Islam in Russia, though unfamiliar to many and often associated solely with the Chechen conflict, has a long and varied history. Only a thousand kilometers or so east-southeast of Moscow, Muslims have a significant presence in the Volga-Ural region, which converted to Islam as far back as the tenth century. Altogether, there are about sixteen million Muslims—Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Ossetes, Ingush, etc.—in Russia, comprising over ten per cent of the population. And their numbers continue to grow. They constitute a double minority, in effect, by being both religious and national minorities within an essentially Orthodox country in which ethnic Russians make up eighty per cent of the population.

The Russian government does grant Muslims specific linguistic and cultural rights, however, and most live in such autonomous republics as the Republic of Tatarstan. These political entities are perceived as being sort of national states within the larger Russian state. Five and a half million Tatars comprise the largest minority group in Russia and, in distinct contrast to Muslims living in the Caucasus, view themselves as the very embodiment of “Russia’s Islam.”

Today Tatar Islam faces a number of challenges: whether to define Islam as a national identity or as a religion; how to respond to Salafist agitation for politicization of Islam, on the one hand, and conservative de-politicization, on the other; and how to define Tatar Islam’s place in the ummah and its relations with the rest of the Muslim world. The Spiritual Board of Muslims of Tatarstan (DUM) is led by conservative Hanafi theologians who advocate a return to Islamic values, or a “re-traditionalization” of post-Soviet Muslim society. As they press for a return to Islamic tradition, however, they also want Sufi national traditions to be respected and refuse to get involved in politics.

DUM members are at odds with a number of factions. They are openly at war with local Salafist movements, which they consider to be too fundamentalist, too politicized, and too universalist in their conception of Islam. They denounce the Salafists as being alien to national religious traditions. The Spiritual Board also opposes the Tatar
presidential apparatus, which, it says seeks a religiously un-justified accomodation with Western ideas and values by advocating the adoption of a new form of “Euro-Islam” or “neo-Jadidism.” The latter is a reference to the Jadid movement inspired by the ideas of Ismail Gaspary (1851-1914) that first emerged among Tatar Muslims in the nineteenth century and spread throughout Russian Turkistan. Its earliest adherents, a profoundly Russified Muslim élite of that era, sought to modernize Islam and reconcile it with Western liberal and progressive thought and to give the Turkic Muslims an active role in Russian politics. Although these debates are taking place today within a very particular Russian context, they are clearly also a reflection of the greater ideological arguments currently shaking up the Muslim world.

The Multiple Speakers for Islam in Tatarstan

To understand these debates, it is necessary to know something about the institutional actors involved in the contest over Tatar Islam: the state, the Spiritual Board, the Council of Religious Affairs, the nationalist movements and the imams. These groups represent particular political interests that explain, in part, their ideological and theological positions. After five centuries of being incorporated into an officially Orthodox Russian empire and after seventy years of militant state atheism, the Tatar Islam emerging today is a complicated phenomenon. It is also marked by the considerable role that state structures play in its development and the specific political framework of a Tatarstan existing within the Russian Federation.

Tatarstan supports a substantive version of federalism and led the ethnic republics’ autonomist revolt in 1993 during discussions about the new Russian constitution. This period of overt opposition to Moscow ended with the bilateral treaty of 15 February 1994, which gave Tatarstan the (unconstitutional) status of an “associated state.”1 Tatarstan continues, however, to stress its distinctive—loyal yet autonomous—status by taking such steps as joining the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Tatarstan’s paradoxically loyalist position within the Russian Federation is reflected in the equally erratic political biography of its president, Mintimer Shaimiev. Shaimiev ran on the ticket of the pro-Yeltsin party Nash Dom—Rossiia (Our Home Is Russia) in the 1995 legislative elections. He then toyed with dissent as a member of the Otechestvo—Vsia Rossiia (Fatherland—All Russia) party of the regional nomenklatura, which was led by Yevgeny Primakov, before finally joining the Unity party that supported Vladimir Putin’s 1999 presidential bid. The Constitutional Court rewarded this loyalty, supporting Shaimiev and a number of other regional presidents in their unconstitutional bids to remain in power for a third term. On 25 March 2005 Tatarstan’s Council of State granted Shaimiev presidential powers for the third consecutive time.

