

SCTCMG 2021
International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of
Modern Globalism»

KHASAV-YURT AGREEMENTS IN MODERN POLITICAL
HISTORY OF RUSSIA AND ICHKERIA

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Abstract

The collapse of the USSR and the Russian Federation establishment marked the trend of sovereignization of the autonomous republics. This process has gone farthest in the Chechen-Ingush Republic, where a group of former Russian General D. Dudayev came to power in 1991 and embarked on a course of proclaiming the full independence of the Chechen Republic, i.e. Ichkeria. In 1993, the political situation in the Republic aggravated, armed clashes between the opponents of the regime and government power structures took place. The internal situation in Russia, which resulted in the plundering of the country's national property, demanded the diversion of public attention. This was done through the development of a Chechen "threat" and the need to establish constitutional order in Chechnya. The first Russian-Chechen military campaign of 1994–1996, conceived as a "small victorious war," turned into a protracted, bloody and extremely unpopular armed conflict in Russian society. Despite the fact that by 1996 the intensity of hostilities had significantly decreased, it was obvious that in the conditions of the ongoing war it would be impossible to ensure the re-election of Boris Yeltsin for a second presidential term. To do so, following the physical elimination of D. Dudaev a negotiation process was initiated with Z. Yandarbiev who replaced him. At the end of May 1996, another ceasefire agreement was signed in Moscow, after which Boris Yeltsin flew to Chechnya and announced the victorious end of the war during the meeting with federal servicemen.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Khasav-Yurt, Lebed, Maskhadov, peace, war, Yeltsin



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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that the ceasefire agreement was quickly thwarted, on the eve of the presidential elections the Ichkerian side took a number of measures to facilitate the re-election of Yeltsin for the second term. So, on 20 June 1996, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Maskhadov issued an order to end all hostilities before the end of the second round of the presidential elections, and the widow of the Chechen Ichkerian President Dudayev, who died in the spring, gave her speech on the Russian television with the words “Yeltsin is our president”. Thus, it can be said that both sides had reached an agreement on the imminent end of the war, which only needed to be documented. At the same time, the fate of the government of Zavgaev was already predetermined.

2. Problem Statement

In the political history of Russia in recent times and the short history of the unrecognized state – the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria – an important role was played by the so-called Khasav-Yurt agreements, which were considered and interpreted by each of the parties in its own way, depending on the political expediency. What led to the conclusion of these agreements, what forces and circumstances played a major role?

3. Research Questions

The subject of the article is the Khasav-Yurt agreements concluded during the acute political crisis in the Russian Federation in August 1996.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the work is to identify the reasons and circumstances of the signing of the Khasav-Yurt agreements, which resulted in the end of the so-called first Chechen war.

5. Research Methods

The principles of historicism, scientific objectivity and consistency are used as research methods. The work is focused on the problem and chronology-based principle

6. Findings

The so-called first Chechen war, its causes, course, results and consequences received considerable attention in Russian and foreign historiography (Aliyev & Souleimanov, 2019; Kadykalo, 2017; Shaffer, 2017; Sushentsov & Neklyudov, 2020). Nevertheless, the problem of the Khasav-Yurt agreements still attracts attention.

On 6 August 1996, approximately six hundred militants entered Grozny controlled by the federal troops without a fight. By a strange coincidence, just the day before, a Chechen militia regiment and up to 1,500 servicemen were withdrawn from the city and were sent to carry out an alleged special operation in

