Report on Human Rights Violations in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic

September 2026

An analysis of open sources for September 2026, including reports by human rights organizations, independent media coverage, and court proceedings, reveals a persistent pattern of violations of human rights and freedoms by the authorities, security agencies, and courts of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic. Documented incidents point to a profound crisis in the prison and law enforcement systems, manifested in the deliberate denial of medical care to seriously ill prisoners, conditions of detention amounting to torture, and judicial manipulation of sentence calculations to prevent parole. Particularly concerning are instances of repressive pressure on minors in the digital sphere, including public, forced apologies on camera, and the elimination of the remaining vestiges of political pluralism through intimidation of independent candidates by security agencies. The coordinated actions of the regional machinery of repression and military courts, aimed at fabricating large-scale “terrorist cells” on the basis of digital evidence alone and accelerating the seizure of assets held by local ruling clans against the backdrop of Russia’s “special military operation,” make it urgently necessary to strengthen human rights efforts in the republic.

Twelve Years Later: A Court in Karachay-Cherkessia Orders a Local Woman’s Arrest in Absentia, Reviving Prosecution over Events More Than a Decade Old

The Ust-Dzheguta District Court in Karachay-Cherkessia ordered the arrest in absentia of a local woman accused of involvement in the activities of the international terrorist organization Islamic State (ISIS) in Syria. The region’s joint court press service issued the corresponding press release.

https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8925339

According to the investigators’ case materials, the defendant flew from Russia to Turkey in 2014 and subsequently traveled onward to the Syrian Arab Republic, where she allegedly joined the militants voluntarily.

Twelve years later, law enforcement authorities resumed the prosecution: the woman was placed on Russia’s federal wanted list in July 2026, and formal charges were brought against her in absentia on August 10. On August 18, her details were forwarded to INTERPOL for an international search.

The case falls under the criminal provision on participation in a terrorist organization, which carries a prison sentence of 10 to 20 years. The court ordered that the defendant be held in custody for two months, with the period beginning upon her possible arrest in the Russian Federation or extradition to the country.

https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/426313

Human rights defenders note that prosecutions involving events from the mid-2010s are a systemic phenomenon in the North Caucasus. Meanwhile, the North Caucasus District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don regularly imposes severe sentences on people from Karachay-Cherkessia

in similar cases. Local resident Ruslan Botashev, for example, received 18 years in a strict-regime penal colony, while Ikhtiyor Bekturdiev of Cherkessk was sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment for participation in ISIS.

This incident illustrates the systemic practice of reviving decade-old criminal cases in the North Caucasus, creating serious risks to the rights to a fair trial and an effective defense.

From a legal perspective, the resumption of prosecution over events in 2014 illustrates how the General Part of the Russian Criminal Code is applied to terrorism-related offenses. Under Article 78 of the Criminal Code, "Exemption from Criminal Liability upon Expiry of the Limitation Period," the maximum limitation period for particularly serious crimes is 15 years. However, paragraph 5 of the same article establishes an unconditional exception for key terrorism-related offenses: no limitation period applies where a person is accused of offenses under Articles 205, 205.1, 205.3, 205.4, 205.5, and certain other provisions.

Because the charge in this case falls under Article 205.5(2) of the Criminal Code, participation in the activities of a terrorist organization, investigators face no time limit for initiating prosecution. Human rights lawyers emphasize that an order placing a person on a wanted list becomes the key procedural trigger for circumventing standard procedures and obtaining an arrest order in absentia. Under Article 78(3), the limitation period is suspended if a person evades investigation or trial. Placing someone on an international wanted list through INTERPOL allows investigators to keep a criminal case open indefinitely, depriving the accused of an effective opportunity to exercise their defense rights, request face-to-face confrontations between witnesses and defendants, or present an alibi because of the time elapsed and their physical absence from Russia.

The international search through INTERPOL for a woman from Karachay-Cherkessia, 12 years after her alleged departure for Syria via Turkey, highlights a critical problem facing thousands of people from the North Caucasus.

Historically, Turkey has served as a major transit hub and a safe haven for emigrants from the Caucasus. In recent years, however, the legal position of refugees in the country has deteriorated sharply.

Today, the Caucasian community in Turkey faces heightened risks due to the combination of two factors: Russian security agencies' abuse of INTERPOL channels, including so-called Red Notices, and Ankara's tightening of domestic migration policy.

