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The Integration of Non-Russian Servicemen in the Imperial, Soviet and Russian Army

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“In the army, regardless of ethnicity or faith, those who are part of the collective should fulfill their public service”- Interview with Sergei Mel’kov, Co-chairman of the Association of Military Politologists, Moscow, 8 October 2008

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“In the army, regardless of ethnicity or faith, those who are part of the collective should fulfill their public service” – Interview with Sergei Mel’kov, Co-chairman of the Association of Military Politologists, Moscow, 8 October 2008

- 1 **PIPSS.ORG** – Based on prognoses about the growth of the Muslim population in Russia over the next 20 years, both Western and Russian demographers predict an increase of Muslim recruits in the army. I understand this issue arose under Brezhnev and then faded away with the collapse of the USSR, since Azerbaijan and the Central Asian Republics ceased to be part of the USSR. Today with the growth of the Muslim population this question has arisen again. Is there data on this issue?
- 2 **Sergei Mel’kov:** The issue arose not under Brezhnev, but under Gorbachev. The issue is multidimensional. Of course, during the Soviet period, the number of recruits from the Central Asian Republics -- Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and the Caucasus -- increased. Today these are independent countries.
- 3 There were definite language problems. In my opinion, they were not insurmountable. There were a number of recruits, especially from Central Asia, who either did not speak Russian at all or who spoke poorly. Naturally, most officers and many political workers did not understand them, and vice versa. In general, it was believed that the Soviet Army was a method for the familiarization of recruits with Russian culture and the Russian language.
- 4 The problem of socialization and communication existed of course, but it worsened after Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in 1985. Why? Because the role of the CPSU as a unified power and the basis of the Soviet government was starting to decline, while at the same time the political power of the Soviet republics was increasing. Naturally the power structures, first and foremost the subdivisions of the armed forces within these republics, were regarded as additional elite resources, which could be used in a fight for power to wring from the center some privileges, finances, etc.
- 5 This is how the problem seems to me. From a political point of view, a process of social change began in 1985, which brought about a worsening of the ethnic question in the army. The country began to open up to international society and we had more information from various sources, as a result of which we began to pay more attention to the situation of those serving in the army and also the situation of the various ethnicities. From my perspective, this is completely fair. But it seems to me that this problem was impossible to solve then. And then there were not the conflicts that would undermine relations between Russians and non-Russians.
- 6 There was not insurmountable opposition. The intensified attention from the top and the public to this problem was a result of the fact that the situation within the army was better understood by and more accessible to the leaders and society as a whole. This is my personal point of view. Because of this, now -- when the leadership in Russia is stable -- the level of interethnic conflict inside the armed forces is low. And there is no strong conflict between representatives of various religions -- no conflict at a level that would negatively influence the state of the armed forces and of war readiness and so forth.
- 7 Let me give an example. Today, the public is being assured that the war readiness of the country is growing. In my opinion it is important to understand what is really going on in the armed forces. Is the information that the armed forces are providing reliable? Is the information on

federal budget expenditures reliable? What about information on the state of army discipline? And so forth. This is what I have in mind. When talking to each other military people often say openly that the level of war readiness of the armed forces is not high, since the level of military training is so low. If one believes the official statistics, in our country there are more and more war games being held, and their quality is growing and so forth. But this is doubtful. Understand that in the given context the problems of inter-religious and interethnic relations in the armed forces are secondary, or tertiary, or whatever.

Agencies for Evaluating the Situation

8 **PIPSS.ORG** – Who in the army -- in the General Headquarters -- is the specialist on this issue?
 9 **Sergei Mel'kov:** The Main Directorate of Education of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation is officially responsible for this issue. There are no individuals with special responsibility for interethnic problems within it. Problems of interrelations among various religions are considered by a special group, which, as far as I know, officially consists of two people. They are entrusted with various duties: they must analyze the situation in the army at all levels, organize interactions between leaders of various religions at the level of the Ministry of Defense -- with the Russian Orthodox Church and with Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and so on. But, in my opinion, this much work is not within the power of two people. I would say that their work is more of a formality. This is my evaluation of the situation. At the command level of the army -- the division level and below -- analogous work is being undertaken by all the bodies responsible for education. They have been given this responsibility.

