COUNTERING EXTREMISM IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS: FROM CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY TO POST-CONFLICT INTEGRATION

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article studies extremism in the North Caucasus and analyzes the subjects, sources, and main reasons for the escalation of armed violence and radicalization. The author focuses on examining the Russian experience of regional policy, which made it possible to move in the North Caucasus from a strategy of conflict management and forceful measures to counter terrorism and extremism to post-conflict integration. *Literature review.* The author discusses empirical and theoretical sources relevant to the topic and objectives of the study. *Methods.* The article uses the method of qualitative diachronic analysis based on the collection and interpretation of data obtained from official documents and secondary sources. *Analysis.* Although transnational Islamist groups share common goals of global jihad and Islamization, they may differ in discourses and methods that facilitate the indoctrination of extremist ideas in the North Caucasus, which is why Russia since the mid-1990s has been using force against jihadism at its local and regional levels. To reduce radicalization and strengthen the integration of Muslims into Russian society, a conflict management strategy was adopted, including anti-terrorist operations; diplomatic efforts in the Muslim world to optimize Russia's multi-confessional image; and a large-scale policy of supporting Russian Muslim leaders and their traditional communities. Domestic policy proclaims Islam to be a traditional religion protected by the state and foundational to the identity of the multinational Russian people. *Results.* The current integration policy in the North Caucasus serves as a tool for countering and preventing extremism – proactively influencing the factors and conditions of radicalization through a set of measures aimed at forming regional elites, economic support via interbudgetary transfers and development programs, promoting tolerance and inclusion, and organizing informational activities.

Key words: extremism, radicalization, preventing extremism, conflict management, integration policy, post-conflict integration, North Caucasus.

ПРОТИВОДЕЙСТВИЕ ЭКСТРЕМИЗМУ НА СЕВЕРНОМ КАВКАЗЕ: ОТ СТРАТЕГИИ УПРАВЛЕНИЯ КОНФЛИКТАМИ К ПОСТКОНФЛИКТНОЙ ИНТЕГРАЦИИ

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Аннотация. *Введение*. В статье проводится исследование экстремизма на Северном Кавказе, анализируются субъекты, источники и причины эскалации вооруженного насилия и радикализации в регионе. Автор акцентирует внимание на изучении российского опыта региональной политики, позволившей пе-

рейти на Северном Кавказе от стратегии управления конфликтами и силовых мер по противодействию терроризму и экстремизму к постконфликтной интеграции. *Обзор литературы*. Автор рассматривает релевантные теме и задачам исследования эмпирические и теоретические источники. *Методы*. В статье используется метод качественного диахронического анализа, основанного на сборе и интерпретации данных, полученных из средств массовой информации, аналитических отчетов, официальных документов, академических работ. *Анализ*. Хотя транснациональные исламистские группы имеют общие цели глобального джихада и исламизации, они могут различаться в дискурсах и методах, которые облегчают индоктринацию идей экстремизма на Северном Кавказе, в связи с чем Россия с середины 1990-х гг. применяет силовые меры против джихадизма в его локальном и региональном срезе. Для снижения радикализации и усиления интеграции традиционных мусульман в российское общество государством была реализована масштабная стратегия управления конфликтами, включающая в себя: антитеррористические операции; внешнеполитические и дипломатические усилия в мусульманском мире по оптимизации поликонфессионального имиджа России; политику поддержки российских мусульманских лидеров. Внутренняя политика провозглашает ислам традиционной религией, охраняемой государством и исторически фундирующей идентичность многонационального народа России. *Выводы*. Сегодня политика интеграции на Северном Кавказе становится инструментом противодействия и профилактики экстремизма – упреждающего воздействия на факторы и условия радикализации посредством комплекса мер по формированию региональных элит, экономической поддержке с помощью межбюджетных трансфертов и программ развития, продвижению толерантности и инклюзии, организации информационной деятельности.