Since the first days of perestroika, Shaimiev has stressed the ethnically mixed character
of his republic. He has sought to turn Tatarstan into a symbol of Russia’s awareness of its religious and ethnic diversity. For him the best way to ensure Tatar sovereignty is to perfect the Soviet system of federalism rather than to try to restore a lost Tatar state. Tatarstan’s presidential administration consistently upholds a Eurasian model of the republic, presenting it as the “bridge” between Russia and Central Asia. As early as the start of the 1990s, Shaimiev very symbolically announced the reconstruction inside the Kazan Kremlin of both the Orthodox Cathedral of Annunciation and the Kul-Sharif mosque; he also established religious parity by conferring public status on both Orthodox and Islamic holidays.

In addition, the republic officially rehabilitated Sultan Galiev (1880-1941?), a symbol of 1920s Tatar national communism and a forerunner of Third-Worldism. Galiev believed that membership in the then-Bolshevik Russian state was compatible with the unification of all Turkic peoples—an attractive notion for contemporary Tatar intellectuals and politicians, who have always seen themselves as the elite of the Turkic world. Sultan-Galievism thus allows Tatarstan’s political authorities to combine their Turkic and Muslim Tatar national identity with European-style modernity and strong loyalty to the Russian state.

Tatar nationalism is inseparable from the religious renewal that the republic has experienced since the fall of the Soviet Union. After declaring sovereignty on 30 August 1990, the Tatar nationalist movement rejected the authority of the DUMES—the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia that Stalin had created in 1943 to cover all of Russia—and demanded the establishment of a spiritual board dedicated exclusively to Tatarstan’s affairs. Under the leadership of the mufti Gabdulla-hazrat Galiulla, then, the Tatar DUM (Spiritual Board of Muslims of Tatarstan) was founded in 1992.

Galiulla’s activities were far more political than religious in character, however. He was closely involved with both the nationalist Pan-Tatar Public Center (Vsetatarskii obshchechestvennyi tsentr) and the Ittifak Party, the self-proclaimed mission of which was to unify the Tatar nation around Islam. He violently opposed the policies of President Shaimiev and supported independence for Tatarstan. Finally, wearied by the recurrent opposition from the DUM and the multiple conflicts among different ulamas, government officials decided to reclaim the religious institutions. During the 1998 Congress of Muslims of Tatarstan, the authorities in power forced the DUM’s high functionaries to quit the political scene and to reduce their support for the nationalists in exchange for government assistance in reconstituting institutional unity for Tatar Islam. Galiulla was dismissed from his position, and the mufti Gusman-hazrat Iskhakov was elected in his place.

Unlike Galiulla, Iskhakov was very respectful of secular power and set about depoliticizing the DUM. In exchange the public authorities adopted, in 1999, a law “On freedom of conscience and religious organizations” stipulating that all the republic’s Muslim organizations be represented and led by a centralized religious body—namely, the DUM.
By guaranteeing the existence of a single religious structure to cover all the national territory, this law served the interests of both the DUM and government authorities, who saw the rival muftiates as undermining Tatarstan’s ability to exercise its rights within the Russian Federation. The DUM, then, has officially become the sole religious authority for Muslims living within the borders of the republic, which is territorially subdivided into muhtasibat covering all of Tatarstan’s forty-five administrative entities. It establishes standards for religious instruction and oversees all Muslim educational institutions within its jurisdiction. The 1999 law has provoked significant polemics both inside and outside the republic. Galiulla announced his opposition by refusing to recognize the DUM’s juridical supremacy and continues, to this day, to press for political engagement from religious personnel.