Muslim Religious Leaders and Internal Russian Politics

10 **PIPSS.ORG** – What is the influence today of Muslim leaders on Russian military policy?
 11 **Sergei Mel'kov:** I believe that Muslim leaders have almost no influence in our country in the military sphere and cannot in principle. Here are some examples:

The Weight of History

12 First, it is the work of history. You perhaps know that in the 19th century in the large garrisons where most Muslims did their service, by personal order of the Russian Emperor was established the position of the *akhun*. An *akhun* is a *mullah* as they were called at the time. In contemporary language, this was an *imam* or *mufti* who was not a serviceman and was not part of the structure of the armed forces. He worked in the mosque, took on work near the garrison and was invited to various events. You can read this in Arapov's book³, which is a collection of documents from the Russian Empire that illuminate many aspects of the issue of relations between the government and Islamic organizations. The book contains documents on cooperation between the military organs and Muslim organizations.
 13 Small changes occurred during the First World War. Around 1914, so-called military *mullahs* appeared in the Russian Imperial Army. I cannot say with accuracy how many there were. But this was primarily a result of the huge number of casualties during the First World War. A mass war and mass army led during this period to more representatives of the so-called "other believing" denominations and ethnicities joining the ranks of the serving army.
 14 However, in the Soviet period a leveling of the social roles of all confessions was quickly introduced. They were simply shown to the curb of the social process (religious organizations were removed completely from politics) and the Communist Party dominated the ideological landscape. Consequently, today the majority of the officer corps professes atheism. But in as much as most of them are ethnically Russian, many consider themselves to be "ethnic Orthodox". We can put it like this: having been emptied out, the spiritual-ideological niche was filled in Russian society and in its armed forces mainly with Russian Orthodoxy.

Proselytism of the Russian Orthodox Church

15 There is another reason why Muslim leaders do not carry any weight, and this is the policy of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is positioning itself as a monopoly. It seems to me

that the merging of individual military leaders and the Orthodox Church is moving faster than the merging of the church with the government. How is the church carrying out its grab for monopoly? What is being done in pursuit of this? Today, according to official data from the Russian Orthodox Church, more than 2,500 former servicemen are priests.

16 How is this happening? For example, the Synodal Department, headed by Dmitry Smirnov, has announced that it is ready to take on fully the spiritual feeding of Russian servicemen, independent of their religion. Representatives of the Synod say, "It's immaterial what your religious persuasion is, whether you are Muslim or Orthodox, come to us and we will conduct services, we will say how to serve...". The Russian Orthodox Church insists that it has the right to work with the military, adding that the majority of Russian society as a whole, and in the army, is Orthodox. Personally, I don't think this way.

"The Role of Muslim Spiritual Leaders is Completely Superficial"

17 It is necessary to underscore that the position of the Russian Orthodox Church differs very strongly from the position of the Muftiat in Russia. I spent some time as an advisor on this issue and I can say that the Russian Orthodox Church did and does believe that Orthodox priests ought to be members of the military and receive money from the government to do so.
18 Lately the situation for priests has been changing. The Russian Orthodox Church has agreed that they shouldn't wear military uniforms, which is to say that they shouldn't be real military men, but that the government should in any event pay them a comparable salary for spiritual services rendered. If the Russian Orthodox Church is ready to secure a place in the army for 2,500 priests, why are Muslim priests necessary? This is logical, although it leads to the monopoly of the Russian Orthodox Church in the army.

19 As relates to the current situation for Muslim spiritual leaders, there are one or two Muslim representatives invited to the gatherings regularly held by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Defense. These gatherings are actively publicized in the mass media, including on television. But the role of the Muslim spiritual leaders is completely superficial. And this is their role in the army in general. They are present at the maneuvers and sometimes on television and they say something into the microphone (especially at various meetings) and this is where it ends.

20 **PIPSS.ORG** – And what is the reaction of Muslims to this situation?

21 **Sergei Mel'kov:** There are various reactions. You know that there are several Muslim centers. For example, the position of the Council of Muftis of Russia headed by Ravil Gainutdin (I formed this council at the end of the 1990s, by the way) is that first and foremost military service ought to be of a nondenominational character. This is to say that it is impossible that organizations of one or another confession should be formed within the armed forces. And, secondly, the religious needs of those in the military ought to be met outside of the military divisions. It is necessary to go to a church, mosque, or synagogue that is nearby. It is not necessary to form these religious institutions within the army.