Ключевые слова: экстремизм, радикализация, профилактика экстремизма, управление конфликтами, политика интеграции, постконфликтная интеграция, Северный Кавказ.

Introduction. Historically, ethnopolitical and religious factors are intertwined in the North Caucasus, often masking each other. The bloodiest ethnic war in the region, the Chechen conflict, began as an ethno-secessionist conflict but soon transformed into religious extremism, with radical Islamism becoming the leading factor in the violence. Ethno-religious violence in the North Caucasus includes a wide range of regional phenomena and intensifies territorial and cultural contradictions. Long-standing regional conflicts in the North Caucasus can be divided into three interdependent types: intra-regional territorial conflicts; separatist conflicts between regional communities and the federal government; and ethno-religious extremism associated with the ideologies and practices of jihadism and radical Islamism in their regional refraction [21]. The North Caucasus region is of geostrategic importance for Russia and is within the sphere of its key national interests. Russia is interested in strengthening its position in the multi-ethnic region, ensuring the security of its southern borders, stabilizing the internal situation, and strengthening regional integration. To determine the goals and priorities of the geopolitical strategy and its compliance with changing regional realities, a comprehensive study of ethnoreligious processes in the North Caucasus is necessary. This is especially important in the context of the large-scale fight against global terrorism, when the possibility of effectively implementing an anti-terrorist strategy and constructively resolving ethnoreligious contradictions largely depends on the stability and regional integration. Establishing political control over the North Caucasus occupied a central place in the 2000 presidential program, remained the most important federal task addressed by the government before the 2004 elections, and was declared a major success of the administration during the 2012 and 2018 presidential campaigns. Further implementation of the regional integration policy means that Russia is moving in the North Caucasus from a conflict management strategy to post-conflict integration.

Methods and materials. The author employs a comprehensive methodological approach. First, a historical and political analysis is conducted on the sources, subjects, and factors of radicalization in the North Caucasus during the post-Soviet decades. This analysis draws on data obtained from federal and regional media,

analytical reports from research centers, official documents (such as the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025 and the Comprehensive Plan for Countering the Ideology of Terrorism in the Russian Federation for 2024–2028), and academic studies by both domestic and foreign scholars. Second, a diachronic study examines efforts to counter extremism and methods of deradicalization in the North Caucasus through an analysis of political events in the region from the collapse of the USSR to the present day. Diachronic analysis involves dividing sociohistorical processes into a sequence of stages and phases, which are considered within the broader context of historical developments. In the context of the subject of the research, the author highlights the essential temporal changes in historical reality (I.D. Kovalchenko): 1) 1994–1996 – the stage of the First Chechen War, the beginning of the "transnationalization" of extremist ideology and terrorist activity (participation of the first foreign jihadists in the conflict); 2) 1999–2009 – the stage of the Second Chechen War, the "jihadization" of the ethnic conflict, the formation of the international terrorist organization Caucasus Emirate, the abolition of the CTO regime, and the combination of conflict management strategy and post-conflict integration; 3) 2010–2015 – a new stage of "jihadization" and "transnationalization" of extremist ideology and terrorist activity of the Caucasus Emirate and the liquidation of the organization; 4) 2016 – present – the stage of full-scale de-escalation of armed violence and further socio-cultural reintegration of the North Caucasus.

Literature review. The combination of ethnic and religious factors is used by contemporary analysts to explain the fundamental causes of armed violence in the North Caucasus [2; 3; 6; 9; 10; 11; 23; 26; 28; 29; 30; 34]. According to R. Glazier, today no cultural conflict is associated exclusively with religion, but it undoubtedly plays an important role in many conflicts around the world, and a deeper understanding of religion and the role it should play in peacekeeping can help in conflict resolution [7]. Most researchers of jihadism and radical Islamism understand extremism as a system of radical views and methods of violence with the aim of achieving destructive goals, combining political and religious components, and acting in an inextricable link with a mobilizing ideology and collective identities [1; 4; 12; 14; 16;

18; 19; 22; 25; 27; 28; 33]. As noted by H.V. Dzutsev and N.V. Kornienko, in the North Caucasus, "religious affiliation is perceived as an element of ethnic self-identification; therefore, apostasy pertains not only to the sphere of religion but also to interethnic relations" [5, p. 91].

