

VICTORY FOR RAMZAN KADYROV IN CHECHNYA

by Natàlia Boronat i Rovira*

Just as the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov promised, from now on the 16th of April will be a bank holiday. It commemorates the day in 2009 in which the Russian National Anti-terrorist Committee lifted the special security measures that had been in place in the Republic since autumn 1999, when Russian federal forces launched their offensive to regain control of the territory.

The special security regime was established to conduct so-called ‘anti-terrorist operations’, a euphemism used to disguise one of the bloodiest and little-known wars of recent times. It imposed a series of restrictions with numerous curfews, police checkpoints, arrests, arbitrary searches and interrogations, roadblocks and special operations in order to wipe out the guerrillas. It was accompanied by the presence of 20,000 federal troops temporarily installed in the Republic to pacify the region.

The second Chechen war

In 1999 Chechnya assumed an indeterminate status following the 1996 Khassaviurt Peace Accords, which put an end to the 1994-1996 war of separation. The war was begun by Russia with the aim of recovering the rebel territory which had declared itself independent at the end of 1991 during the process

of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Khassaviurt Accords, signed by presidents Boris Yeltsin and Aslan Maskhadov, established that Russia would withdraw all federal troops from Chechnya and that after five years the Republic’s status would be decided. It would either form part of Russia or gain independence.

In the autumn of that year the now former president Vladimir Putin, was prime minister (a post he holds once more). He justified the start of the second war as a response to the invasion by Chechen radical leaders of neighbouring Dagestan and the attacks on apartment buildings in various Russian cities. Responsibility for these events was never claimed by Chechen independence groups, behind which some claim to see the shadow of the Russian secret services. One such analyst is Oussam Basayev, a Chechen historian who lived through and studied the pe-



The youngest member of Kadyrov's fan club reads a poem to his leader

riod between the wars and asserts that Moscow had been planning the invasion for months.

Basayev believes that the Chechen president at the time, Aslan Maskhadov, who immediately condemned the Islamist actions in Dagestan, was caught between two stools: on one hand there was Russia's desire to recover the republic and on the other the internal destabilisation due to problems with Islamist radicals continuing around him.

When federal troops entered Chechnya, Maskhadov's government was forced to flee to the mountains and the president was assassinated during an anti-terrorist operation by federal forces on the 8th March 2005. In this manner Moscow shut the door on any dialogue with the separatists. From the start of the second conflict, differences between the independence group and an increasingly important Islamist fac-

tion became apparent. The latter were the perpetrators of bloody attacks, such as the taking of hostages at the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow 2002 and the Beslan school siege (North Ossetia) in 2004.

FROM 2002, RUSSIA BEGAN TO APPLY A POLICY THAT HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS THE 'CHECHENISATION' OF THE CONFLICT: THE GRADUAL TRANSFER OF POWER AND THE TASK OF REPRESSION TO A CHECHEN GOVERNMENT THAT IS LOYAL TO MOSCOW

In 2007, one of the Chechen leaders, Doku Umarov, currently considered president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (the name used by independence groups for their country) declared the creation of the Emirate of the Caucasus and announced the abandonment of the fight for a secular Chechnya in

favour of an Islamic state including part of the North Caucasus.

From the start of the second conflict, many of those who had fought for independence in the 90s began to form around the mufti of Ichkeria, Akhmad Kadyrov (father of the current president) who in 1999 went over to the federal side. Many 'reformed' pro-independence figures would form the basis of the pro-Russian government imposed by the Kremlin a few years later.

The attacks of the 11th of September 2001 provided Moscow with a means to justify the second war as its own personal crusade in the fight against international terrorism. From then on, those formerly branded 'bandits' began to be referred to as 'terrorists'.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERAL FORCES STATIONED IN CHECHNYA ARE AGAINST THE LIFTING OF ANTI-TERRORIST OPERATIONS BECAUSE THEY ARE UNHAPPY WITH HOW POWER HAS BEEN DISTRIBUTED IN THE FORMER REBEL REPUBLIC

The 'Chechenisation' of the conflict

After the end of the more serious skirmishes between the federal forces and the Chechen rebels in 2002-2003, Moscow decided to apply a policy that has come to be known as the 'Chechenisation' of the conflict. This involves the gradual transfer of power and the task of repression to a Chechen government that is loyal to Moscow. In order to carry out this 'Chechenisation' plan, Putin found a close ally in the form of the Kadyrov clan.

In 2003, in a state of war, a referendum was held in which some 96% of voters recognised that Chechnya was

an integral part of the Russian Federation. That same year Akhmad Kadyrov became the pro-Russian president of Chechnya. Akhmad Kadyrov was assassinated on the 9th of May 2004, during celebrations held for Victory Day, when Russia commemorates the Soviet Union's heroic efforts to defeat Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The post of president was subsequently held by Alu Alkhanov, but real power was in the hands of Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the assassinated president, who was to become chief of the republic on turning 30 in 2007.