22 And another important point is that Muslim organizations are always prepared to participate in independent work, carrying out events organized at the initiative of the military leadership, but they refuse to participate in any kind of military actions, armed conflict and the like. The reasons, I think, are understandable in as much as such a situation can lead to a worsening of relations with the local population and between the military and the various ethnicities.

23 A somewhat different position is held by Talgat Tadzhuddin, Chairman of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims. He has led the Muslims since the Soviet period. In his opinion, Muslim organizations should conduct themselves like the Russian Orthodox Church. For example, in time, there can be imams and muftis in large garrisons. He would like it if the government would pay them for their spiritual services to the troops. But on this question he usually does not speak out independently. That is to say, his position includes that he completely supports the Russian Orthodox Church. Lately he is speaking less on this theme, although in the 1990s there were several scandals. In detail, he started to insist that if in our country there is mutual tolerance and respect between representatives of various religions, then there should be no difference between priests and other religious leaders. He wanted Orthodox priests to serve in Mosques. Or he could go to a Synagogue or Russian Orthodox Church and it wouldn't make

any difference. Accordingly, he argued that representatives of various traditional confessions in Russia could serve in an Orthodox Cathedral. There was a scandal because to me (and not just to me) it seems that this is impractical and in practice could lead to very serious conflict.

Mullahs in the Army

24 **PIPSS.ORG** – Can you imagine or foresee the presence of *mullahs* in the army in the near future?

25 **Sergei Mel'kov:** On a permanent staffing basis, as bureaucrats who receive a government salary, it is impossible. It is only possible for them to participate from time to time in one or another event. But on a staff basis, it is hard to imagine their participation. Perhaps they can be involved as exceptions, to give a show of inclusiveness in training (i.e. to underscore that officers and priests are doing the same work). But if, for example, there were an order to introduce an institute of military spirituality, then the majority of representatives would be from the Russian Orthodox Church. To avoid a scandal some representatives of the Muslim faith might be selectively included. Such an order could come only from the president.

26 But it is not right to unnecessarily politicize this topic. It is politicized by many -- the Russian Orthodox Church and, in the 1990s, the leadership of many Muslim organizations. In my opinion, it is not a political issue. In any case, at the Russian Muslim Council in my time, we managed to convince Ravil Gainutdin and his deputy Damir Gizatullin that this question should be peaceably discussed on the basis of clearly formulated principles. These principles, I would note, are laid out in a document entitled "Basic Position of the Social Program of the Russian Muslims"⁴.

27 It is possible, of course, today to speak about problems within the military, for example, the lack of religious freedom. Many solutions to this are proposed: either, as the Russian Orthodox Church has proposed, construct houses of worship, or the so-called "setting aside" of rights, whereby citizens go into the army for a period to defend the motherland and for a year or two years (as it was previously) their spiritual needs should be subordinate to their military service.

28 Can the Council of Muftis of Russia or another Muslim organization follow the path of the Russian Orthodox Church? Hardly. You can judge for yourself. If they were to act like the Russian Orthodox Church, first they would reach agreement with the commanders, then they would inculcate their priests into the army collectives, then they would make them officers. And what would be the result? Where would they gather all at once such a number of Muslims to serve in if not all then at least the large military divisions? In the officer corps and in the command there arise a huge number of problems with the organization of religious activities within military collectives. If they also needed to organize the preparation of so called military imams... I believe that this problem should not be politicized.

29 There is another example. While in the 1990s the issue was pressing, now Muslim leaders have taken a different position. They are not trying to reach agreement with the Ministry of Defense, because they understand that such an agreement will never be. The political system in our country is contracting. For Muslim leaders, there is the question of physical survival. Consequently, they don't have time to worry about influencing the armed forces. This is my personal take on things. Judging by what has been done, not what has been said, there haven't been and aren't now any efforts being taken by Muslim leaders. Periodically they will make an announcement, but this is just to get some attention. And there will not be any action on installing Muslim spiritual leaders into the army collectives in the near future, I assure you. Nowadays, as soon as we start to take up this question -- even as academics -- there follow accusations of politicization. You understand that to get involved in politics is dangerous in this country.