1. Deportation Detention Centers and Restriction Codes (G-87)

Since the early 2020s, Turkish migration authorities have actively applied administrative restriction codes to people from the North Caucasus and Central Asia. Among the most dangerous is G-87, "Threat to National Security."

The code is assigned by Turkey's Directorate General of Migration Management on the basis of intelligence from local security services or requests from foreign states through INTERPOL. No Turkish court ruling is required: suspicion of radicalization or involvement in extremist organizations is sufficient.

People assigned this code are subject to immediate detention and placement in removal centers, including facilities in Selimpaşa, Tuzla, and other areas. Human rights defenders frequently describe conditions in these centers as prison-like, with severely restricted access to independent lawyers.

2. Russia’s Use of INTERPOL as an Instrument of Repression

Human rights organizations, including Safeguard Defenders and Red Notice Monitor, have repeatedly stated that the Russian Federation systematically uses INTERPOL mechanisms to pursue political opponents and refugees. In the North Caucasus context, this takes the form of large numbers of requests based on terrorism and extremism charges.

The issue has acquired urgent international significance and has been formally raised at the United Nations. Within relevant UN human rights committees and working groups, independent experts and international rapporteurs have initiated consideration of Russia’s abuse of international criminal search mechanisms. The international community characterizes these actions as the direct use of transnational justice institutions to persecute refugees from the Caucasus, activists, and people seeking asylum in third countries, particularly Turkey. This violates the fundamental principles of the UN Refugee Convention and undermines confidence in the global INTERPOL system.

As the current case from Karachay-Cherkessia demonstrates, investigators deliberately revive decade-old cases, such as a departure in 2014, many years later.

Inclusion in the INTERPOL database automatically prevents a person from leaving Turkey, blocks their ability to regularize their status, and cuts off access to banking and social services.

3. “Covert Deportation” and Humanitarian Risks

Although Turkey is bound by the European Convention on Extradition and the international principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning a person to a place where they face torture or death, Ankara regularly carries out forced removals.

Rather than following the complex, public process of conventional extradition through the courts, Turkish authorities often use administrative deportation for immigration violations or on the basis of security codes.

Held in removal centers under intense psychological pressure and cut off from information, detainees from the Caucasus frequently sign “voluntary return” documents, known as Gönüllü Geri Dönüş, after which they are placed on flights to Russia.

Upon return to Russia, people extradited or deported in response to requests alleging involvement in ISIS or other banned organizations come under the complete control of regional offices of the Federal Security Service (FSB). Human rights defenders report that torture, severe physical violence, and closed trials are used against such detainees almost universally in the North Caucasus, resulting in prison sentences of 15 to 18 years. The risk of surrender makes refugees from the Caucasus in Turkey one of the region’s most vulnerable and least protected groups.

Fabricating “Terrorist Cells”: The Southern District Military Court Sentences a Cherkessk Resident to 16 Years on the Basis of Digital Evidence

The Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don handed down a severe sentence against Ikhtiyor Bekturdiev, an Uzbek citizen residing in Cherkessk, in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic. The panel of judges found him guilty under Article 205.5(2), participation in the activities of a terrorist organization, and Article 205.1(1.1), assistance to terrorist activities, of the Russian Criminal Code.

https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8990299

Bekturdiev was sentenced to 16 years in a strict-regime penal colony, with the first three years to be served under the more restrictive conditions of a prison. The judgment has not yet become final and may be appealed by the defense.

https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/427073

This trial reflects a systemic pattern of repression by law enforcement authorities in the North Caucasus: the mass construction of cases involving “underground cells” on the basis of digital traces and undisclosed testimony alone.

According to the official account put forward by investigators and accepted by the military court, the chronology and substance of the case are as follows.

It is alleged that, between July and October 2023, while living in Cherkessk, Bekturdiev corresponded through an unnamed messaging app with an “unidentified member” of a group affiliated with the international terrorist organization Islamic State (ISIS). During these exchanges, the defendant allegedly “embraced a radical ideology.”

Investigators allege that, in October 2023, he used his mobile phone to record a video statement in which he read out a pledge of allegiance to an ISIS leader, then sent the file to his online handler.