There is no reliable information as to the number of victims of the conflict: according to various sources the number varies between 100,000 and 200,000 between the two wars, in a country with a current population of 1.3 million inhabitants.

The federal troops have been accused of numerous violations of human rights, but the organisations that work in the republic maintain that since the 'Chechenisation' of the conflict the responsibility for the majority of crimes against the civilian population lies mainly with the Chechen army. Observers recognise that progress in the normalisation of the republic and the reconstruction of Chechnya in recent years is apparent, but argue that the regime is sustained by the people's fear of it.

An end to a state of war

For some time now Kadyrov has been insisting that the anti-terrorist operation should be called off because only a few dozen guerrillas survive in the mountains and taking such a step will help to normalise life in the republic and favour economic development. An end to the anti-terrorist regime



will involve some 20,000 federal troops leaving the country and Kadyrov wishes to control the economy, especially the customs posts of a future international airport and the oil industry, which is currently in the hands of the Russian state-owned oil company Rosneft.

For Kadyrov, the Kremlin's decision to end its special security measures in Chechnya shows that 'the Russian government has officially confirmed that the terrorist menace has been eradicated'. The Chechen president used the occasion of the celebrations on the 16th of April to once more swear allegiance to Moscow and declared that 'the Chechens have defended Russia's territorial integrity and from now on will continue to defend the state's interests'.

Some analysts believe that the Kremlin's decision last April needs to be seen in the light of the economic crisis that Russia is experiencing and Moscow's need as the centre to delegate competencies, rights and responsibilities to the regions. Alexey

Malashenko, responsible for the Carnegie Centre's 'Religion, Society and Security' programme in Moscow believes that 'sooner or later the federal budget will be reduced, meaning Chechnya and subsequently Kadyrov himself, by way of compensation for a reduction in funding, can achieve his dream: the granting of international status to Grozni airport'. Malashenko predicts that Kadyrov will increasingly have more autonomy but, nevertheless he will not consider independence since 'Ramzan is only comfortable with being independent within the framework of the Russian Federation'.

Kadyrov, who employs some 7,000 former guerrillas in his army, claims there are only 70 rebels left in the Chechen mountains. According to the Russian military there are nearer 500 and they still represent a serious threat. The displaced federal Russian forces in Chechnya are opposed to the ending of anti-terrorist operations by the regime as they are unsatisfied with how power has been distributed in the former breakaway republic. What is more, they risk losing their substantial financial remuneration and the privilege of a fast-track military career.

For Ivan Sukhov, a specialist on the North Caucasus who works for *Vremia Novosti* newspaper, the anti-terrorist regime 'is an instrument employed by federal forces not only to fight against guerrillas, but also to demonstrate their presence to the population and the regional leaders, so they do not overestimate their independence'.

Four days after the National Anti-terrorist Committee's public announcement as to the end of the operation throughout the republic, the Russian military rushed to temporarily reintroduce it in three zones of Chechnya following the receipt of information that

A young man with a Chechen flag



10,000 people rally in the Chechen capital Grozny to mark 100 days of Ramzan Kadyrov being the prime minister

terrorist attacks were in preparation. Kadirov was obliged to say that there had been a misunderstanding and that the few guerrillas still in existence were under control. Nevertheless, the clash of interests between the Russian military and the government in Grozni became apparent.

Aside from the 20,000 soldiers temporarily stationed in Chechnya, who will gradually be withdrawn, a further contingent of some 20,000 personnel will remain in the republic. They consist of members of the defence and interior ministries and the border police of the Russian Federal Security Service. On the 1st of May the creation of a 'Peace-keeping Committee' was announced. It will be a structure that answers directly to Moscow and will serve to control the federal and Chechen forces.

The Chechen conflict has spread like an oil slick to other regions of the Caucasus, especially Dagestan and Ingushetia, where on a local level federal forces are also frequently carrying out anti-terrorist operations to neutralise guerrillas. Tatiana Lokshina, an analyst for Human Rights Watch, considers that the instability in the two republics is one of the results of the second Chechen war, since 'it is the same movement, a clandestine insurrection that is ideologically Islamic fundamentalist and which wants to bring about the creation of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus'.

A Russian journalist specialised in conflicts in the Caucasus, Yulia Latiniina, summed up the significance of the Kremlin's lifting of the special security situation in Chechnya: 'a complete victory for Kadirov over Russia, but not over the guerrillas'.



*NATÀLIA BORONAT I ROVIRA

(SALOMÓ, 1973). HOLDS A DEGREE IN INFORMATION SCIENCES FROM THE *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona* AND IN SLAVIC PHILOLOGY FROM THE *Universitat de Barcelona*. SINCE 2001 SHE HAS SPENT MOST OF HER TIME IN RUSSIA. SHE WORKED IN ST. PETERSBURG AS A CATALAN LECTURER AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY AND IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY. SHE NOW LIVES IN MOSCOW, WHERE SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST FOR DIFFERENT CATALAN MEDIA ORGANISATIONS AND REPORTS ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE POST-SOVIET AREA.