vyacheslav Polosin, another ethnic Russian convert to Islam and a former

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40 Tat'yana Oganessian, "Evraziiskaya partiya zanyala sakral'noe mesto," *NG Religii*, August 3, 2001, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2001-08-08/3\\_party.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2001-08-08/3_party.html).

41 Laruelle, *Eurasianism and the European Far Right*, 93.

42 March, Luke, "Modern Moscow: Muslim Moscow?" In *Russia and Islam: State, Society and Radicalism*, eds. Roland Dannreuther and Luke March (London: Routledge, 2010) 89.

43 IslamNews. "TsDUM: struktura Gainutdina ne opravdala doveriya musul'man," *IslamNews*, March 16, 2011, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-41881.html>.

44 Gräf, Bettina, "Yusuf al-Qaradawi," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islam and Politics*, eds. John L. Esposito and Emad el-Din Shahin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 226.

Orthodox Church priest, who directs the Scientific-Educational Center “*Al-Vasatyia – Umerennost*”. Polosin has also drafted several documents, including the Social Doctrine of Muslims, issued by Gainutdin’s DUM,<sup>45</sup> obviously following the pattern of the ROC’s social doctrines.<sup>46</sup>

## Gainutdin’s Eurasianism paradigm

Gainutdin then worked on monopolizing the Council of Muftis of Russia, the umbrella of various Muftiates in opposition to Tadzhuddin’s TsDUM in Ufa. Originally, the Council of Muftis was a joint venture of several regional Muftis as ‘co-founders’, with Gainutdin’s DUM in Moscow claiming to be in charge of most of West Russia while the Volga region was left to the “Volga-Mufti” Mukaddas Bibarsov (residing in Saratov), and with Siberia assigned to Nafigulla Ashirov, head of the “DUM of the Asiatic Part of Russia”. This division of labor did not yet fully reflect Gainutdin’s Eurasianist ambitions.

In the late 2000s, Gainutdin reinvigorated his Eurasianist rhetoric with a return to Dugin’s love for the Mongols: at a conference in September 2009, he declared that Russia owned not only its statehood but also its greatness to the Golden Horde.<sup>47</sup> Over recent years he stressed the “large-scale Eurasian culture” to which Russia’s Islam pertains, in opposition to the West.<sup>48</sup>

Some ascribe this shift in Gainutdin’s rhetoric to his young and energetic deputy in the DUM, Damir Mukhetdinov (b. 1977), who embodies the inevitable generational shift within the Muslim establishment in Russia (as the Soviet Mir-i Arab-educated Muftis like Tadzhuddin, Gainutdin and Nafigov now reach retirement age). Mukhetdinov developed a pro-Kremlin Muslim Eurasianist platform by adjusting DUM’s rhetoric to Putin’s concepts of anti-

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45 Cf. Minaret, “Islamskaya doktrina protiv radikalizma,” *Minaret* 3:33, December 13, 2012, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history\\_culture/?5027](http://www.idmedina.ru/books/history_culture/?5027).

46 Cf. Alicja Curanović, “Relations between the Orthodox Church and Islam in the Russian Federation,” *Journal of Church and State* 52:3 (2010): 503–539.

47 Vladimir Oivin, “Shavkat Aviasov: Ya kraine otritsatel’no otnoshus’ k deyaniyam ord Chingiskhana,” *IslamNews*, October 18, 2009, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-20883.html>.

48 Igor’ Gashkov, “Sheikhi rossiiskogo konservatizma,” *NG Religii*, January 17, 2014, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2014-12-17/1\\_gainutdin.html](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2014-12-17/1_gainutdin.html).

globalism, multiculturalism, the protection of traditional values, and anti-Western conservatism.<sup>49</sup>

Being an active media presence, Mukhetdinov deconstructs the negative image of the Golden Horde and challenges the majority of Russian historians who would argue that Russian statehood was achieved not *due to* the Golden Horde but in the struggle *against* it. When in September 2015 the Moscow city authorities organized a re-enactment of the Mongol invasion on Red Square, Mukhetdinov publicly criticized them for “repeating dark myths about the Golden Horde yoke”. Gainutdin’s deputy referred to the great Russian historian Nikolai Karamzin (1776–1826), who is believed to have said that “Moscow owes its greatness to the Khans.”<sup>50</sup> The school history curriculum, in Mukhetdinov’s opinion, keeps portraying the Tatars as enemies, ignoring that Tatars fully participated in the defense of Russia’s independence. Mukhetdinov’s pet subject is Kuz’ma Minin, the national hero who defended seventeenth-century Russia against a Polish invasion. Mukhetdinov argues that Minin was actually “our [Muslim Tatar] fabulous Kirisha Minibaev”, and therefore his military glory should be conferred upon the Tatars.<sup>51</sup>