The most serious element of the prosecution, assistance to terrorism, rests on the claim that, from December 2023 to April 14, 2025, Bekturdiev followed instructions received through the messaging app and promoted the organization among people close to him. According to the court, he invited six people from Uzbekistan to join the banned organization. Investigators claim that one of his acquaintances agreed to join the virtual cell as a result.

Systemic Indicators of Fabricated Criminal Cases

Lawyers and human rights monitoring groups examining cases under Articles 205.1 and 205.5 of the Criminal Code in the Southern District Military Court identify several recurring patterns in Bekturdiev’s case that raise serious doubts about the fairness of the proceedings.

1. Exclusive reliance on “digital evidence.” A single video recording of a pledge or a text log of messages on a phone is often the only physical evidence of participation in a terrorist organization. When detained migrants are held in complete isolation, lack independent legal counsel at the initial stages, and face a language barrier, such recordings are frequently made under direct physical coercion, threats to deport their families, or instructions dictated by security officers.

2. The “unidentified handler.” The use of fictitious “unidentified members” abroad in case materials allows investigators to avoid producing real evidence that a terrorist network exists. Officers need only assert that the correspondence involved an account allegedly linked to ISIS.

3. Charges based on “witness” statements. Allegations that six compatriots were recruited in Cherkessk are generally proved in court solely through records of interviews with those same individuals. Faced with the cancellation of their work permits, removal from Russia, or prosecution for failure to report a crime under Article 205.6 of the Criminal Code, migrant workers are compelled to sign whatever statements FSB investigators prepare against their acquaintance.

4. The assembly-line prosecution of migrants. Bekturdiev’s case is not unique. The Southern District Military Court previously convicted Tajik citizen Alimardon Karimov using a similar approach. He was accused of pledging allegiance to ISIS while serving a sentence in a penal colony in Stavropol Territory. Migrants from Central Asia are among the groups with the fewest protections and greatest vulnerability before the Russian law enforcement system: they lack the resources to pay for qualified legal representation, and their cases are heard behind closed doors.

A Particularly Harsh Prison Regime

The requirement that Bekturdiev serve the first three years in a prison before transfer to a strict-regime penal colony is an extreme measure of repression. The Russian prison regime entails continuous confinement in locked cells and severe restrictions on outdoor exercise, visits, and parcels. For foreign nationals without family support in the region, these conditions mean complete physical and informational isolation, with a high risk of abuse by prison administrators and no opportunity for human rights defenders to document violations promptly.

Human rights organizations continue to collect information on violations of the rights of foreign nationals and migrant workers during closed trials in the North Caucasus.

The Case of Mountaineer Mikhail Semenov, a Man with a Disability, Exposes Abuses in Karachay-Cherkessia’s Prison System

The security agencies and courts of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic display a consistent disregard for the rights of seriously ill prisoners. The case of Mikhail Semenov, a well-known mountaineer from Teberda who has a recognized Group II disability under Russia’s disability classification system, illustrates the use of law enforcement as an instrument of punitive pressure. A comprehensive analysis of the case materials reveals not only deliberate procedural manipulation of the duration of confinement, but also gross violations of national and international standards governing the health of people deprived of their liberty.

Mikhail Semenov, a mountaineer from Karachay-Cherkessia, is serving a sentence for illegally crossing the Russian state border through the East Klukhori border pass toward Abkhazia in April 2024. The court sentenced him to one year in a settlement-type penal colony.

Human rights sources and Semenov’s wife link the severity of the prosecution and the subsequent pressure in detention facilities to his conflict with local security officials. The mountaineer openly criticized the situation around the Klukhori Pass, stating that the management of the Teberda Nature Reserve, under the protection of security agencies, had been charging outsiders for illegal trips to the closed border pass.

In July, security officers in Karachay-Cherkessia detained the 38-year-old Semenov, who has a serious chronic heart condition and officially recognized Group II disability status. The formal justification for taking a seriously ill man into custody was his failure to report to the settlement-type penal colony by the designated deadline. Human rights lawyers emphasize that the detention was manifestly unjustified and unlawful from the outset.

At the time of the alleged violation, Semenov was undergoing treatment and a specialized medical rehabilitation program. Under applicable Russian law, treatment and rehabilitation constitute a valid reason for postponing the date on which a person must report to a penal institution.

Despite the medical documentation, the court disregarded the defense's legal arguments and authorized his detention, setting in motion a sustained campaign of physical and psychological pressure against him.

