Lezgins

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 411,535 Lezgins in the Russian Federation. Lezgins are the fourth largest ethnic group in Dagestan, accounting for 12.5 per cent of the population, and according to official Azerbaijani statistics the second largest group in Azerbaijan (178,021 or 2.2 per cent of the population according to Azerbaijan's 1999 census). They live in south-western parts of Dagestan and adjacent areas in Azerbaijan. Lezgin belongs to the Caucasian family of languages.

Historical context

The Lezgin Democratic Movement Sadval (‘Unity’) was created in 1990. Its leadership called for the unification of all Lezgins. In December 1991, the All-National Congress of Lezgins established the Lezgin National Council. The Council has called on Russia, Azerbaijan and Dagestan to redraw present borders to unite the Lezgins in the region. The introduction of a border regime between Dagestan and Azerbaijan produced strong protests from Lezgins.

In 1998 Sadval split into ‘radical' and ‘moderate' wings, with the former continuing to advocate the creation of an independent Lezgin state and latter settling for advocacy of a Lezgin territorial autonomy in Dagestan. As a result of infighting between the two wings, the movement reportedly lost much of the popular support it had once enjoyed. In March

In March 1999 another organization, the Federal Lezgin National Cultural Autonomy, was established as an extraterritorial movement advocating cultural autonomy for Lezgins.

Current issues

According to reports Lezgins in Dagestan suffer disproportionately from unemployment, with unemployment rates in Lezgin-populated areas of southern Dagestan twice the republican average of 32 per cent. This may be one contributory factor to renewed calls from within the Sadval movement in January 2006 for a redrawing of the Russian-Azerbaijani border to incorporate Lezgin-populated areas of southern Dagestan within Azerbaijan.