After the public authorities and the Spiritual Board, the next main actor in the world of Tatar Islam is the Council of Religious Affairs. This body is heir to a Soviet structure created at the time of Stalin’s “reconciliation” with religions during the Second World War. In 1943 the Soviet authorities established a Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, and in 1944, a Council of Religious Affairs for non-Orthodox forms of worship. These two institutions merged in 1965 into one Council of Religious Affairs, which survived the collapse of the Soviet regime. It still monitors the application of legislation relevant to religious matters, while also facilitating communication between state institutions and religious movements. Although the conditions surrounding such relationships have radically changed in the post-Soviet era, the Council continues to symbolize the interference of secular power in the spiritual realm. Its main functions involve the enforcement of laws that ensure respect for official secularism, give preference to religions recognized as “traditional” and restrict the rights granted to those classified as “non-traditional.”

It is not surprising that the president of the Council of Religious Affairs of the Cabinet Ministry of Tatarstan, Rinat Nabiev, lauds the principle of interconfessional tolerance that exists throughout the Russian Federation, and especially in Tatarstan. In his opinion, the degree to which this principle has become a reality is due, at least in part, to “the Russian intellectual élites who came to integrate numerous elements of Muslim culture.” A principal mission of the Council of Religious Affairs is to promote non-transcendent religious expression—such as charitable activity—that stresses the collective and conformist character of faith over the individual’s relation to God. The Council is devoted to transforming religious institutions into charitable associations. According to Nabiev, anchoring religion in altruistic social activities and in “charitable thinking” is what applying the secular principle of interconfessional tolerance means. For him, indeed, “it is precisely this interaction that, in the Volga region, has prevented wars from being launched and purges based on religious and ethnic criteria.”

In this struggle to define and guide Islam in Tatarstan, the Council, the political authorities and the Spiritual Board are joined by yet another set of rivals. Nationalist Tatars
also lay claim to Islam. As represented by the Pan-Tatar Public Center and the Ittifak party, the Nationalist Tatar movement has always declared its support for Islam—but initially as a culture, not as a political system. In the early 1990s it championed the idea of a secular national state in which Islam would merely be recognized for its role in national culture and in maintaining the moral health of the people. By the end of the decade, however, the situation had changed: the Ittifak party switched its emphasis from nationalism to Islamism. Today its leader, Fauziya Bairamova, speaks of the complete Islamicization of individual, social and political life, and calls for a return to the original and universal rules of Islam as laid down in the Quran. In 2000, after the Ioldyz madrasa in Naberezhnye Chelny was closed for allegedly accommodating “Wahhabites,” the Pan-Tatar Public Center also adopted a more fundamentalist vision of Islam and began arguing that the religion was the sole authentic defender of Tatar identity. Both the Ittifak party and the Pan-Tatar Public Center denounce the Spiritual Board, which they consider too moderate.

Significant conflicts also exist among Tatarstan’s Muslim “clergy.” From about one hundred in 1990, the number of imams and ulamas has now reached over three thousand. Several new institutions of religious education have been established as well. Among them are the Muhammadiyah madrasa and the mosque of the so-called “millenium of conversion to Islam” in Kazan, the Islamology Department at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences, the Orientalism Institute at the University of Kazan, and the Islamic University of Russia. Such growth has naturally sparked divisions. Urban and rural imams do not enjoy the prestige or status granted to the instructors of the madrasas, for instance, nor do they often share their religious ideology. The younger generation of clerics, trained in higher educational institutions, tends to espouse a universalist vision of Islam, while most of the ulamas are still wedded to a more traditional, popular Islam and are themselves barely distinguishable from the rest of the population.

This diversity of Tatar Islam’s representatives accurately reflects the diversity of the religion itself, which continues to grow. There were eighteen officially recorded Muslim communities in 1988, more than seven hundred in 1992, and there are around a thousand today. These groups run the spectrum from fundamentalists to traditionalists to partisans of a moderate, liberal vision of religion.

The Spiritual Board of Tatarstan: Apolitical Conservatism?