In September, the mountaineer's wife publicly described the catastrophic conditions in which her husband was being held and the authorities' outright refusal to provide adequate medical care.

Semenov's transfers between penal facilities were accompanied by continuous human rights violations:

• The Cherkessk remand detention center, Karachay-Cherkessia. In the first weeks after his arrest, a man with a disability and a heart condition received no specialist treatment. The detention center administration ignored complaints that his health was deteriorating.

• Remand detention centers in Moscow Region. After his transfer to central Russia, the situation remained unchanged. Semenov unsuccessfully sought basic medical examinations and essential heart medication. In human rights practice, such denial of care is regarded as cruel and degrading treatment under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

• Pressure in the settlement-type penal colony. On September 22, the prisoner's wife reported that, following his transfer to the colony, its administration continued to exert coordinated pressure on Semenov and obstruct his lawful efforts to defend his rights.

https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/426880

The culmination of systemic judicial abuse in Karachay-Cherkessia was the formal rejection of Mikhail Semenov's application for parole. The court of general jurisdiction justified its decision on a technical ground, finding that the minimum period of the sentence required before an application could be filed "had not yet elapsed." Semenov's defense strongly disputes that conclusion and has announced its intention to appeal.

His lawyers identify a direct legal error in the court's calculations: regional judges deliberately used an incorrect method to calculate time served, failing to credit the days Semenov spent in remand detention during the investigation and transfers, or interpreting prison rules in the manner most detrimental to the seriously ill prisoner. Artificially delaying parole for a person with a Group II disability resulting from a heart condition, amid continuing pressure, turns the remainder of his sentence into a real threat to his life.

https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/426732

Mikhail Semenov's case in Karachay-Cherkessia establishes a dangerous precedent of investigative authorities, prison administrations, and courts acting together to circumvent explicit legal provisions. It exposes the following major failures in the region's legal system:

1. Disregard for medical considerations in the enforcement of sentences. In Karachay-Cherkessia, Group II disability status and heart defects no longer prevent a person's confinement in a remand detention center. The courts have entirely withdrawn from overseeing the quality of prison healthcare.

2. Procedural falsification in sentence calculations. Incorrect calculations of time served to block parole indicate a deliberate judicial practice of keeping prisoners in penal colonies despite lawful grounds for release.

3. Impunity for failure to provide emergency care. The fact that Semenov's health complaints were ignored in several successive detention facilities demonstrates that medical discrimination within the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN) is a problem extending across regions.

Protecting Mikhail Semenov’s rights requires immediate intervention by the prosecutors responsible for supervising compliance with the law in correctional institutions, as well as urgent complaints concerning the failure to provide medical care.

Center “E” Intimidates Schoolchildren

Officers of the Interior Ministry’s Center for Combating Extremism in Karachay-Cherkessia identified an online post containing symbols banned in the Russian Federation, published by a 15-year-old girl from Cherkessk. The regional law enforcement agency did not specify which organization’s or movement’s symbols the minor had shared.

After identifying the account holder, officers held a “preventive conversation” with the schoolgirl in her mother’s presence. An administrative offense report was drawn up against the minor’s parents for failure to fulfill their duties to support and raise their child, an offense punishable by a warning or a fine of 500 to 2,000 rubles.

The press service of the Interior Ministry in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic also published a video of the schoolgirl apologizing on its official Telegram channel. On camera, the minor described the incident as a “major lesson,” stated that such actions were unacceptable, confirmed that she had been held accountable, and urged internet users not to do the same.

Instead of standard educational or preventive measures, security officers subjected a child to a full-scale campaign of public humiliation.

An administrative offense report for “failure to fulfill parental duties” was promptly drawn up against the girl’s parents. The principal instrument of state-imposed psychological pressure, however, was the publication of her apology video on the regional Interior Ministry’s official Telegram channel. On camera, a frightened child calls her action “foolish” and says that she “has been held accountable for it.” At the same time, the agency deliberately withheld information, refusing to specify which symbols she had posted. This prevents the public from assessing the actual seriousness of an “offense” that might have been nothing more than a meme, a peace symbol, or a historical illustration.

