

Relying on Traditional Structures Unlikely to Stabilize North Caucasus

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Window on Eurasia covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author **Paul Goble** is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

VIENNA — Ingush President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov has announced plans to revive there the role of "taips" — the traditional extended family organizations — in order to fight corruption and stop the continuing flow of young people into the bands of anti-government militants.

But this effort, the latest example of a North Caucasian leader turning to traditional arrangements in support of his government, is unlikely to achieve either of the goals that he seeks. And while it may win Yevkurov some temporary popularity, it is likely to reduce still further his power and authority — as well as that of Moscow.

Earlier this week, Kommersant [reported](#), Yevkurov met with representatives of 14 leading taips and told them that he would like to see these structures play a greater role. "If each taip is able to maintain order among its representatives," he said, "we can dramatically improve

the situation in the republic."

To coordinate this activity, the Ingush leader said he was creating "a council of taips" that would fight corruption and criminality. Among the steps he called for is the setting of "proportional quotas" for each taip so that its leaders and their young people could gain access to university-level education without being forced to pay bribes.

Aleksei Malashenko, an expert on the Caucasus at the Moscow Carnegie Center, told Kommersant that Yevkurov's initiative was part of the Ingush president's drive to create new avenues for dialogue between his government and the population, avenues that had been largely blocked by actions of his predecessor Marat Zyazikov.

"Over the last several years," Malashenko said, "the population of [Ingushetia] had ceased to believe people among the powers that be considering and not without foundation that the bureaucrats were concerned only with their own enrichment" and not about the welfare of the people as a whole.

Turning to traditional structures like the taips is nothing new in the post-Soviet Caucasus. Taip councils existed earlier in Chechnya under President Dzhokhar Dudayev and in Ingushetia as well. But while they enjoyed support among the elderly, they "did not play a major role in society," Kommersant points out, and quickly became "only a decorative structure."

Given the respect that societies in the North Caucasus have historically given to elders, it is not surprising that leaders interested in building their own authority and thus establishing or restoring order should turn to such primordial groups. But the situation in the region over the last two decades appears to have made that an increasingly counterproductive strategy.

In an [article](#) this week, Andrei Demidov observes that in the North Caucasus, young people are hit far harder by the problems of unemployment and are struck by the way in which the local power structures are dominated by older people who strike the young as out of touch.

The Russian commentator notes that "in a situation when in Dagestan, every year there need to be up to 20,000 new jobs," given population growth and rural over-crowding in that agricultural republic, "young people either are leaving beyond the borders of the republic or striving for changes. Here and now. Including with arms in their hands."

And they are even more likely to choose the latter option, he continues, because of another Dagestani reality: the dominance of older people in government institutions. In the republic's Popular Assembly, "he points out, "there are 72 deputies. Of them only one — Gaziat Abuchov — is under 30, and only five are under 40."

In short, "older people are deciding the problems of the young." The same pattern holds across the North Caucasus. As a result, for young people, "the path to power is practically closed." But those who go into the forests do so because there "it is possible to stand up now," something the tilt toward the traditional structures dominated by the old will make worse.

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