Gainutdin and Mukhetdinov’s Tatar Eurasianism is in clear opposition to Tadzhuiddin’s Bulgar-centered Eurasianism: they embrace the continuity between the Muslims of the Golden Horde and the Tatars today, attempting to integrate the Mongol heritage into an imperial ideology based on Tatar-Russian cooperation. The Moscow Cathedral Mosque, which was officially opened in September 2015, became the symbol of this cooperation. Now supposedly the largest in Europe, the Cathedral Mosque left behind the new mosques in Chechnya and Tatarstan; it is envisaged as an embodiment of the fruitful alliance between Islam and the Russian state. The minarets of the Cathedral Mosque are to remind its visitors of both the Moscow Kremlin’s Spasskaya Tower and the Kazan Kremlin’s Söyembikä Tower; this, according

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49 Damir Mukhetdinov, “Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo: sotsiokul’turnaya real’nost’ i kontsept,” *Geopolitika*, December 16, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.geopolitica.ru/article/rossiyskoe-musulmanstvo-sociokulturnaya-realnost-i-koncept#.VpjL1hHw78s>

50 Interfaks, “Bez Zolotoi Ordy ne sostoyalos’ by Rossii, shchitayut v DUM RF,” *Interfaks Religiya*, September 7, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=60046>.

51 Damir Mukhetdinov, “Opyt DUMNO v dukhovno-nravstvennom vospitanii veruyushchikh,” *Official website of the Spiritual administration of Nizhegorodskaya oblast’*, October 2, 2009, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.islamn.ru/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=4413>.

to Gainutdin, proves that Russia's Muslims are indeed the "Eurasian foundation of Russian civilization"<sup>52</sup>.

President Putin participated in the opening ceremony of the mosque, which was interpreted as an important sign of his political preference for Gainutdin's Moscow-based DUM. The political elites welcomed Gainutdin's convenient paradigm, which depicts Russia as a successor to the Muscovite Rus', Imperial Russia, the USSR, and the Golden Horde. In contrast to many other Eurasianism interpretations, including that of Dugin, Gainutdin's circles also show strong support for Putin's Eurasian Economic Union. It is seen as "a Muslim Union"<sup>53</sup>, which "fully meets the aspirations of the Russian Muslims"<sup>54</sup>. On behalf of all Muslims from the Soviet Union successor countries, Mukhetdinov asserted that these Muslim communities are eager to join the process of building a single "Eurasian home"<sup>55</sup>. This strategy was successful: in 2014, Gainutdin was allowed to rename his "DUM of European Russia" into the "Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Russian Federation", which symbolizes Gainutdin's claim to represent all Muslims of Russia, against the shrinking influence of Tadzhuiddin.

The international press coverage of the opening ceremony was a major publicity victory for Gainutdin, as it confirmed his constructed image of a bridge-builder between Russia and the Muslim World. The occasion became a welcome opportunity for President Putin to meet Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan; at that time the two leaders were trying to coordinate their policies on Syria. However, Gainutdin's close ties with Turkey soon became a liability when Turkish-Russian relations broke down in November 2015, after a Turkish F-16 shot down a Russian fighter plane at the Turkish-Syrian border. When relations improved again by the summer of 2016, Mukhetdinov was

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52 Ravil Gainutdin, "Otkrytie sobornoj mecheti Moskvy – dobraya vest' dlya vsego islamskogo mira, otmechaet muftii Gaynutdin," *Interfaks*, September 23, 2015, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=60267>.

53 Damir Mukhetdinov, "Pozdravlenie s shestidesyatiletiiem," *LiveJournal*, October 7, 2012, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/54533.html?thread=48133>.

54 *Vestnik*, "Rossiiskie musul'mane za evraziiskii proekt," *Vestnik Kavkaza*, December 13, 2014, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/articles/Rossiyskie-musulmane-za-evrazijskiy-proekt.html>.

55 Damir Mukhetdinov, "Evrazijskaya integratsiya – shans stat' samostoyatel'nym tsentrom global'nogo razvitiya!" *LiveJournal*, September 19, 2013, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://damir-hazrat.livejournal.com/107680.html>.

quick to take credit for it, arguing that Gainutdin's DUM RF was instrumental in reestablishing the links between Putin and Erdogan, acting as Russia's and Vladimir Putin's "spiritual, Muslim special forces (*spetsnats*)"<sup>56</sup>. Obviously, Gainutdin's political capital in the international arena makes him quite vulnerable at home; but as stakes are high, he seems to be willing to take the risk.