Following the example of the Orthodox Christian hierarchy in Russia, the ulamas of the DUM aspire to have a major influence on the development of Islam in Russia. The supreme mufti Gusman Iskhakov and his first deputy Valiulla Iakupov have consequently sought a high profile in the numerous theological and ideological debates taking place in the Tatar public space. They assert that, while the secularizing forces within society might be discouraged, Tatarstan must accept the social reality of contemporary Russia, which is
officially a secular state. The DUM further emphasizes the need to consider the multi-
ethnic character of Tatarstan, in which Muslim Tatars represent only half the population,
the remainder being comprised of other nationalities and confessions. The DUM, then,
maintains a pragmatic attitude toward political matters: it upholds the decisions of the
presidential administration and recognizes the principle of separation between church
and state.

According to the DUM’s Kazan muftiat, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the
resulting ideological vacuum prompted many individuals to turn to religion for consola-
tion. And it contends that, after many decades of widespread atheism, this religious
“renewal” is indeed real, pointing especially to the increasing number of youth who now
attend worship services—an activity previously limited to older persons. Yet, the muftiat
also recognizes that Tatar Islam’s institutional framework is weak. Most imams have
received only on-the-job training—a fact that contributes to the conservation of the val-
ues of traditional Tatar Islam but also to the separation of its practices from Muslim uni-
versal norms. Iakupov admits to the low level of theological knowledge of today’s imams,
who at times even spread ideas inconsistent with Islamic dogma and cause believers to
flee in search of a more rigorous understanding of the faith.

These educational disparities also contribute to some generational conflicts. Iakupov
acknowledges that older imams tend to resent the new generation of better educated the-
ologians who are trying to establish new religious norms. The older generation is very
reluctant to change practices that enabled Islam to survive decades of official atheism on
the supposition that they conflict with sharia, which is poorly understood in any case.
Iakupov also warns that the younger generation’s desire for more rigorous religious obser-
vance may have some unfortunate consequences: movements he refers to as “Wahhabite”
may well be able to take advantage of this difficult period of radical post-Soviet change to
spread caricatured religious values among individuals with little knowledge of Islam.
Such extremist movements attempt to attract youths under the cover of discourse that
promises renewal and a break with the past, and that condemns the practices of older
generations.

The DUM muftiat is concerned about the development of what it calls fundamental-
list “sects” and recalls that Tatarstan has already been repeatedly accused of allowing
Salafist doctrines to flourish on its territory, even though the local clergy widely condemn
them. The muftiat denounces these “sects” for being financed from abroad, and Iakupov
especially criticizes the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Moscow for using its considerable
resources to disseminate Wahhabi propaganda throughout the country. The muftiat
accuses the embassy, in effect, of foreign interference for the methods it has employed to
influence Russia’s Muslims. In addition to spreading literature, the DUM contends, these
include sending children to study in Arab countries, opening of institutions of theologi-
cal instruction in Russia, and educating “religious cadres” under the supervision of Arab
teachers and proselytes from abroad. The DUM also takes to task the Tablighi Jamaat, who are active throughout the Russian Federation; the neo-Sufi movement of Suleyman; and the Nurjus, from Turkey, who are themselves well established in Tatarstan (especially in Naberezhnye Chelny) with seven Tataro-Turk secondary schools. The muftiat further accuses the Nurjus of concealing their fundamentalist agenda and of taking advantage of the Federation’s liberal legislative framework by falsely registering as a cultural association rather than a religious institution.

Iakupov has no doubt about who should be held personally responsible for the growth of “sects” in Tatarstan—namely, the supreme mufti of Russia, Talgat Tadjuddin. Iakupov charges that Tadjuddin has fostered divisions in Tatar Islam since 1980, when he became head of the DUMES. By allegedly repressing his rivals, Tadjuddin is seen to have given rise to two non-official movements in Tatarstan, the “Faizrakhmanisty” and the “Mofliukhunovtsy.”