D. Sagramoso and A.A. Yarlykapov analyze the role of foreign fighters in the Chechen wars and in the development of Islam in Chechnya and Dagestan in the 1990s–2010s, challenging the prevailing view in the academic literature that foreign jihadists bore the main responsibility for political Islamization [23]. The article argues that Islamist tendencies and Salafi circles existed in the North Caucasus before the First Chechen War: local Salafi jamaats, combined with foreign jihadist fighters, provided the mobilization structures and ideological framework for the radicalization of the North Caucasian underground [23, p. 28].

Analyzing the specifics of ethnoreligious radicalism and extremism in the North Caucasus, it is necessary to point out the combination of local and global levels of armed violence. According to O. Roy, the local level is associated with ethnic separatism and is part of politically motivated violent actions with a clear goal: to liberate the territory from what is perceived by radicals as foreign occupation [19]. The global level of radicalization is determined by the following criteria: a terrorist act is not always part of a wider range of political and military actions; it is relatively isolated from the local political context; extremists are not always rooted in the region (even if they are integrated, like the Arab fighters in the first Chechen conflict); they do not fight in their country of origin, but in the case of the North Caucasus this is an exception, while jihadists circulate between three countries – the country of origin, the country of residence (radicalization), and the country of conflict, although all three can coincide [19].

In order to analyze the conceptual connection between radicalization and deradicalization, it is necessary to provide a framework definition of deradicalization by D. Koehler, who describes this phenomenon as a process of "repluralization" of political values and ideas [14]. This definition of deradicalization entails an increase in the perception of alternative solutions to an ideologically defined problem, which has the important effect of forcing people

to rethink the lack of alternatives to violence as a means of achieving political change [14]. According to Koehler, radicalization is a process of "depluralization" aimed at reducing the political ideas available to people until the only available political ideas are those sanctioned by the extremist ideology of a terrorist organization [14]. Thus, radicalization and deradicalization are closely intertwined and, therefore, are concepts that should always be studied together. Koehler believes that taking into account the connection between radicalization and deradicalization can be useful in developing methods for countering extremism and in the effective planning of preventive measures by official bodies. This is due to the fact that, as deradicalization strategies, preventive programs are only successful when they are based on a comprehensive understanding of the root causes of extremism and violence [14].

Analysis. *1. Regional specifics of extremism: the Caucasus Emirate and global jihadism.* In the "Strategy for countering extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025", the following concepts are used to conceptualize extremism: "a) the ideology of violence – a set of views and ideas justifying the use of violence to achieve political, ideological, religious and other goals; b) radicalism – uncompromising commitment to the ideology of violence, characterized by the desire for a decisive and radical change in the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation, violation of the unity and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation; c) extremist ideology – a set of views and ideas that represent violent and other illegal actions as the main means of resolving political, racial, national, religious and social conflicts; d) manifestations of extremism (extremist manifestations) – socially dangerous illegal actions committed on the grounds of political, ideological, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity, or on the grounds of hatred or enmity towards any social group, contributing to the emergence or aggravation of interethnic, interfaith and regional conflicts, and also threatening the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, the violation of the unity and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation" [32].

