



**Individual Advanced Research  
Opportunities Program**

**Research Report**

*The opinions, recommendations, and conclusions of the grantee are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IREX or the US Department of State.*

Please respond to the following questions, using the form below as a template. Research Report, along with your Final Report, is due within 30 days of the end of your grant. Please e-mail your Final and Research reports to [iaro@irex.org](mailto:iaro@irex.org).

**1. Title of Research Proposal:**

Jadidism: Russia's "Euro-Islam" between multi-scalar threats

**2. Topic of Research**

The efforts of Tatarstan to defend its own form of Islam, known as "Jadidism" – a reputedly modernizing, Westernizing form of Islam alternatively known as "Euro-Islam" – from 1.) Moscow's project to re-centralize the Russian Federation – a project that has encroached on Tatarstan's cultural autonomy – and 2.) the growing presence of a globalizing Islam, often associated with the Middle East, that may be resistant to modernizing forces within its ranks.

**3. Relevance and Contribution to Field**

In the West, both scholars and policymakers are actively seeking ways to engage a resurgent Islam. In these discussions, however, the "Islamic World" is frequently limited to the Middle East and, as a result, the Muslim religion is often viewed in its Arabic form and often seen as a conservative, reactionary, anti-

modern faith. The example of Tatarstan and the Tatars, however, provides a needed counterpoint to such discussions. My research is a case study of how Islam and the West need not be conflictual, how modernity is not antithetical to faith, and how the Islamic faith, as crucial part of national identity, can be reinterpreted in changing times. This research also begins to trace the factors that may help peacefully accommodate Islam within a larger non-Muslim polity or perhaps lead to radicalization of segments.

#### **4. Approach and research methodology; list of research sites**

First, I conducted a wide-ranging reading of republic-based newspapers in order to familiarize myself with the evolving dialog surrounding Islam in Tatarstan. This reading, which covered the years 1991-1995 (the first five years of “sovereign” Tatarstan) and 2000-2004 (coinciding with Putin’s dismantling of Tatarstan’s sovereign status), was conducted in Tatarstan’s national library in Kazan, the republic’s capital. Second, I conducted a series of semi-guided interviews with intellectual, spiritual and political leaders; these interviews were mainly carried out in Kazan. In total, a dozen interviews were conducted. Most important among these interviews include those with Rafik Mukhametshin, recognized as Kazan’s leading Islamic scholar; Fauizia Bairamova, leader of the radical nationalist – and increasingly Islamic – “Azatlyk” party; and Rafik Abdrakhmanov, director of the Kazan Federal Institute. In the course of conducting these interviews, I also collected a large amount of additional written materials that will be incorporated into my work.

#### **5. Research findings and preliminary conclusions**

Under Putin’s leadership, Moscow has systematically dismantled most traces of Tatarstan’s autonomy. This campaign largely has been aimed at the republic’s political status and structure, bringing it under control of the center, but has also encroached on the Tatars’ cultural autonomy. Among these moves against the Tatars’ cultural autonomy include the ban on converting their non-Slavic language from the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin-based one; the ban on Muslim

women wearing headscarves in passport photos; and the effort to reclassify all the so-called “Baptized” Tatars as non-Tatars (and thereby reduce the share of Tatars in the republic). This campaign has not resulted in a backlash among the Tatars, religious or otherwise. First, Putin, has been careful not to alienate the Tatars’ mainstream Muslim leadership. Putin, although carrying out a war against Chechens, the other Muslim group that declared sovereignty back in 1991, has stressed the compatibility among Russia’s two largest confessions, even going so far as to petition the world’s largest Islamic organization for Russia’s recognition as a Muslim state. In this endeavor, as in other similar endeavors, the Russian president has enlisted the services of leading Tatar religious leaders and has consistently presented Tatarstan as a model of inter-confessional harmony. As he does this, Putin stresses the line presented by the Tatar political leadership: that Tatars practice Jadidism, a modernizing form of Islam, not a backward-looking, “foreign” faith. Putin has emphasized that the Tatars’ religion is not simply a religion endemic to the Middle Volga, but endemic to Russia – that it evolved in contact and response to the European Russians. This approach has proved successful for Putin, as he maintains a higher-than-average approval rating among Tatars and managed to secure official support by the region’s largest Muslim organizations for both presidential elections (2000 and 2004). Thus, it can be tentatively asserted that Putin’s tone is very effective among Tatarstan’s Muslims, who look to have their faith confirmed as a religion important to the Eurasian heartland. In my conversations with political and cultural leaders, even though they generally bemoaned Moscow’s recentralization campaign, they admit that Putin has exhibited the right tone when dealing with the Tatarstan’s main religion. They, too, are also quick to point out that the Tatars’ religion is modernist Jadidist Islam, not “backward” – the word most generally used to describe the conservative form of Islam that is making inroads in Tatarstan. Several of my subjects were resistant to headscarves on women, saying, “It is not a Tatar style.” They associated headscarves with the Middle East, though it most likely has been “popularized” by Turkish missionaries that have helped re-popularize Islam in Tatarstan itself. This dis-association with