The first movement is comprised of the disciples of Faizrakhman Sattarov, who was one of a group of Tatars authorized to study at the madrasa Mir-i Arab in Bukhara. Sattarov was an imam in Leningrad, Rostov-on-Don, Ufa and Oktyabrsky, before being named acting supreme mufti at the DUMES in 1970. At the end of the 1980s, he created his own religious group, which still survives today in Kazan, Ufa, Naberezhnye Chelny, Leninogorsk, Almetevsk and a few villages. The Faizrakhmanisty rejects the Hanafite madhhab, or school of Islamic jurisprudence. Much of its discourse is borrowed from Hanbali and Shafi schools of jurisprudence, although structurally it is modelled on the Sufi order.

The second group Iakupov singles out for mention was founded by N. Mofliukhunov, who worked as superior of the Chistopol mosque from 1961 to 1988. Also educated in Bukhara, Mofliukhunov gained some celebrity status as translator of the Nugmani Tafsir, the famous commentaries on the Quran by the 11th Century Turkic theologian Yakub Ibn Nugman. His movement rejects the role of the Hadith in theology, denying them any authenticity and demanding adherence solely to the Quran. It also refuses to recognize the legitimacy of many rites and traditions sanctioned by the DUM, and condemns pilgrimages to the historical sites of Bulgary and Biliar, where the Tatars were first converted to Islam in 922, as being “pagan.”

Confronted with these “sectarian” groups, the Kazan muftiat works to promote a more moderate position. It rejects the idea, advanced by fundamentalists, of returning to some form of “pure Islam”—an idea that it sees as dangerously utopian. For the DUM this conception of Islam is unacceptable because it involves replacing national mores with imported foreign elements; what the partisans of fundamentalism seek to change is precisely Tatar religious practices. Rather than abandoning many of its theological conceptions and existing rites, the DUM declares, Tatar Islam should take pride in the legitimate specificity it has achieved thanks to those who, now as always, have remained faithful to the
Prophet. The muftiat holds that the pre-Islamic practices integrated into Islam, the Sufi traditions that shaped the Tatars’ understanding of God, and the pilgrimages to the sites of local saints are more important and more legitimate than the notion that every Muslim throughout the world should pray in exactly the same way.

The Spiritual Board thus calls for an apolitical and traditionalist re-Islamicization of Muslims. On the political level it tacitly endorses the official secularism of the Russian state, vaunts the religious tolerance that unites it to Orthodoxy, and supports the political authorities of Tatarstan in their defence of the republic’s interests. On the religious level it presses for public acknowledgement of Islam as a key element of national identity, for obligatory courses of religious education in the schools, and for Tatar Muslims to attend mosque services regularly and to follow Islamic precepts in their daily lives—precepts regarding marriage, the duty to have many children, the deference owed to elders and imams, and so on. On the theological level the Spiritual Board maintains that Hanafism should be strictly respected; that traditional readings of the Hadith should continue; and that local rites and pilgrimages, as well as Sufi traditions, be followed—even if some portray such practices as contrary to the principles of “classical” Islam.

At the same time the DUM criticizes those—including reformist Tatar political authorities and their intellectual allies—who support the revival of Jadidism. It asserts that reforms designed to update Jadid ideas, which were first developed in the context of czarist colonization and the juridical domination of Orthodoxy, are simplistic and irrational. Both Iskhakov and Iakupov reject the Jadid sanction of the concept of *ijtihad*, the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the Quranic or Sunni sources, which they see as both impeding their own goals as well as lending legitimacy to the simplistic views of the fundamentalists. They consider that *ijtihad*, which is used to justify individual interpretations of the Quran and the Hadith, will strengthen Wahhabism by undermining the authority of official Hanafi Islam. The DUM holds, moreover, that the theological interpretations proposed by the presidential administration and its ideological adviser, Raphael Khakimov, are too inspired by the religious model of western Europe, where faith is accepted as being open to an infinite number of individual interpretations. It denounces the notion that faith is equivalent to private morality and does not require any personal religiosity or collective practice—a phenomenon it presents as a form of “Muslim Protestantism.”