Typologically, the North Caucasian conflicts can be characterized as intrastate ethnopolitical conflicts, which are based on ethno-separatist intentions to separate from the Russian Federation and build new ethno-national and ethno-religious states [6; 10; 22; 23; 25; 28; 30; 34]. After the first Chechen conflict, North Caucasian ethnic separatism was mobilized on the basis of jihadist extremism, which was the most widespread form of violence and represented a fundamental challenge to the ethno-confessional peace in the North Caucasus. Until the mid-1990s, the North and South Caucasus occupied an insignificant place in global politics, but the need for footholds near Iran, Syria, and Iraq and the threats of Islamist terrorism and Al-Qaeda * and ISIS ** forced the world community to intensify its anti-terrorist strategy in the region. Russia, Iran, and Turkey have competed with each other for influence in the Caucasus for many centuries; the unresolved issue of the Caspian status also did not reduce tensions in the region, but in recent years the positions of the parties have converged on most issues of regional development and geopolitical strategy. Diplomatic efforts in the Middle East and throughout the Muslim world to optimize the multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional image of Russia have become an important condition for optimizing relations between Russia, Iran, and Turkey. One of the hotbeds of instability in Middle Eastern geopolitics on the border with the Caucasus remained the situation in Syria. Since 2013, relations between Russia and Iran in the Syrian conflict can be characterized as a partnership, and after Russia's direct intervention in the Syrian conflict on the side of the government in 2015 – as an alliance. This fact was emphasized by the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, N.P. Patrushev, who stated in Israel in 2019 that Russia and Iran are allies and partners in Syria. More complex relations have developed in the Russia-Iran-Turkey triangle, where the first two countries are allies, and Turkey is only a partner, since it is a NATO country and supports forces openly hostile to the government of Bashar al-Assad. Such paradoxical geopolitical cooperation could take place due to the fact that Russia and

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Iran jointly played a decisive role in preventing the coup d'état in Turkey in 2016, and on the basis of this support, the Astana process of 2017 was launched [31].

Following the Chechen conflict, the emergence of "rebel jihad" in the 2000s led to numerous and bloody terrorist attacks. The Caucasus Emirate *** created a network of jihadists in each North Caucasus region and organized terrorist attacks since 2007. According to A.A. Kazantsev and L.Yu. Gusev, "this structure was created by the 'president of Chechnya in exile,' Doku Umarov, in 2007 and signified the transformation of the North Caucasus underground from separatist-nationalist to radical-Islamist" [12, p. 23]. After the death of all known leaders of the Caucasus Emirate, local field commanders swore allegiance to ISIS in 2014–2015. Global ISIS jihadists appeared in the North Caucasus before the 2014 Sochi Olympics. The Caucasus Emirate competed with ISIS in the North Caucasus, but later local radicals and militants went to Iraq and Syria and joined ISIS. Under pressure from the Caucasus Emirate, transnational radical Islamists and global jihadists who supported Al-Qaeda and ISIS gained weight and significance in the North Caucasus [9; 10; 12; 23; 26; 28].

Although transnational jihadism is associated with Islamism, and in many ways these ideologies rely on common cultural sources, at the same time jihadism represents a break with Islamism as a political movement. According to I.V. Starodubrovskaya, "radical Islamic ideology combines elements of archaization with an attempt to Islamize modernity" [27, p. 112]. Jihadists are highly critical of Islamist movements around the world, accusing them of accepting democratic parliamentary systems and participating in elections, of rejecting Sharia law, and of preaching "shirk" (idolatry), which for jihadists is a mortal sin and a justification for hatred of traditional Islamists. Jihadists view Muslims as a community of believers, a group that has been saved ("firqah an najiyah") and which suffers from repression in the world: they claim that in Muslim countries Muslims are oppressed by regimes supported by Western governments. Jihadists reject nation-states on the grounds that such states are secular and artificial constructs inherited from Western colonialism. Jihadists regard all international institutions (including the UN) as representing a repressive order and as illegitimate [8; 9; 11; 14; 19; 25]. Today, jihadism is dominated by narratives presented in several themes: jihad against the infidels, the dominance of "jahiliyyah" (ignorance) in society, the romanticization of jihad, the valor of a warrior fighting in the path of Allah, enjoyment in paradise, and the predetermination of the fate of the "mujahidin" [18, p. 86].