headscarves helps explain why neither Kazan government nor nationalist groups offered support to a group of Muslim women who fought for their right to be have passport photos wearing headscarves.

However, a distinct type of non-Jadidist Islam is making inroads in Tatarstan, particularly beyond the limits of Kazan. It is reported that “Wahhabi” (a term that is used very loosely, generally indicated any type of more conservative, non-native Islam) activity is taking place in some village mosques and medresses. It is impossible to estimate the extent of this activity, though it is generally associated with Tatarstan’s poorer rural areas, the regions that have suffered from poverty and corruption since the fall of the Soviet Union. This is a common feature with most of the conservative Islamic movements taking place in Russia, most notably including the North Caucasus. The turn from the Tatars’ modernizing, national-flavored Jadidism to a stricter form is seen in the face of Fauizia Bairamova, who was a fiery nationalist, who in the early 1990s unambiguously called for Tatarstan’s full independence from Russia. Since the mid-1990s, Bairamova, along with the radical “Azatlyk” party she leads, has been marginalized by the ruling political elite and the so-called “official nationalists” who are support by the Kazan Kremlin. Whereas Tatar nationalism, with Jadidism being an important cultural aspect of that, was most important for her a decade ago, she told me that she now strives to be a “good Muslim” above all. The re-centralization of the Russian Federation, with its concomitant dismantling of Tatarstan’s sovereignty, according to Bairamova, is punishment from Allah for the Tatars not having been faithful Muslims first and foremost, for cooperating with a Christian empire. Though Bairamova articulates a minority view among the former and current “radical” nationalists, echoes of this sentiment can be heard in nationalist publications that are mainly printed in the Tatar language. This sentiment is also potentially more attractive in the impoverished rural areas.

## 6. **Future research agendas**

Three months simply is not enough time to thoroughly understand the developments surrounding Islam and national identity in Tatarstan. I have only

scratched the surface and do not feel that I can speak with full authority on this topic. However, I intend to continue to research this very question when I begin my in-field research for my Ph.D. dissertation (projected to begin in the fall of 2007). Spanning a full academic year, this future research will build on work conducted this summer and should result in a much clearer, in-depth sense of the situation in Tatarstan and, accordingly, provide insight to associated phenomena around the world.

## **7. Policy recommendations**

It is clear that Islam in Russia demands more attention. It is poorly under-studied and under-monitored by the academics and policymakers alike (for example, as I understand, only a single junior officer in the US Embassy in Moscow is charged with monitoring and engaging Islam throughout Russia). Islam in Russia, closely tied to minority national identity, varies greatly in the forms that it assumes, depending on geography and historic experience within the Russian polity. Therefore, I urge our policymakers to, first, recognize Russia as an Islamic state and, consequently, develop a coherent policy that would combine research, monitoring, diplomacy and development in an effort to engage and guide Russia's Muslim segments. Second, US policymakers need recognize that the Tatars and Tatarstan will play a crucial role in Russia's future development. More energy needs to be devoted to engaging this ethnic group and studying and engaging their religion. The Tatars thus far have been successful in defending their modernizing form of Islam against both Russification and conservative Islamicization programs. US policymakers and scholars alike have an interest in better understanding the mechanisms at work in this case.