

## Dargins

### Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 510,156 Dargins in the Russian Federation. Dargins are the second largest group in Dagestan, accounting for approximately 16 per cent of the republic's population. They are one of Dagestan's 14 official titular nationalities. They live primarily in south-central Dagestan and are Sunni Muslim, although there is a small Shi'i minority. The Dargin (or Dargwa) language belongs to the Caucasian family of languages.

### Historical context

The Dargin are indigenous to the North Caucasus. They were converted to Islam in the eighth century under Arab influence. The Dargin came under Russian influence from the onset of the nineteenth century. During the Soviet period an official Dargin nationality was consolidated to include a number of smaller but culturally related groups such as the Kaidak and Kubachi. The Dargin have traditionally been a trading people, and maintain traditional Caucasian social structures, including village (*aul*) assemblies and councils of elders.

During the late Soviet period Dargins came to become one of the most politically influential ethnic groups in Dagestan, holding the republican leadership from 1983.

### Current issues

Competition between Dargins and Avars for political influence in Dagestan intensified in 2005-6 and culminated in the replacement of a Dargin by an Avar as holder of the State Council chairmanship. Magomedali Magomedov, the Dargin who was Dagestan's *de facto* leader since 1983, resigned in February 2006. In contravention of the informal power-sharing arrangement between Dargins and Avars, which split the republic's two top posts between the two ethnic groups, the new Avar president appointed an ethnic Kumyk as prime minister.

Dargins, along with other ethnic groups, are involved in intersecting ethnic and mafia struggles for political and economic power in Dagestan. Together with knock-on effects from the Chechen conflict, these rivalries account for a dramatic deterioration in the security environment in Dagestan, with 80 political assassinations reported in the first six months of 2005.