Human rights defenders have consistently criticized law enforcement agencies’ publication of apology videos featuring detainees, especially minors, citing severe psychological pressure, violations of children’s rights, and breaches of confidentiality.

https://m.vk.ru/wall-49559624_26342

https://www.instagram.com/reels/DdwCUwvtESX/

Recently, human rights defenders and independent monitoring groups have observed an extremely dangerous trend in southern Russia and the North Caucasus: minors are increasingly becoming targets of criminal and administrative prosecution.

Russia’s law enforcement system and security services have effectively erased age boundaries in their punitive operations, turning teenagers and schoolchildren into a convenient means of meeting institutional targets for combating “extremism” and “sabotage.”

The latest incident in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic clearly demonstrates how the Interior Ministry’s Center for Combating Extremism is conducting a full-scale hunt for children in the digital sphere.

Recurring Patterns in the Persecution of Minors in Southern Russia

A human rights analysis of recently documented incidents identifies three principal areas in which minors have come under attack.

1. Fabricating “Sabotage” Cases through Recruitment: Young People Drawn into Railway Arson

FSB investigators in southern regions are routinely reclassifying deceived teenagers from victims to defendants charged with particularly serious offenses against the state. Handlers, often acting as agents provocateurs, infiltrate youth chat groups and use manipulation, blackmail, or promises of small payments to induce teenagers to set fire to railway relay cabinets or other railway infrastructure. The law enforcement system entirely disregards the children’s age, the circumstances in which they were deceived, and the absence of conscious terrorist intent, sending schoolchildren to trial in an assembly-line process with the prospect of sentences of up to 10 to 15 years.

2. Using Forced Apologies on Camera as a Tool of Intimidation

The practice of recording penitential videos, which originated in Chechnya, has now been formally expanded by the security services and Interior Ministry across the North Caucasus Federal District. Publishing a video showing the face of a 15-year-old child on official agency platforms directly violates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the principle of confidentiality in juvenile justice, and basic protections against psychological abuse. The child is used as a public example to intimidate all other young people in the region.

3. Preemptive Deprivation of Rights through “Extremist” Registers

Underage activists are deprived of their civil rights at an early stage. A striking example from the wider region is the case of Kevin Lik, a schoolboy from Adygea who, while still a minor, became the youngest person prosecuted for “high treason” in the history of the Russian Federation. He endured imprisonment and was released only as part of a major international prisoner exchange.

The criminalization of minors’ actions and the use of public shaming demonstrate that state security agencies in Karachay-Cherkessia and neighboring republics no longer distinguish between radical underground groups and teenagers acting impulsively or without a full understanding of their actions online.

Pressure on children is a sign of the complete deterioration of legal institutions, as Center “E” and the FSB ruin minors’ lives to meet reporting targets, denying them room to make mistakes and the right to fair treatment by the state. Human rights organizations demand an immediate end to the publication of children’s faces and apologies on official agency channels and call on international institutions responsible for protecting children’s rights to give close attention to the situation in the North Caucasus.

Eradicating Political Pluralism: An Independent Candidacy in the State Duma Election Is Eliminated in Karachay-Cherkessia

The campaign for elections to the Russian State Duma in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic demonstrated the final dismantling of lawful political competition. The withdrawal of Akhmed Abazov, a candidate from the opposition party Yabloko, from the race resulted from coordinated administrative pressure and direct threats.

This incident forms part of a nationwide trend toward the complete elimination of the remaining vestiges of political pluralism, reducing elections to a formal process of endorsing figures selected by the authorities.

Akhmed Abazov was formally nominated by Yabloko as a candidate for the eighth State Duma in Karachay-Cherkess single-member constituency No. 16.

The independent politician was nevertheless unable to participate fully in the electoral process. Immediately after his nomination, Abazov faced intense pressure from the republic's regional authorities and security agencies. According to representatives of the party's regional branch, the candidate was openly warned that continuing his campaign would lead to severe personal and economic reprisals.

Under constant psychological and administrative pressure, Abazov was forced to submit a formal request to the republic's Election Commission to cancel his nomination and withdraw his candidacy. The Election Commission of Karachay-Cherkessia promptly responded by revoking the decision to register him. As a result, the constituency was entirely stripped of an alternative opposition platform.

Akhmed Abazov's case in Karachay-Cherkessia is not a local anomaly. It is a systemic manifestation of state policy aimed at destroying all forms of independent representation in contemporary Russia.

