“Stateless” Places in the North Caucasus?
Localized Forms of Sovereignty in Dagestan

Part of IERES’ Visiting Scholar Roundtable

with

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The North Caucasus is the most unstable region in the Russian Federation, burdened with numerous political
and social conflicts, all-embracing corruption, and Islamic radicalism. The activities of Islamic militants, often
considered the main threat to Russian authority in the region, are but one sign of a deeper crisis in the region
which cannot be understood without considering the dynamics of a growing gap between the North Caucasus
and the rest of the Russian Federation in regard to identity, shared symbols and values. In Dagestan more and
more people are literally “withdrawing” from the state, in particular by distancing themselves from state
practices. They live in self created “spaces of order” – localized forms of sovereignty, where state officials have
lost their authority to imams and other religious leaders and where everyday life is regulated by Sharia or other
local laws.

This presentation will describe different discourses and practices connected with the construction of these
alternative “spaces of order” in Dagestan. The following questions will be addressed: What are the dynamics
of these places? What are the ideologies behind them? How do locals understand the terms “Islamic State” and
Sharia law and how do these understandings define the way that they live? What discourses do community
leaders refer to? And finally what is their relation to the Russian state? The research findings are based on
fieldwork conducted in the North Caucasus between 2004 and 2011.

Iwona Kaliszewska is a part-time lecturer and researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural
Anthropology at the University of Warsaw in Poland, where she is currently finishing her Ph.D. dissertation. She
is the president and of the Kaukaz.net Foundation and a regular contributor to the New Eastern Europe journal.
She is a co-author of the Polish language book Matryoshka in Hijab. Essays on Dagestan and Chechnya (2010). She is
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Thursday, February 23, 2012
4:00-5:00
Voesar Conference Room
1957 E Street NW, Suite 412
Please RSVP at http://tinyurl.com/KaliszewskaGWU

This event is on the record