the village of Alkhan-Yurt, located 15 km from Grozny. As a result, the militants reached the city center, where the fiercest battles began. At the same time, the transfer to Grozny of all the most efficient detachments of militants from all over the Republic began, which also entered the Chechen capital, without encountering opposition from the federal troops. Very soon, the total number of militants concentrated in Grozny, according to some estimates, reached 4 thousand people (Barkhatov, 1998). After an unsuccessful attempt to quickly unblock the units and objects surrounded in Grozny, the federal command began to concentrate forces around the city, in turn blocking the militants who entered it. By mid-August, General Pulikovskiy, who commanded the United Group, was ready to launch a decisive attack aimed to free Grozny, but the events took an unexpected turn for him. It was not the long arm of coincidence that the attack of Grozny coincided with the inauguration of Yeltsin, which took place on August 9, 1996. The end of the Russian-Chechen war was entrusted to the retired General Lebed, who was appointed by the Russian president on June 18 as his assistant for National Security and the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Fierce battles were still going on in Grozny, when on August 11 Lebed arrived in Chechnya through Dagestan and met with Maskhadov and some other representatives of the Ichkerian leadership. During this meeting, the parties agreed that within the next seven days a final agreement would be reached on the cessation of hostilities and the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya (Russia – Chechnya: A Chain of Mistakes and Crimes, 1998). Three days later – on August 14 – B.N. Yeltsin signed a decree according to which the process of the political settlement in Chechnya was completely concentrated in the hands of the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Having received the necessary powers, A. Lebed went to Chechnya on August 15 and met not only Maskhadov, but also Yandarbiev. Following this, a formal agreement was signed on the cessation of hostilities in Grozny and throughout the entire territory of the Chechen Republic. This agreement provided not only for a complete ceasefire, but also for the withdrawal of the opposing sides from Grozny and the creation of five joint commandant's offices, which were supposed to control order in the city (Russia and Chechnya ..., 1997). Objections from the command of the United Group and the Zavgaevskiy government were completely ignored. On August 30, A. Lebed arrived in the Dagestan city of Khasav-Yurt. However, the negotiations turned out to be difficult, since the Ichkerian delegation put forward a number of new demands. Nevertheless, on 31 August 1996, in the presence of Tim Guldiman, Head of the OSCE Assistance Group in the Chechen Republic, the opposing sides signed agreements named "Khasavyurt". In total, two documents were signed in Khasavyurt, i.e. the Joint Statement and the Principles for Determining the Basis of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic. While the meaning of the Joint Statement was limited to a declaration of commitment by both sides to find a mutually acceptable way for a political settlement of the armed conflict, the second document contained a number of specific commitments on the basis of which the further negotiation process was to be built. Neither the form nor the content of the "Principles ..." signed by the parties could be regarded as a treaty resolving contradictions between the federal center and the leadership of the separatist movement. On the contrary, the resolution of the issue of the political status of the Chechen Republic was postponed for at least five years – the Agreement "... until 31 December 2001.

Within a month, both sides had to create a Joint Commission of representatives of the state authorities of Russia and Chechnya to solve a limited range of tasks, which included the following:

- Preparation of proposals for the completion of Russian troops withdrawal.
- Preparation of measures to combat crime and terrorism, preparation of proposals for the restoration of budgetary relations, programs for the restoration of the socio-economic sphere of the Chechen Republic.
- Control over the provision of the population with food and medicine.

A separate clause in the agreement stated that the legislation of the Chechen Republic should be based on the observance of human and civil rights, ensuring civil peace, interethnic harmony and security of all residents of the Republic, regardless of nationality and religion that the Khasavyurt agreements passed over in complete silence the fate of the pro-Moscow government of Zavgayev. This meant that the Kremlin, without any conditions, agreed to the transfer of all power in the Chechen Republic to the very political group, for whose removal from power the war was waged. This alone was enough for a number of prominent Russian politicians to immediately come out with sharp criticism of the results of Lebed's peace initiative. For example, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov said that the Lebed-Maskhadov agreement was a surrender of the Russian Armed Forces to the bandits, and the Liberal Democratic Party was going to apply to the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation with a request on this matter. Former Soviet dissident A. Solzhenitsyn spoke in favor of granting independence to Chechnya, but without the Cossack lands, meaning the Shelkovsky and Naursky districts. On 5 September 1996, Yeltsin announced his support for A. Lebed's actions, but warned that there was no need to rush to the withdrawal of troops, and a few days later, the Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation Kovalev called the Khasavyurt agreements a political declaration that had no legal consequences. The Minister of Internal Affairs A. Kulikov openly spoke out against their observance, including the meeting of the State Duma [Osmayev, 2008]. One of the harshest assessments of the Khasavyurt agreements was given by State Duma Deputy Govorukhin "What happened in Chechnya, we call a betrayal. Doku Zavgayev, thousands of Chechens who wanted to live with Russia were betrayed. There were betrayed ... two hundred thousand Russians in Chechnya. Soldiers were betrayed ..." (Russia and Chechnya ..., 1997). The legislative branch of the Russian Federation also perceived the "Khasavyurt world" ambiguously. The head of the upper house of the Russian parliament, Yegor Stroyev, publicly doubted the strength of the peace achieved (Golotyuk & Volkov, 1996), and about a hundred deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation signed a written protest against the Khasavyurt agreements (Ibragimbeyli, 1996). The sharp criticism of Lebed's actions, voiced in the highest echelons of power in the Russian Federation, did not mean at all that the Secretary of the Security Council was acting on his own initiative and against the will of the country's president. In fact, it was nothing more than a hypocritical attempt to shift all responsibility for the humiliating peace onto Lebed, while at the same time removing Yeltsin. In reality, at that time the federal center had no other opportunity to end the war in Chechnya, except at the cost of transferring power to the separatist leaders. Russia needed a respite and Lukin, who was a direct participant in the Khasavyurt negotiations talked about this later being frank: The point is not in the Khasavyurt agreements, which, I repeat, were forced and needed at that moment, but in the fact that neither us nor Maskhadov took the advantage of the respite they gave" (Lukin, 2002). Meanwhile, many Russian political commentators doubted that the Khasavyurt agreements would give Russia any long respite:

Sovereign Chechnya would inevitably find itself in a very difficult social and economic situation due to the destruction, sharp reduction in Russian aid, technical personnel leaving the country... One can imagine what extreme situations might arise and extremism could have been faced in such country. (Belchuk, 1996, p. 11)

In Chechnya itself, supporters of the pro-Russian orientation unequivocally perceived the Khasavyurt agreements as yet another act of betrayal by the Kremlin. Zavgayev himself, refraining from direct criticism of the federal center, called the actions of the Ichkerian side aimed at the complete elimination of his government from the political arena as “political treachery” (Zavgayev, 1996). Dissatisfaction could also be observed in the Ichkerian camp. The most radical part of the militants, from among the so-called Wahhabis, openly objected to the very fact of the beginning of negotiations with the Russian side to end the war. Later, they also spoke out against the unhindered withdrawal of federal troops. A certain disappointment reigned among all the leaders of separatists, i.e. the Khasavyurt agreements did not lead to the recognition of the independence of the Chechen Republic, which they had hoped for. For example, Yandarbiev in his public statements stressed that Ichkeria needed more reliable guarantees rather than the declaration of good intentions signed in Khasavyurt by the Russian leadership “These guarantees should not depend on the internal situation in Russia, and, therefore, within Russia no such relationship is established. Such relations shall be established within the framework of international law” (Eismond, 1996, p. 5). However, the Khasavyurt agreements themselves did not provide for such a development of events. Moreover, the Russian side did everything possible to not only prevent recognition of the independence of Chechnya, but also to strengthen its international isolation. During the fall of 1996, the press service of the Russian president issued warnings that Moscow would cancel diplomatic relations with those countries that recognize the independence of the Chechen Republic. Yeltsin did not miss the opportunity to declare that “there can be no talk of independence for Chechnya” (Osmaev, 2008).

7. Conclusion

Thus, it is problematic to consider the Khasavyurt agreements as a real peace treaty between two subjects of international law. In addition, these agreements in no way contributed to the resolution of contradictions between the federal center and the separatist regime established in the Chechen Republic. Nevertheless, the Ichkerian side still hoped to achieve, if not international recognition of its independent political status, then at least significant concessions from the Russian side on the basis of these agreements. For its part, the Russian leadership was going to postpone consideration of the issue of the political status of the Chechen Republic for at least five years on the basis of the same agreements. In Khasavyurt, both sides made concessions, receiving in return something else, more important for themselves. As it has been already mentioned, the main obstacle to ending the war was the question of the political status of Chechnya. Both sides agreed to postpone the consideration of this issue. This gave Moscow the respite it needed to strengthen its state institutions, which had come close to the point of disintegration. As for the Ichkerian side, by agreeing to accept the “deferred status” formula, in exchange it received a de facto legitimization of its power in Chechnya and a promise of assistance in the post-war reconstruction of the Republic. At the same time, these agreements could not provide the conflicting

parties with any long-term truce. The extremely streamlined and vague formulations used in the text of the Khasavyurt agreements opened up a wide scope for their interpretation, which almost immediately caused mutual accusations of their violation. For example, the Russian side strongly objected to the official introduction in Chechnya of a new Criminal Code based on Sharia law. Discontent in Moscow was also caused by the fact that the Chechen armed formations refused to disarm, and the Ichkerian side unilaterally determined the composition of the so-called transitional government, which was to operate until the general elections. In September 1999, Lebed in his interview provided the following assessment of this agreement “Maskhadov and I were able to break the base of this war. We gave Russia a chance, a rare one, to get out of the war, which brought it 80,000 to 120,000 deaths. But what happened next? In May 1997, the President of Russia and the President of Chechnya signed a “peace treaty” where Yeltsin crossed out the link to the Khasavyurt agreements with one stroke of the pen. In the two and a half years that followed this event, nothing happened” (Figaro, 1999). Putin, speaking a little earlier at the meeting of the State Duma, said the following:

It is necessary to subject to an impartial analysis the very content and practice of the application of the Khasavyurt agreements. I am convinced that using the agreements of 1996, extremist forces are thus trying to solve the problem of the republic’s status in a separatist spirit, unilaterally, exclusively in the interests of one side. (Le Figaro, 1999, para. 3)

An analysis of the events that took place in 1996–1999 leads to the conclusion that both the Khasavyurt agreements and the 1997 Treaty were more declarations than real documents.

Acknowledgments

The reported study was funded by RFBR, project number 20-311-70005

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<https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2021.11.161>

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference

eISSN: 2357-1330

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