30 **PIPSS.ORG** – What is the Ministry of Defense's position on this question?

31 **Sergei Mel'kov:** I haven't heard any position. When I was in the Ministry of Defense I served in the Expert Center and we developed the Ministry of Defense's position on this issue. At that time, the minister was Sergei Borisovich Ivanov. I wrote an analytical note and even published my opinion in *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*. The fact that I wrote about my position was not appreciated and they had a talk with me about the importance of loyalty and so on.

32 I believe that the General Headquarter in no event should take a decision or even make a suggestion on this issue. Because this isn't a military issue, it's a socio-political question – a political question first and foremost.

33 I have written that the Russian Orthodox Church is trying to establish itself in the armed forces. As evidence I presented statistics and numbers. Now of course, I do not remember and can only give some estimates. This was in early 2006. The head military prosecutor prepared a paper entitled "Bill on Federal Law on Military Priests"⁵. Since the head military prosecutor does not enjoy the right to initiate legislation it became, as so often happens, a question in the mass media. The text of the bill was passed between specialists. That's how things are. As soon as something appears in the mass media we immediately start to discuss it. And the minister had to react to it somehow.

34 I wrote a note estimating how much it would cost to implement this bill, in accordance with the duties laid out in the text. I, by the way, think that that Prosecutor didn't write the bill himself, not the Military Prosecutor. It was probably the Synodal Department of the Russian Orthodox Church that prepared the 19-page document. In it was suggested that around 3 500 priests be brought into military collectives as officers, and, what's more, that every "military priest" should have an assistant military priest at the sergeant level. The head military priest should be a general lieutenant. They wanted to have all the benefits that military personnel enjoy: free public transport, guaranteed housing, rations, and so on. All this would have cost just unbelievable amounts of money. When I laid this out, discussion about the bill immediately ended.

35 It seems to me that this won't happen in the Russian Armed Forces in the near future. There is one more very important reason for this. It is the reduction in troops and funding for the Russian Armed Forces. There is talk that it is necessary to devote more money to the development of new types of modern technology for atomization and computerization. In my opinion, military priests are not contributing to this plan; they can't make the armed forces more modern. They, of course, like any confession, are demonstrating their loyalty to the government, saying "You just give us financial support and we will solve your problems." This isn't the case.

36 And the secular government has no other position than to remain exclusively nondenominational in its army training and it ought not be otherwise. This is the only true position. It's one thing to present a bill, a "proposal" from the General Headquarters or another organ of the military directorate, and it is another to show that it is necessary to do things without public discussion. For now the military leadership is holding its tongue -- and rightly so.

Army Policy in Relation to the Muslim Minority

37 **PIPSS.ORG** – Please tell us about the situation for Muslims in the army. How are things in reality? In January 2008, Damir Gizatulin (Deputy Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia) stated: "Muslim soldiers have no problem"⁶. How should one interpret this statement?

38 **Sergei Mel'kov:** Look at what is implied by the problems. If we speak about problems of freedom of conscience then there is no problem, since no one is looking at such things and no one is particularly interested. See for yourself. The Council of Muftis says that they are not prepared to spiritually tend servicemen, because the army ought not be ideological or religious. The Council is against following an authoritarian path to form religious cells, model homes and rooms in military divisions. It's as though problems of freedom of conscience in the army collectives don't exist.

39 But there is another aspect to the issue. I have always believed, as does the leadership of the Council of Muftis of Russia, that there are problems in the training of Muslim servicemen. The problems are not among Muslim soldiers primarily, but among the officer corps leading military collectives where there are representatives of various ethnicities and confessions. The problem appeared in these divisions at the end of the 1980s in the early 1990s when several servicemen, citing one or another verse in the Koran or one or another ethnic tradition tried to get some benefits or release from fulfilling one or another duty of military service.

40 It seems to me that this problem hasn't gone anywhere. It exists to this day. It seems to me that Damir Gizatulin had exactly this in mind.

Enlistment Resources: General Headquarters Gives Preference to Slavs?

41 **PIPSS.ORG** – Would you say that Muslims avoid military service more frequently than others?