The Caucasus Emirate declared its rule over most of the North Caucasus republics in 2007, defining radical Islamism and jihadism as its political ideology. While the First Chechen War was fought by local recruits and based on an ethno-nationalist ideology, the radical leaders of the Second Chechen War sought to expand the ethno-religious conflict by using jihadism as an ideology and practice of violence. The jihadization of the Chechen mujahedeen began in the mid-1990s and culminated in October 2007 in the proclamation of the Islamist Caucasus Emirate on the site of the defunct ethno-nationalist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The leaders of the Caucasus Emirate initially declared their loyalty to Al-Qaeda, following the tactics of international terrorism and organizing terrorist attacks on "enemy territory." In 2014, disagreements arose within the radical Islamist movement in the North Caucasus over the strategy of global jihadism. The disagreements between supporters of Al-Qaeda and ISIS concerned the essence of the "Islamic uprising": supporters of Al-Qaeda in the Caucasus Emirate argued that the terrorist war should be waged in all countries hostile to Islam, including Russia; supporters of ISIS in the North Caucasus prioritized the idea of a state based on radical Islam and wanted to join ISIS in its fight to create a new Islamic caliphate in the Middle East and the Caucasus. In addition to ideological disagreements, a number of factors contributed to the significant decrease in the number of jihadists in the Caucasus Emirate, primarily the lack of mass support among local Muslims and the anti-terrorist activities of the Russian authorities. The number of Imarat supporters declined due to the split after the 2014 Sochi Olympics, and after 2016, the flow of radical Islamists leaving Russia to join ISIS virtually ceased [10; 23; 26; 28].

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Many researchers point to a noticeable de-escalation of violence in the region since the mid-2010s, drawing attention to the fact that the number of people killed or wounded in armed violence has decreased, either overall or using the number of casualties among security forces as a proxy [10; 23; 28]. E. Holland, F. Witmer, and J. O'Loughlin identify three periods when civilian casualties were high: 1) August – December 1999, the early stage of the Second Chechen War; 2) 2003–2004, including the terrorist attack in Beslan; and 3) 2010–2013, when violence was highest in Dagestan [10]. During the more active phases of hostilities (2000–2002, when violence peaked in Chechnya), civilian casualties were lower, with most clashes occurring between security forces and radicals. Following the peak of violence in 2010–2013, the proportion of civilian casualties declined; since 2014, the percentage of civilian casualties has been at or below 15% in each of the subsequent three years [10].

One of the significant and independent factors of ethno-confessional radicalization in the post-Soviet North Caucasus was the problem of mass outflow and migration of the Russian-speaking population: migration processes increased the polyethnicity of the Ciscaucasia and the monoethnicity of the national republics. The authorities of the Russian regions responded to these processes in different ways: if in Stavropol in the 1990s, ethnic migration took place relatively peacefully, without excessive politicization, then in Kuban, ethnophobia began to form on the basis of ethno-religious and cultural intolerance. Stormy migration flows in the context of economic depression formed a number of ethnic conflict zones in the North Caucasus, including in the southeast of Stavropol Krai, where there was a long-term ethnic confrontation between the Nogais and Dargins. The east of Stavropol Krai is a striking example of ethnic dynamics with the replacement of ethnocultural groups that historically lived in a certain territory by new ethnic groups with the risk of escalating conflicts [2].

2. Integration policy as a strategy for countering extremism. When developing new strategies for integrating multicultural societies, it is necessary to expand the scope of reductionist interpretations that focus only on economic integration: socio-cultural differences, symbolic resources, and group identities are becoming key in integration policy today. Integration policy in complex societies is a set of national and regional strategies that promote ethnic and religious peace by countering extremism and deradicalization: socio-cultural integration policy strives to create optimal conditions for the harmonious interaction of the structural elements of the social system, a balance between religious and ethnic groups [20].