## Geidar Dzhemal's alternative Eurasianism

A radically different vision of the role of Russia's Muslims in Eurasianism was suggested by Geidar Dzhemal' (1947–2016), a controversial Muslim thinker, philosopher, and prominent media figure. Dzhemal' started from positions similar to those of Dugin, as his philosophy was strongly influenced by the same esoteric and far-right circles in 1980s Moscow. Both later attempted to enter politics, but while Dugin "successfully forged close ties with some high-ranking figures in the Putin establishment, Dzhemal' followed another path and moved closer to the leftist opposition to the regime"<sup>57</sup>.

Dzhemal' became known as a radical Islamist, with a mixture of Shi'i and Salafi elements, and as a staunch opponent of both the Yeltsin and the Putin regimes. His Islamic Eurasianism differed markedly from Dugin's largely pro-government ideology. As we have shown elsewhere,<sup>58</sup> Dzhemal' nevertheless remained an inner-systemic thinker who played within the limits of the political game: while becoming Russia's major propagandist for a radical political vision of Islam, Dzhemal' continued to enjoy access to prime-time media, and escaped classification as a political threat to the system. He defended radical Islamic groups, maintained close relations to Chechen, Tajik and other Islamists, but never called for *jihad* against Russia; on the contrary, his core argument was that Islam is Russia's natural ally against the West.

56 Andrei Mel'nikov, "Muftiya zapisali v 'spetsnaz' Putina," *NG Religii*, August 17, 2016, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/ng\\_religii/2016-08-17/3\\_muftii.html?id\\_user=Y](http://www.ng.ru/ng_religii/2016-08-17/3_muftii.html?id_user=Y).

57 Marlene Laruelle, "Digital Geopolitics Encapsulated: Geidar Dzhemal between Islamism, Occult Fascism, and Eurasianism," in *Eurasia 2.0: Russian Geopolitics in the Age of New Media*, eds. Mikhail Suslov and Mark Bassin (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 85.

58 Gulnaz Sibgatullina and Michael Kemper, "Between Salafism and Eurasianism: Geidar Dzhemal and the Global Islamic Revolution in Russia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 28:2 (2017): 219–236.

Dzhemal's Islamic Eurasian model was more sublime and revolutionary than the secondary role that Dugin reserved for Russia's Muslims. Dzhemal' achieved this without positive references to the Mongol heritage: on the contrary, he mocked popular Neo-Eurasian geopolitics by calling it a parody of the Mongol tradition. The latter he saw as an uninspired and "anti-passionate" conception (*a-passionarnaiia kontseptsiiia*) that makes the middle and lower classes "immune to influences of social destabilization". In other words, he rejected the Neo-Eurasian ideology of Dugin's type as a conservative cover-up that discourages radical political activism in Putin's Russia.<sup>59</sup>

Dzhemal's alternative version of Neo-Eurasianism was Indo-European in nature. His historical point of reference was the project of Alexander the Great, who by uniting the space that is today the core of the Muslim World—from Xinjiang to Libya—laid the basis for Hellenism, which in turn was the soil from which both Christianity and Islam emerged. In Dzhemal's works, Alexander is referred to as Dhū l-Qarnayn, a personality mentioned in the Islamic tradition, who, Dzhemal' believed, made the first attempt at "revolutionary globalism"<sup>60</sup>. For Dzhemal', the Chingizid model that the new Eurasianists emulate was in fact a counter-revolution to Dhū l-Qarnayn's project.

Also, Dzhemal' rejected the very idea of 'traditional' Islam, and in particular the authority of Russia's state-appointed Muslim leaders. Dzhemal' saw adopting Salafism as the only way to save Eurasian Muslims from their theological and geopolitical errors.<sup>61</sup> Unlike the Muftis who focus on the Tatars as Russia's Islamic elite, the half-Azerbaijani Dzhemal' came to envisage the Caucasus as the source of passionarity. For him, the region was a battlefield between Islam and the forces of the Devil, *Iblis*.<sup>62</sup> The Caucasus was torn apart by Russia's imperial ambitions and the "world liberal club"<sup>63</sup>; but it had already

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59 Geidar Dzhemal', "Sud'ba ponyatii," 2001, repr. in *Osvobozhdenie islama*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal' (Moscow: Umma, 2004a), 222–223.

60 Ibid., 216.

61 Cf. Laruelle, "Russia as an anti-liberal European civilization", 91.

62 Geidar Dzhemal', "Gruzino-rossiiskii konflikt s tochki zreniya musul'man," 2008a, repr. in: *Stena Zul'karnaina*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal' (Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaya mysl', 2010b), 268.