42 **Sergei Mel'kov:** No, I think that it's the opposite situation. The majority of Muslim people, and first of all those who live in the Caucasus, have their own ethnic traditions; not religious, but ethnic. In the Soviet period and today those who do not serve in the army are considered to be half-men. For them, service in the army is very important. Nowadays there are business-structures where it is possible to earn money and make something of oneself, but the majority are still oriented towards government service. To occupy a position of status in society and to set yourself up it is necessary to serve your term in the army. I think that Muslims are more prepared to serve in the armed forces and are less likely to avoid serving in the army than Russian recruits on the whole.

43 But there are problems with them and I have written about this in my manuals on working with Muslim recruits⁷. The problems arise within the military collectives and relate to the training component. It is necessary to guarantee equal conditions for those who are recruited from the Caucasus and those who are recruited from other regions of Russia. In reality it is difficult to guarantee a single rule of service for all. For example, how should one react when a serviceman says: "Not once in my life have I washed a floor. My mom did this at home and I won't do it here." How should one act? Should one force the fellow or try to find another solution? Should the officer corps be involved in this or the sergeants? This is a big issue, but this is a training issue and not a spiritual issue.

44 **PIPSS.ORG** – Is it true that the General Headquarters is increasing the stratum of Slavs in the army by artificial means?⁸

45 **Sergei Mel'kov:** I get this question a lot. The stratum of Slavs in the army cannot be increased by artificial means. Our country in any event is a country of Slavs; they are the majority. Naturally, many of those who call themselves Russian, that is Tatars, Bashkirs, those living in the Volga Region, and not in the Caucasus, know Russian very well. Their culture is close to Russian culture. The cultures of the Caucasian peoples differ the most from the culture of the Russians.

46 Nevertheless it seems to me that that the General Headquarters does not play that role about which you are speaking. It is more that the General Headquarters is artificially intermixing ethnicities by following the extraterritorial principle when forming military collectives.

47 **PIPSS.ORG** – How do officers relate to Muslim recruits? Do press reports that the majority of soldiers from Muslim regions are sent to the least prestigious battalions (construction battalions) reflect the reality?

48 **Sergei Mel'kov:** You know there are no construction battalions (*stroibaty*) any more. In 2004 there were. But in 2006 we began to not just reduce their number, but to practically dissolve them. Today they don't exist at all within the Russian Armed Forces. However, there was a tradition in the Soviet period to send servicemen who didn't know Russian well or who had insufficient preparation in school to perform auxiliary work. It was always this way.

49 It is declared otherwise, of course; that there are the same possibilities for everyone. But in practice it is hard to guarantee. I do not know how it is in other armies, but I know that in any army, in any country, they understand that a man who doesn't know the language well or who has a poor education needs extra training to achieve the appropriate level of preparation. And this, in the first place, is a waste of time, and in the second, it's a waste of resources. This is obvious. For this reason, the practice is to send these people to do auxiliary work.

50 But today, because construction battalions have been eliminated and a significant portion of the divisions are moving to contract service it seems to me that this problem is losing its urgency. The Military Registration and Recruitment Offices can now (theoretically at least) find other people on a contract basis. But the salaries that they are prepared to offer – the

monetary allowances for recruits – are not very high. It is difficult to find people willing to work under these agreements, but it is unrelated to their ethnicity or denomination.

Can Muslims Reach the Officer Ranks?

51 **PIPSS.ORG** – What percent of officers are of the Muslim faith?

52 **Sergei Mel'kov:** I do not know. I do not have this data.

53 **PIPSS.ORG** – Can Muslims reach the officer ranks?

54 **Sergei Mel'kov:** That's a good question. I think that officially no one is saying that there are any problems. I think that faith itself doesn't influence the military educational institutions where they train specialists. Instead, the region a person is from has more influence. In Tatarstan, where it is pretty peaceful, acceptance into military educational institutions is not a given. From Dagestan or Chechnya, of course, they try not to take people and not because Wahhabism is widespread there and so forth, but because of the conflict situation there. They just try not to take them and that's it.

55 But if there were a resolution on this, for example from the government of the Russian Federation, there would probably be the situation like that that existed in the Soviet period. I am thinking about the last years of the USSR, when they sent people wholesale from the regions and from the national republics, without competition and without exams, for free, to educational institutions -- not just military ones, but also civilian ones. They applied and they studied.