A human rights analysis identifies several key elements of this repressive strategy:

1. Criminalizing and obstructing the legally recognized opposition. Yabloko remains one of the last legally registered political organizations openly advocating a pacifist and democratic platform. Forcing its candidates to withdraw through intimidation demonstrates that the authorities no longer tolerate even minimal criticism within the official electoral arena.

2. Monopolizing the electoral arena. Russia's electoral system has become a mechanism for the controlled allocation of seats between the ruling party and established satellite parties wholly loyal to the Kremlin. Any candidate capable of mobilizing local communities' protest sentiment is excluded well before voting begins.

3. Using regional administrative power as an instrument of coercion. In the North Caucasus, pressure on independent candidates has traditionally been particularly harsh. The absence of independent civil society oversight allows local officials to deploy the full range of security-service methods, threatening activists with criminal prosecution or the loss of employment or businesses.

The exclusion of Akhmed Abazov from lawful political participation deprives residents of Karachay-Cherkessia of the opportunity to express their disagreement with the prevailing socioeconomic and political course peacefully and legally. Human rights defenders conclude that the elimination of political alternatives inevitably radicalizes protest sentiment in the region, because lawful channels of dialogue between society and the state have been completely destroyed.

The documented forced withdrawal of a candidate in Karachay-Cherkessia will be included in broader monitoring reports on electoral manipulation and the undemocratic nature of the federal electoral cycle.

https://www.currenttime.tv/a/abazov-snyalsya-s-vyborov-iz-za-ugroz/33858986.html

https://ovd.info/index.php/story/golosovanie-18-20-sentyabrya-khronika?news_id=76105

Akhmed Abazov’s forced withdrawal in Karachay-Cherkessia is part of a large-scale, systematic campaign to exclude independent candidates from elections in the North Caucasus Federal District. Elections in the North Caucasian republics have traditionally been characterized by the harsh use of administrative power. In the current electoral cycle, however, human rights monitoring groups report a comprehensive purge of all alternative forces from the political arena.

According to independent electoral experts, the North Caucasus Federal District has the lowest levels of political pluralism in the Russian Federation.

Patterns of exclusion of the independent opposition in the region fall into three main strategies.

1. Forced Withdrawal under Coercive and Economic Pressure

The case in Karachay-Cherkessia reflects one of the least transparent but most effective methods used by administrations in the Caucasus. When a candidate is widely known in the republic and capable of attracting genuine protest votes, the security apparatus is deployed against them.

Human rights defenders report that candidates and their family members are threatened with:

• Criminal cases on “extremism” or economic charges.

• The immediate dismissal of relatives from publicly funded and state institutions.

• The complete destruction of personal or family businesses through unscheduled inspections by regulatory bodies.

As a result, candidates submit “voluntary” requests to cancel their registration, allowing election commissions to report that there have been no formal complaints or official refusals to register candidates.

2. Rejection of Signatures and Administrative Barriers Imposed by Election Commissions

For self-nominated candidates and representatives of non-parliamentary opposition parties, such as Yabloko or independent regional platforms, election commissions in the republics of the North Caucasus Federal District use the systematic rejection of voter signatures.

In Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Stavropol Territory, the proportion of independent candidates’ signatures declared “invalid” on the basis of assessments by Interior Ministry handwriting experts reaches 85 to 90 percent.

Meanwhile, courts of general jurisdiction in the North Caucasus side with election commissions in 100 percent of cases, rejecting candidates’ appeals and requests for independent handwriting examinations.

3. Criminalizing Activists Long before Campaigns Begin

The harshest method of clearing the electoral field in the North Caucasus Federal District is the preemptive criminal prosecution of influential public figures long before an election campaign officially begins. A prominent example is the Russian Justice Ministry's recurring inclusion of local human rights defenders and Circassian, Karachay, or Ingush national activists in "foreign agent" registers, alongside their inclusion in the Federal Financial Monitoring Service's lists of "extremists and terrorists," as happened to Rustam Khuazhev, an activist from Adygea. Acquiring such a designation automatically deprives a citizen of the right to stand for election, completely barring lawful access to political activity in Russia.

https://verstka.media/bolee-60-oppoziczionnyh-kandidatov-snyali-s-vyborov-iz-za-ekstremizma-problem-s-dokumentami-i-inostrannyh-akczij

Human rights defenders conclude that the electoral system in the North Caucasus Federal District has been reduced to an entirely controlled instrument for legitimizing regional elites. Opposition candidates are excluded through direct intimidation, depriving the multiethnic population of the North Caucasus of the right to representation of its interests.