The Spiritual Board, therefore, is in a difficult position between two “dangers”: that of being marginalized by a widespread religious “renewal” movement that may come to be dominated by more radical elements; and that of contributing to a process of secularization that may diminish its role as mediator between the state and the population. In navigating this situation, the DUM has placed its hopes in the development of Islamic state education, which it believes will enable it to regain control over the whole Muslim community and to orchestrate a balance between collective religiosity and secular legislation.
“Euro-Islam”: A Secularized Conception of Islam?

In the early 1990s, the presidential administration of Tatarstan saw itself as an enlightened, fundamentally secular oligarchy interested in preserving the republic’s ethnic and religious diversity. It sought to uphold a strong national identity that would, however, be compatible with Russian political realities. The formation of this “new” identity involved, not only the rehabilitation of Islam as a defining element of national identity, but also its evolution into a modern faith that would respect official secularism and other religions.

This pragmatic goal has shaped the proposals for reconceptualizing Islam that have been spearheaded by Rafael Khakimov (1947–), the leading theorist for Tatarstan’s authorities. A political adviser to President Shaimiev, Khakimov heads the ideological section of the Tatarstan-New Century party (Tatarstan’s version of the pro-Putin United Russia party) and directs the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan. Despite his great influence, however, Khakimov does not have a monopoly on public statements on Islam; he merely voices the official position of the Tatar administration on religious matters.

Khakimov advances a subtle theological position that simultaneously condemns the traditional form of Tatar Islam as ethnocentric and opposes the idea that Islam is monolithic. He argues that Islam was historically rooted in national cultures—cultures recognized by the Quran as legitimate—and is, therefore, fundamentally pluralistic. Khakimov’s aim is to enhance the status of Hanafism as a pragmatic theological school that recognizes not only sharia but also the value of common law and is willing to adjust Islamic principles to different cultural contexts. In this way, unlike the DUM, which seeks to restrict the use of ijtihad, Khakimov is a proponent of it. He advocates a more flexible approach to dogma and, using a traditional expression, wants to “reopen the gates of ijtihad” that were closed in the ninth century. In a famous pamphlet entitled Where Is Our Mecca? A Manifesto of Euro-Islam, he insists on dissociating Islam from Arab culture: one can be Muslim, he asserts, without any cultural link to the classical Middle East.

Khakimov clearly draws on the reformist legacy of Jadidism which defended the individual’s right to challenge community opinion and the local madhhab. Khakimov has recognized that such ideas are easy to adapt to contemporary circumstances—though the Jadidists also believed in the future political unity of the Turkic world, while today they are portrayed strictly as Tatar national heroes. The pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic aspects of their thought are viewed as being too disruptive in light of contemporary political realities and are diplomatically ignored. Otherwise, however, Khakimov considers Jadidism to be a direct precursor to the particular Euro-Islam that he is trying to develop: “Jadidism is the source of all contemporary Tatar culture.”

Khakimov wants to root Islam in modernity: being the religion of free human beings,
Islam must result from free choice. He argues that there can be no intermediary between God and man, and no Islamic justice without equality between men, and between men and women. *Ijtihad* is the only way to introduce liberal thought into Islam, enabling it to avoid a “clash of civilizations” and to respond to the growing Islamophobia in Russia.

Tatar Euro-Islam has a positive conception of modernity. According to Khakimov, the Tatars understand the need for a secular state, a democratic and liberal political system, and mastery of cutting-edge technologies. Islam must help modernize society, not re-traditionalize it. Since the late nineteenth century, the arrival of capitalism in Russia has “fundamentally changed the functions of Islam: once an institution of ethnic preservation, it had to become a factor of development.” Thus Khakimov accepts and even applauds the paradoxical behavior of the vast majority of Tatars who consider themselves Muslims even though they fail to frequent mosques. Khakimov draws on this sociological data to confirm his concept of Euro-Islam, understood as the “contemporary form of Jadidism—a neo-Jadidism which better reflects Islam’s culturological aspect than its ritual side.”