56 I do not know about military institutions of higher education explicitly, but with regard to civilian institutions I can say that now there exists so-called quotas on the admission of representatives from one or another republic. In the first place, this concerns Chechnya and to a lesser degree to Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Dagestan. They exist. This involves, as far as I know, several leading institutions of higher education in the country. At Moscow State University there are such quotas, for example. I can't say whether this situation is related to any specific majors. I know that in the Russian Academy named for Plekhanov there are quotas on admissions from Chechnya.

57 In military institutions, in my opinion, there are not such quotas. But you know that the number of Russian military institutions of higher education is being reduced. This process has already started and it will be completed by 2012. The number of military educational institutions will be cut by at least half. The process has begun in earnest. And this is not just being done through the merger of institutions of higher education. There are, for example, several academies. What should be the approach? There will remain one academy, a university, and satellite institutions. And now they have decided to reduce the number of military educational institutions. In general no one is concerned in our country about your ethnicity or your faith. Now this is not a problem.

58 **PIPSS.ORG** – And what about the Chechen phenomenon? How do you avoid the Dudaev syndrome?

59 **Sergei Mel'kov:** Understand that I take a slightly different position. I look at things in a different way than many people. The problem isn't Dudaev. In the 1990s, I also thought that if we didn't make Chechens generals, then this problem wouldn't exist. All the same, things turn out this way. This doesn't change anything. When the elite of a region decides to separate itself or carry out an independent politics, and if the people mature to the point that they are a nation and desire their own government, there is nothing to do.

60 **PIPSS.ORG** – By the way, in the Soviet period were there many Muslim officers? I don't remember -- two, three, not more.

61 **Sergei Mel'kov:** This is a fact. But is this good or bad? In accordance with the ethnic policy that was being declared at the time, there needed to be automated criteria for selection. Let's presume that there are 0.1% Chechens in the population. What does this signify? Does it mean that in the organs of power there should be 0.1% Chechens, in the working classes there should be 0.1% Chechens, among kolkhoz workers, among deputies, and so on? At that time in several key areas of government work – political work, party work, and so forth -- they tried to observe this.

62 But as soon as we move to a new plane, for example, when we try to look at this issue from the point of view of management effectiveness or "management" as they say nowadays, then it comes out that the ethnicity of the person serving in one or another post doesn't make any difference. It is most important whether the person can unite military collectives and fulfill the given task. Take either Chechens or Russians -- it's unimportant. It sometimes is the case that as much as you train some officers, nothing will come of it.

63 In summary, I'll repeat that the situation with Muslims in the army today depends not on the percentage, and not on whether there are many or few among the high-ranking officers. The problem is in the policies of the Chechen Republic in the early 1990s. They decided to set out on an independent voyage and that was the problem. If it hadn't been Dudaev, there would have been someone else. They would have found Maskhadov. If not Maskhadov, they would have found a Russian, and so forth. If not a Russian, then they would have invited a mercenary. If there is a function, there will always be a man to fulfill that function.

Some Experience with Local Conflict

64 **PIPSS.ORG** – What was the experience with the management of Muslim recruits during the first Chechen War? According to press reports, several regions with Muslim majorities refused to send recruits. On the other hand, commanders in the field, fearing conflict with criminal groups, sent back soldiers recruited from the Caucasus to their regions. What was the official policy of the Ministry of Defense in relation to Muslim recruits during this period?

65 **Sergei Mel'kov:** I know of some examples. I heard, in any case, about how people recruited from the North Caucasus fled. For this reason, at some point, they started trying to not send recruits from the North Caucasus to Chechnya. But I can say that when the first Chechen War started, I served in Volgograd under the late General Rokhlin. At that time, they were sending them all to Chechnya indiscriminately. But after some time, one out of every two returned home, mainly those who were called from the North Caucasus.

66 How should this be evaluated? Was this a restriction or not? That is, at first, when there was a shortage, they sent them all. And then they began to be sent home. Was this a sign of distrust? I think not. Informally distrust, of course, existed, but formally we can hardly find any documents to confirm this – orders or directives that suggest that this was done deliberately. I think all the same that in the officer corps there exists some definite distrust, if you please, at the mental level. Then they were writing about the possibility of servicemen joining the armed bandits if they had relatives in the mountains. Then this was a pressing issue, but it isn't now. Looking back, you understand that if there were such cases, they were isolated. But at the time they tried to create a situation where the people didn't have a choice – either serve here or move there. The task was simply not to create a situation where there was a choice and that's it...