63 Geidar Dzhemal', "Moment istiny," 2008b, repr. in *Fuzei i Karamul'tuki*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal' (Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaya mysl', 2010a), 15.



brought forward a whole plethora of “passionate Muslims”<sup>64</sup> who resisted the imperialistic dominance—obviously having the Islamic militants in mind. According to Dzhemal’, resistance is possible only if the region comes together in a supra-ethnic union, overcoming the contemporary illegitimate “administrative pieces” created by Russia to manipulate its minorities.<sup>65</sup> Dzhemal’ linked his criticism of Russia’s policies in the North Caucasus with the legend of David’s struggle against Goliath; this made him resonate with Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev (b. 1954), who was a prominent figure in Chechen politics in the 1990s and 2000s. Nukhaev, in his book *Vedeno or Washington* (which was published in Dugin’s publishing house in 2001), shows the fallacy of Yeltsin’s plan to “restore the empire in a mechanical way”, i.e., by launching a war in Chechnya; instead, Nukhaev suggested his own “Eurasian plan” according to which Putin should not try to defeat “Wahhabism” by simply supporting the institutes of ‘traditional’ Islam. Although Nukhaev rejected Wahhabism and clearly supported the official political regime, he recognized the weakness of traditionalism in competition with other Islamic ideologies.<sup>66</sup> Nukhaev disappeared from the political scene in the mid-2000s, following Paul Khlebnikov’s assassination; Khlebnikov was the chief editor of *Forbes* and was killed in 2004 shortly after he published a book based on interviews with Nukhaev.<sup>67</sup>

Regarding Russia’s foreign policy, Nukhaev, Dugin, and Dzhemal’ provided spiritual legitimacy for the strategic partnership with Iran, which in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR was one of Russia’s few remaining partners in the Middle East. Dzhemal’ asserted that Russia should even help Iran to attain the nuclear bomb in order to counterbalance the state of Israel.<sup>68</sup>

It is difficult to assess Dzhemal’s actual impact. He presented himself as Dugin’s former mentor, and while criticizing Dugin’s particular interpretations he remained in contact with him. Other radical Russian thinkers (like

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64 Geidar Dzhemal’, “Vystuplenie na konferentsii ‘Islam i azerbaidzhanskaya molodezh’ v Rossii” 2004b, repr. in *Stena Zul’karnaina*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal’ (Moscow: Sotsial’no-politicheskaya mysl’, 2010b), 28.

65 Geidar Dzhemal’, “GRU pereigralo FSB v Ingushetii,” 2008c, repr. in *Fuzei i Karamul’tuki*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal’ (Moscow: Sotsial’no-politicheskaya mysl’, 2010a), 23.

66 Khozh-Akhmed Nukhaev, *Vedeno ili Washington* (Moscow: Arktogeya-tsentr), repr. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 18, 2001, accessed December 15, 2016, [http://www.ng.ru/net/2001-04-18/0\\_euroasia.html](http://www.ng.ru/net/2001-04-18/0_euroasia.html).

67 Lenta.ru, “Nukhaev, Khozh-Akmed,” accessed December 15, 2016, <https://lenta.ru/lib/14160692/full.htm>.

68 Shlapentokh, “Islam and Orthodox Russia,” 42; Geidar Dzhemal’, “Orientatsiya – islam, ili Nazad v budushchee”, 1999a, repr. in *Osvobozhdenie islama*, ed. Geidar Dzhemal’ (Moscow: Umma, 2004a), 233.

Eduard Limonov) also respected Dzhemal' as a powerful spokesperson for Islam and Muslims. Equally, among Dzhemal's closest friends were prominent journalists like Maksim Shevchenko, who at times displays a special affinity towards Islam and radical Islamic movements. In the 2000s, Dzhemal' mentored a group of young Russian radical left- and right-wing thinkers, several of whom converted to Islam and promoted Dzhemal's thinking. But this did not lead to a stable community or school, since these Russian Muslims soon went their own ways.<sup>69</sup> Dzhemal', who since the 1980s had close ties with Islamic activists in Tajikistan, was perhaps most respected among intellectual Islamist circles of Central Asian provenance, especially those who found themselves in a diaspora situation in Russia.

## Conclusion

Although contemporary Russia's Eurasianists can be seen as a "motley and fragmented constellation of people with competing ambition"<sup>70</sup>, most of them embrace Eurasianism as an "ideology of empire", and use it to achieve their particular political goals.

Russia's official Islamic leaders have to express their support for Putin's course, and Eurasianism is one way of doing this. And "one can understand the Muslim leaders' behavior—the regime's current foreign and domestic policy does not leave any room for other, more flexible approaches"<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, the everlasting rivalry among Russia's major Muftiates prevents them from establishing a common Islamic Eurasian platform.

Mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin from TsDUM in Ufa failed to convince Muslims that Dugin's "Eurasianism" is also their movement. The latter's program remained centered on Orthodox standpoints, since it openly states that Orthodoxy constitutes "the basic tradition" and "the religious geopolitical pole" of

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69 Vadim Sidorov, "We are not Fascists, We are Sufis," in *Islamic Authority and the Russian Language: Studies on Texts from European Russia, the North Caucasus and West Siberia*, eds. Alfrid K. Bustanov and Michael Kemper (Amsterdam: Pegasus, 2012), 345–360.

70 Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 83.

71 Alexey Malashenko, "Far from the Arab Spring," *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, October 29, 2014, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://carnegie.ru/2014/10/29/far-from-arab-spring-pub-57602>.

the Eurasian project.<sup>72</sup> Islam is only invited to take a subordinate place in it. We might assume that Dugin preferred Tadzhuddin to any other Islamic leader because in the 2000s, Tadzhuddin enjoyed better connections to the authorities not only in Moscow but also in the Republic of Tatarstan. Since Dugin dreams of a “Kazan Rus” axis, Tadzhuddin appeared as an ideal figure to represent the multi-confessional nature of the “Eurasia” party. Tadzhuddin’s eccentric *jihad* proclamation against the United States on behalf of “Muslims of the Holy Rus”<sup>73</sup> adds to Tadzhuddin’s image of a strongly anti-Western Rusophile—a mandatory requirement to participate in Dugin’s schemes. Equally, Tadzhuddin’s exaggerated reverence for the Patriarch (whose hand he once kissed in public) brings him closer to the Orthodox Church.

Mufti Gainutdin of DUM RF in Moscow is more independent from the Dugin franchise of Eurasianism, and so is Gainutdin’s very prominent deputy Damir Mukhetdinov. They call upon the Russian authorities to fully acknowledge the Muslim component in Russia’s civilization. In a much more intellectual and assertive version than that promoted by Tadzhuddin, they also attack “the Western Islamophobic discourse” which depicts Islam as “an ‘archaic’ religion that ‘oppresses women’ and engages in ‘terrorism’”. In their constant flow of media statements, speeches, and books, Gainutdin and Mukhetdinov note with concern that even Russia’s own intelligentsia is not committed to multiculturalism and interreligious dialogue.<sup>74</sup>

The annexation of the Crimea gave new grounds for Muslim leaders to emphasize the Eurasian roots of Russian civilization. A key reference point here is the Tatar intellectual Ismail Gasprinskii (1851–1914), who was born on the peninsula and promoted the association with Russians as a positive factor for Muslims. In October 2014, at the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Khan Uzbek Mosque in the Crimea, Gainutdin stated that Muslim Turks “lost statehood in the form of medieval Khanates [but] became the second state-religion and nation, and acquired a new statehood in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation”. According to the Mufti, “Crimea is

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72 Staalesen, “Orthodoxy and Islam”, 316.

73 Newsru, “Musul’mane Svyatoi Rusi’ ob’yavili dzhikhad SSHA,” *Newsru*, April 3, 2003, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.newsru.com/religy/03Apr2003/iraq1.html>.

74 Mukhetdinov, “Rossiiskoe musul’manstvo”.

once again becoming an important center of the Eurasian space, just as it had been seven hundred years ago.”<sup>75</sup>

The very fact that Muslim leaders adopt Eurasianism and attempt to fit Islam into the paradigms of this ideology makes it evident that the Tsarist and Soviet system of administering Islam survived the end of the USSR and has been reinforced in Putin’s Russia.

The most prominent exception to these Kremlin-loyal Islamic Eurasianists was Geidar Dzhemal’, whose Islamic radicalism had clear anarchistic features, but whose call for a “global Islamic revolution from below” in conjunction with Russia was deliberately too vague to have direct repercussions. Exactly this vagueness allowed him to remain an acceptable antipode to the discourse of the Muftis, in whom he saw merely state-appointed administrators. Dzhemal’s agenda was a mixture of many elements, from Shi’a discourse to Salafism, with a strong dose of Marxism and Eurasianism. He shared his crude anti-Westernism with Dugin, from whom he however distanced himself by focusing on Islam, on Indo-Europeanism/Aryanism, and on the Caucasus. Most notably, Dzhemal’ benefitted from the fact that few mainstream Islamic authorities distinguish themselves by philosophical depth and political acumen. But while Dzhemal’ remained true to his image as an anti-systemic thinker, he also managed to remain part of the accepted elite.

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