Khakimov believes there is an intrinsic link between the national and religious aspects of Tatar identity, or “Tatarness.” He identifies two cultural factors that will determine the people’s future: “Firstly, the status of Tatar as the key language in the Turkic group. Secondly, Jadidism as one of the most highly developed forms of Islam.” Khakimov’s ideas are not, therefore, at all free of nationalist implications. He has publicized his nationalist convictions in several texts, including *Who Are You, Tatar?*, which was published in Russian in 2002.

Khakimov particularly decries the Russian authorities—both czarist and Soviet—whom he accuses of having wrongly divided the Tatars into several ethnic groups by giving separate institutional recognition, not only to the Tatars of Crimea, Astrakhan and Siberia, but also to the Nogais and Bashkirs. Khakimov considers the Bashkir nation to be an artificial construct created by the Bolsheviks, and dismisses the claims made by present-day Kriashens and Bulgars for status as separate peoples to be equally unfounded. He harshly criticizes Tatar society as well for its lack of commitment to the adoption of the Latin alphabet, a project that the Second World Congress of Tatars voted for in 2002 but the Russian Duma then deemed unconstitutional.

More generally, Khakimov condemns Russian historiography and its discriminatory view of the Tatars as barbarous sons of the Mongol empire; for him they are the “descendants of the Turkic genius.” He even claims they played a key role in the creation of the Russian empire, which was born from the seizure of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552 and 1556, respectively. Having been the first Russified Muslims, he argues, the Tatars joined the Muscovite aristocracy, fought to expand the empire, “opened up” Siberia and Central Asia, and mediated Russia’s relations with the Muslim world. The Tatars have the longest tradition of coexistence with the Russians, Khakimov maintains, and have contributed to Russia’s Eurasian identity for five centuries. While Khakimov’s ideas are Eurasianist, they
also have a pan-Turkic zeal to them. He sees the Tatars as the unifiers of the Turkic peoples and Turkic unity as inevitable—despite opposition from Moscow. In the long term such unity will strengthen Russia, moreover, because the Turkic peoples are the “natural” allies of the Slavs.33

Khakimov’s theological conception of Islam, then, emphasizes the historical role and geographical position of Tatarstan as a “bridge between civilizations” or a cultural crossroads. “We need Jadidism,” he has written, “because it draws on the values of the West and of the East in equal measure. The fates have decreed for the Tatars to become the northern outpost of Islam; they are situated on the border between West and East, not only geographically, but culturally as well.”34 Khakimov’s theories have garnered little popular support in Tatarstan, however. They are not appreciated among the ulamas, who interpret them as a form of forcible modernization through covert secularization; they are too intellectual and elitist for the masses; and, above all, they are seen as expressing official opinion on religious matters. Indeed, Tatarstan’s political strategy inside the Russian Federation is precisely to stress both the republic’s cultural—national, linguistic, religious—distinctiveness and its acceptance of modernization.

Conclusion

Several ideological readings of Islam are currently being debated in Tatarstan. Through the figure of Rafael Khakimov, the Tatar state promotes a secular version of religion and conceives of Islam above all as an element of national culture. Tatar nationalism is thereby linked to Euro-Islam. Khakimov concentrates on nationalist discourse in the hope of skirting theological difficulties that he sees as archaic. His goal is to foster a reform of Islam that would render it compatible with Western norms of individualism and economic and political liberalism. In its dealings with Russia, the European Union, and the United States, Tatarstan would like to present Euro-Islam as the face of Islam in the republic—despite the fact that it is contested by local theologians.

Precisely because it must fight against both Euro-Islam and Salafism, the Spiritual Board finds itself in the most difficult position. On the one hand, the DUM condemns Euro-Islam for reducing religion to little more than a servant of nationalism or a cultural tradition; on the other, it refuses to espouse any universalist conception of Islam. It seeks, instead, to develop relations with the rest of the Islamic world in the hope that Tatar Islam will be recognized as legitimate by other countries and Islamic institutions. While doing so, however, it rejects the notion that local traditions should be changed in the name of a hypothetical “universal Islam” whose practices and dogmas would be uniformly applied.