Muslims and Army Reform

67 **PIPSS.ORG** – In the context of the reform of the armed forces, is it possible to propose founding mono-confessional military units? You can take Chechnya as an example, where Chechen military units⁹ were founded, or Ingushetia, where a cadet corps especially for Ingush is being founded and other minorities are excluded. They can be accepted to military institutions without competing. How are these particular cases (it is possible there are other examples) included in federal military policy? (Alongside this selection, in Karelia, Muslims from Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and the North Caucasus and so forth all serve.)

68 **Sergei Mel'kov:** Here there are pluses and minuses. In our country, there were experiments with founding mono-confessional units in the 30s and 40s of the last century. These experiences were not encouraging. Neither from the point of view of management, nor from the point of view of the quality of the military preparation of these units, did they prove themselves. During World War II, they also founded special units at certain stages – let's say from the Chechens. They spent their whole lives in the saddle, on a horse, so they were selected for the cavalry. They needed to be placed where there was demand for cavalry. But if a person, who has spent his whole life sat in a saddle, is put in a tank, he needs to be retrained. And we understand that during the war, when there were great losses, probably at certain moments

it came to this. For the person who didn't speak Russian, but knew about technology, it was difficult in our country. That's number one.

Ethnic Cadet Corps Are One Option to Resolve the Problem of Unemployment

69 Second, is the foundation of an ethnic cadet corps. It is conditional not on the preparation of more servicemen, officers or specialists for the armed forces, but on solving the problem of employment, because in the North Caucasus we have a lot of out of work people. It seems to me that the government is trying to set up the young this way. Will they be servicemen, or will they not? It's a big question. A lot of youth to one degree or another are supported by the government through these corps in some way. And which of these will become servicemen is another debated issue. This is my opinion.

70 **PIPSS.ORG** – How do the military leaders justify these ethnic preferences?

71 **Sergei Mel'kov:** Earlier there was information about units predominated by one ethnicity. These were not specially founded but came together by chance. For example, one of my acquaintances in the 1990s received servicemen from the construction detachment in Petrozavodsk. By chance it turned out that 93% recruits there were from Dagestan. How did this end? The result was sad -- they refused to work and obey orders. This military unit was disbanded, the recruits were sent off to various places.

72 All the same we should understand that in the army, regardless of ethnicity or faith, those who are part of the collective should fulfill their public service. Of course there are some exceptions, but if servicemen refuse to fulfill their orders, they either have to leave the service or be jailed. A third option also exists – they can run away. How can it be otherwise, what other options are there?

Monoethnic Units for Specific Tasks

73 I think that no one would deliberately create monoethnic units except for very local, specific tasks.

74 For example, in Chechnya in the 1990s there was a unique situation. It wasn't characteristic of all the other territories of the Russian Federation. They decided to take this step, since it was necessary to entice fighters from the armed gangs or "*bandformirovani*", as we say. They offered them service on these conditions: Do what you know how, but formally you are members of the armed forces.

75 The problem was that they didn't subordinate themselves to the general command. It was a semi-partisan structure. And now the situation has changed, a "partisan" or "semi-partisan" formation is no longer needed. At that certain stage they create these specific units, but they need to be brave and take responsibility to suppose that in the long-term there will be a structure – monoethnic, monoreligious -- that will work well. For now this hasn't proved itself. You understand that the *Vostok* battalion in the Chechen Republic is full of cutthroats. How do several hundred cutthroats combine with military discipline and an armed forces that treats everyone equally? At any moment they can become insubordinate. To me, this is obvious. At a certain stage this structure can be useful, but then there can be serious problems. This is inevitable.

Notes

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8 Cf. V.Mukhin, « Prizyvslavianskoinatsional'nosti », *NG - Religii*, 15 octobre 2007, <http://www.ng.ru/printed/163166>. [E.S.K.'s note].

9 For instance the *Vostok* Battalion [E.S.K.'s note].

Footnotes

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