In the "Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025," the concept of "counteracting extremism" is conceptualized as "the activities of entities counteracting extremism aimed at identifying and eliminating the causes of extremist manifestations, as well as preventing, suppressing, solving, and investigating crimes of an extremist nature, minimizing and (or) eliminating their consequences"; while "entities counteracting extremism are federal government bodies, government bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and local government bodies" [32]. Deradicalization is a long-term social process of leaving an extremist environment and distancing oneself from extremist views and value systems; it is a process as a result of which radicalized individuals and groups renounce not only the use of violence but also extremist ideology, "repluralize" (D. Koehler), leave the extremist group, and accept a new system of integration values that rejects violence as the only way to achieve political goals. Support for deradicalization practices is a form of prevention and counteraction to extremism and radicalization. Anti-extremist preventive measures are divided into two types: primary prevention – work to prevent recruitment of new members into extremist groups; and secondary prevention – preventive work with members of extremist groups. As in the case of radicalization, deradicalization is a dynamic process that does not happen all at once: there is no such thing as "spontaneous radicalization," just as there is no such thing as "spontaneous deradicalization." Deradicalization takes a long time and requires, from the individual and the group, critical interaction with the environment and their own views in the long term and reintegration into society.

Regional approaches to the prevention of extremism and radicalization in the North Caucasus, with an abundance of common

features, have noticeable local specifics. The main part of deradicalization strategies is informational, explanatory, cultural and educational work, which is carried out during mass events, through local media, publications on social networks and brochures. As an ideological alternative to ethnoreligious extremism, regional and federal authorities are pinning their hopes on the development of scientific and educational programs, a mass volunteer movement, the popularization of patriotic activities, holding youth forums, and the allocation of grants for the development of civic forms of activity. Ethnic pluralism, consolidating a multicultural community and forming close ties between ethnic groups, is of fundamental importance for the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts: social inclusion and integration policies create conditions for the rationalization and transformation of unmanageable identity conflicts into intercultural dialogue [20; 21].

According to I.S. Semenenko, V.V. Lapkin, and V.I. Pantin, the measure of the effectiveness of regulating ethnopolitical conflict is the "depoliticization of ethnicity, which can be ensured by the social policy of the state and the inclusion in the agenda of civil society of interests promoted on behalf of ethnic groups, a positive combination of civil and ethnic identity based on 'consent to development' as a key guideline for the identity policy of subjects involved in interethnic interactions" [24, p. 69]. E.A. Stepanova, analyzing the reasons for the de-escalation of armed violence in the region, notes that the rational combination of force and integration strategies of deradicalization ensured "the transition of the armed conflict in Chechnya and terrorism of North Caucasian origin from priority challenges to the national security of the Russian Federation to the category of peripheral threats – at the level of low-intensity and highly fragmented violence" [28, p. 113].

Currently, the "Comprehensive Plan for Countering the Ideology of Terrorism in the Russian Federation for 2024–2028" is being implemented, the main goal of which is to protect the population from the propaganda influence of extremist ideologies and international terrorist organizations, communities, and individuals [15]. Among the main tasks of countering the ideology of terrorism, priority preventive areas of the fight against extremism, and ways of deradicalization

provided for in the Comprehensive Plan, the following are highlighted: "general prevention – activities to implement events with the population (for the education sector – with students) aimed at forming an anti-terrorist worldview; targeted prevention – activities to implement events with individual social groups of people vulnerable to the influence of the ideology of terrorism, or their individual representatives (for example, with people who received a religious education abroad and intend to engage in religious activities on the territory of the Russian Federation)"; "Individual prevention is the activity of implementing measures with individuals who are exposed to the ideology of terrorism or have fallen under its influence, the purpose of which is to form in them motives to refuse to participate in terrorist activities" [15].