The DUM’s Tatar theologians argue that the movements calling for a literal reading of the Quran come from the Arab world and bring with them Arab cultural elements that need not be accepted in Tatarstan. In addition, these movements seek to undermine the
supremacy of Hanafism—and its flexible approach to dogma—within the Russian Federation. Finally, these proselytizing movements promote a more militant vision of Islam: they divide the world into *dar al-Islam* (land of Islam) and *dar al-Harb* (land of war), and desire to politicize the faith so as to use it in the struggle against the so-called “Western domination.”

The Spiritual Board judges such conceptions of Islam to be unacceptable. It recognizes that Tatar Islam is a minority religion within the mostly Orthodox Russian Federation and should, therefore, adopt a more conciliatory than confrontational attitude. Muslim proselytism is frowned upon by the local theologians, who see it as a potential source of inter-confessional tensions. It was not surprising that the various Spiritual Boards of Russia strongly disapproved of the creation, in 2004, of a Russian association of ethnic Russians who had converted to Islam. The DUM also rejects the distinction between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-Harb*; it hardly seems to apply to Russian Islam, which has lived in relative peace within the Christian world for many centuries. The Spiritual Board is quite aware, moreover, that religion is little practiced among Tatar Muslims, who tend to think of themselves more as Russian citizens than as Muslims cut off from their co-religionists.

The Spiritual Board opposes the anti-Western politicization of Islam. In the international arena Tatarstan considers itself to be at the very forefront of the “dialogue of civilizations.” And the great variety of societies within the Islamic orbit undercuts the notion—so loudly proclaimed by Islamic propaganda—of a universal Islam. Indeed many Muslim societies, especially those on the “periphery” of the Islamic world, have developed a much more nuanced vision of Islam. They do not seek a confrontation with the “West” and refuse to limit their conceptions of Islam to only those approved of in the Middle East.

**NOTES**


9. Russian legislation actually divides religions into "traditional" religions (Orthodoxy, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism) and "non-traditional" religions (Protestantism, Catholicism, new Christian or Muslim religious movements).


12. Ibid.

13. Russia is a secular state that recognizes a separation between church and state. The legislation is ambiguous, however, because the Orthodox Church enjoys special status as a cultural symbol of the nation. The present discussion about whether or not Orthodoxy can juridically be given official supremacy has aroused the concern of Russia’s Muslims.


16. The Tablighi Jamaat is a Muslim missionary and revival movement that wants to bring about a spiritual awakening among Muslims. Originally started in India, the movement has spread to more than one hundred countries and is now well represented in Russia.

17. The Turkish Nurju movement, inspired by Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen, spread to Central Asia and Russia in the 1990s. Its first ambition is to contribute to the re-Islamization of the “Turkic brothers” by developing Turkish schools in the Post-Soviet space.

18. Since the second half of the 1990s, Russian legislation on religious matters has become increasingly tighter. It is now somewhat difficult for new religious movements to gain juridical recognition. A number of them, therefore, prefer to present themselves, and have registered themselves, as cultural associations.


20. The Spiritual Board recognizes Bulgaria and Biliar as revered pilgrimage sites (local Hajj) while fundamentalists denounce them as "pagan."


28. R. Khakimov, “Kriticheskoe myshlenie i obnovlenie islama.”


31. The Kriashens are Tatar speakers who have been Orthodox for several centuries. Kriashen nationalist intellectuals want the Kriashens to be recognized as a distinct “nationality.” In the 2002 census, “Kriashen” was included in the multiple-choice list of “nationalities,” an act that the Tatars perceived as a provocation staged by Moscow to weaken Tatar identity and challenge the Tatars’ status as the titular nationality in Tatarstan. However, the final result (about 23,000 Kriashens were counted) did not have any particular repercussions.

