

Ingush

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 413,016 Ingush in the Russian Federation. The majority of the Ingush live within the western part of the Chechen-Ingush republic, which now forms the Ingush Republic. Prior to the fighting in Prigorodny region in 1992 many (32-60,000) lived in North Ossetia.

Historical context

Since Russian conquest, the fate of the Ingush has been closely linked to that of the Chechens. The formal division of Chechens and Ingush dates from the 1880s when the western clans of the Chechens did not take part in the war with Russia and were subsequently termed by Russians Ingush. Ingush is a language very close to Chechen and a part of the Veinakh branch of the Caucasian language family. A Cyrillic script was introduced in 1938. Ingush were among the last of the peoples of the North Caucasus to convert to Islam (1860s).

Under Soviet rule Ingush were initially part of the Autonomous Mountain SSR created in 1920. The republic ceased to exist in July 1924 and Ingush were given their own autonomous oblast. In January 1934, Ingush and Chechens were merged into a single AO. In December 1936 the oblast became an ASSR. Deported with Chechens in 1944, Ingush began to return to the region following rehabilitation (1956-7).

Frictions between Chechens and Ingush developed from 1989 and especially after the declaration of independence in November 1991. Ingush constituted only 12.9 per cent of the 1.2 million population of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. With apparent Russian support (in order to weaken the Chechens), Ingush began to advocate the creation of a separate Ingush republic which was created on 4 June 1992. The borders with Chechnya were provisionally agreed to be those that had existed pre-1934. The borders remained contested, however, especially with respect to North Ossetia, where fighting broke out in 1992 in the Prigorodny region. Some 64,000 ethnic Ingush were displaced to Ingushetia from North Ossetia as a result of the fighting. The conflict lost prominence as other conflicts in the region erupted, yet no formal resolution process was undertaken. Over the subsequent decade an estimated 30,000 Ingush returned to North Ossetia, settling in Prigorodny region and the outskirts of Vladikavkaz.

Current issues

On 22 June 2004 Nazran, the Ingush capital, was the site of militant attacks targeting 15 official buildings and reportedly killing more than 90 people, including Ingushetia's acting Interior Minister, his deputy and the city's Prosecutor-General. Most of the others killed were policemen. While Moscow claimed the raid had been perpetrated by Chechens, evidence of the ease and familiarity with which the fighters found their targets suggested the involvement of local ethnic Ingush.

Although Ingush-Ossetian relations had gradually improved in the decade following the Prigorodny

conflict, relations between the two groups deteriorated as a result of the Beslan hostage-taking crisis in September 2004 and other attacks in North Ossetia attributed by the North Ossetian leadership to the Ingush. In June 2006 the Ingush Parliament adopted a motion calling on Moscow to return the disputed territory, as Ingush President Murad Zyazikov called for federal rule to be established over it. In July the North Ossetian authorities detained three young Ingush men they claimed were carrying a remote-controlled bomb in their car - one of numerous incidents reported in the village of Kartsa, situated in North Ossetia but populated by Ingush. Also in July 2006 twelve Ingush men in the temporary settlement of Maysky began a hunger strike to publicize demands to the right of return to their villages in Prigorodny district. The North Ossetian Nationalities Ministry reaffirmed the right of return for Ingush to Novy instead, a district neighbouring Maysky with no paved roads, water or gas supply.

Ingushetia, one of Russia's poorest regions, has benefited from the channelling of economic resources into the republic by Moscow since 2002, when the republic was hit by flooding. Nonetheless opposition to President Zyazikov's perceived closeness to Moscow has fuelled both informal Islamic and formal party political opposition in the republic. The suppression of 'mainstream' political opposition is a further contributory factor to the rise of Islamic militancy in Ingushetia, as elsewhere in the North Caucasus.

In 2007, the situation deteriorated sharply, with a rise in the number of attacks on pro-Russian targets. According to Reuters, these included the murder of a close aide to the pro-Moscow President and the killing of a Russian school-teacher and her children. In late July, Moscow sent in 2,500 extra troops - almost tripling the number of Special Forces in Ingushetia. Local people reportedly accused the security forces of behaving in a 'heavy-handed way', with human rights organizations warning that the presence of so-many troops might further fuel an already volatile situation.

The Moscow Helsinki Group issued one such warning in September 2008, saying that Ingushetia was on the brink of civil war. The NGO accused the Russian government of pursuing overzealous policies against alleged Muslim militants, including arbitrary detention, disappearances and torture, and said that these tactics were prompting further rebellion.