In order to counter extremism, special attention is now being paid to methods of preventing the radicalization of young people through seminars and presentations for students conducted by imams and government officials, which widely use theological, political, and legal arguments against violent ideologies [1]. The abundance of state grants for counter-extremist initiatives encourages competition between NGOs in the region and helps launch small businesses, develop business plans, and provide microloans. Such grants also offer a range of practical courses and seminars that attract entrepreneurs from the regions, giving them the opportunity to collaborate and learn from each other. These are examples of positive inclusive initiatives aimed at developing communication skills and tolerance. Multi-target approaches that encourage intercultural dialogue are crucial in promoting integration policies in the North Caucasus. Analyzing the models of reintegration of the North Caucasus region, R.Kh. Kochesokov notes, "The education sector plays a crucial role in the reintegration process. In the early post-Soviet years, the paradigm of education as a process of providing services became widespread. Now it has become obvious that the role of education cannot be reduced to a simple transmission of scientific knowledge. It is in the educational process that spiritual values that unite people are laid down" [13, p. 18].

Integration policy in the North Caucasus is financed by the federal government through target programs aimed at solving a set of regional

problems. These mechanisms include inter-budget transfers, such as subsidies, grants, and subventions; federal target projects – large industry programs; and special economic zones. State programs aimed at stimulating economic development accompany inter-budget transfers; federal target programs and grants give priority to long-term investments in production, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, science, education, and tourism. Extensive top-down development programs should be coordinated with local projects based on regional resources and human capital, transforming local practices into business models. The North Caucasus needs support for bottom-up economic development in order to form a solid economic foundation at the grassroots level and unlock growth potential; moreover, the macro-region needs further integration. According to Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation A.V. Novak, "Key sectors for the regional economy are currently developing in the North Caucasus. These are tourism, agro-industrial complex, agriculture, industry, and transport. The Prime Minister has approved economic models for each region of the North Caucasus. Priority investment projects are currently being implemented there. This will attract more investment, create new jobs, and develop small and medium businesses" [17].

Results. As terrorism and extremism remain a serious threat, there is a growing scientific and socio-political consensus that special operations and enhanced security measures alone are not enough to defeat terrorism. In order to fully and effectively respond to the challenges and threats that terrorism and extremism pose to the North Caucasus today, more attention should be paid to the prevention of radicalization through strengthening ethno-confessional tolerance, structural changes, and integration policies. Systemic governance must be strengthened, eliminating aggravating factors that can create conflicts and lead people to extremist groups.

By the mid-2010s, a number of factors, in addition to ideological differences, contributed to the decrease in the number of extremists in the North Caucasus, primarily the lack of mass support among local Muslim communities, anti-terrorist activities, and the policy of integration of the region. The number of supporters of the Caucasus Emirate decreased due to the split after the 2014 Sochi Olympics, and after 2016 the flow of radical Islamists leaving Russia and joining ISIS stopped – deradicalization and de-escalation of armed violence began in the region. In order to reduce radicalization and strengthen the integration of traditional Muslims, the state adopted a systemic conflict management strategy, including counter-terrorism operations, methods of preventing radicalization, diplomatic efforts in the Muslim world to optimize the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional image of Russia, and a large-scale policy of support for Muslim leaders and their traditional communities.

The integration policy proclaims Islam as a traditional religion, protected by the state and historically foundational to the identity of the multinational Russian people. State support for Islam corresponds to the main goals of foreign and domestic policy. The confirmation of the cultural and historical connection of Islam with Russia, as well as the thesis that Russia is a multi-confessional civilization, served as the basis for its desire to restore the geopolitical status of a great power in Asia and the Middle East. Under these conditions, the policy of integration in the North Caucasus is becoming an important tool for the prevention of ethno-religious extremism, a preemptive impact on the factors of radicalization through a set of political and socio-cultural measures to manage regional elites, economic support through federal transfers, targeted projects and development programs, the promotion of social inclusion and tolerance, and the organization of educational and informational activities.

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