Reversal of Privatization and the Use of Justice to Mobilize State Resources during the "Special Military Operation"

In September 2026, the Federal Agency for State Property Management, Rosimushchestvo, again offered for auction a confiscated mansion in Yessentuki formerly owned by Vladimir Kaishev, the former head of government of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic. According to official documentation, the starting price for the 308.7-square-meter house and a land plot of more than 2.8 hectares was set at 55.821 million rubles. The previous auction, with a starting price of 57.262 million rubles, was declared unsuccessful because there were no buyers. The Russian Federation's ownership of the properties was registered in February of this year on the basis of a court ruling transferring the former official's assets to the state.

https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/9005776

https://www.instagram.com/p/Dd4n2b7RQmK/

This auction illustrates a broad nationwide trend during the period of the "special military operation," in which federal authorities have sharply intensified anti-corruption proceedings against regional elites. Against this backdrop, the state has shifted toward sweeping reversals of privatization and the mass seizure of assets worth billions from senior officials. In September 2025, for example, a court granted an unprecedented claim by the Russian Prosecutor General's Office, confiscating property worth almost 42 billion rubles from Vladimir Kaishev. The ruling was upheld on appeal in December of that year, and Kaishev filed a cassation appeal in April of the current year in an effort to challenge the seizure.

Meanwhile, criminal proceedings are unfolding in Stavropol Territory against the former head of the Karachay-Cherkess government, his brother Yuri, and several alleged accomplices. As part of the campaign to dismantle regional clans, they face charges of organizing a criminal association under Article 210(3) of the Criminal Code, large-scale theft from a gas pipeline, fraud, extortion, and exceeding official authority. Vladimir Kaishev is also accused of organizing a contract killing. The seizure and sale of property belonging to such prominent officials underscore that, during the "special military operation," the federal center no longer guarantees the security of local ruling elites' wealth, turning confiscation into a means of replenishing the budget and redistributing resources.

https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/426996

Also in September 2026, the Civil Division of the Supreme Court of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic upheld a lower court's decision to transfer to the state property worth a total of 307 million rubles belonging to Dmitry Bugaev, the region's former minister of property and land relations and former deputy head of government, and members of his family. The appellate court left unchanged the Cherkessk City Court's ruling of May this year, under which 22 readily marketable real estate properties and three vehicles were confiscated from the former official and his relatives. More than 64 million rubles were also recovered as the monetary equivalent of property already disposed of.

https://www.interfax-russia.ru/south-and-north-caucasus/news/sud-podtverdil-konfiskaciyu-aktivov-na-307-mln-rubley-u-byvshego-vice-premera-kchr

According to prosecutors, while holding various senior positions in the republic's executive authorities between 2015 and 2025, Bugaev acquired expensive assets and deliberately registered them in the names of close relatives and affiliated individuals to conceal them. The lawful origin of the funds used for these transactions was not established during the proceedings. The former minister also faces criminal prosecution for exceeding official authority; in August, the court extended his detention in connection with that case.

https://yugsn.ru/v-cherkesske-sud-izyal-aktivy-eks-ministra-kchr-bugaeva-10595309

https://expertsouth.ru/news/sud-podtverdil-konfiskatsiyu-aktivov-na-307-mln-rubley-u-eksvitsepremera-kchr/

This court decision provides further compelling evidence of a broad and persistent trend that has developed against the backdrop of the "special military operation." The confiscation of Dmitry Bugaev's multimillion-ruble assets, following the unprecedented seizure of 42 billion rubles in property from another former head of the Karachay-Cherkess government, Vladimir Kaishev, confirms that the federal center has fundamentally reshaped regional anti-corruption policy. During the "special military operation," law enforcement and the courts have moved to an assembly-line seizure of the local ruling elite's concealed wealth, using reversals of privatization and civil confiscation to make a public example of dismantling regional clans and mobilizing resources for the state.

The Kaishev and Bugaev cases clearly demonstrate that, against the backdrop of the "special military operation," the federal center has radically changed the rules governing its relations with regional ruling elites:

1. Civil confiscation without a criminal conviction. Claims by the Prosecutor General's Office seeking the seizure of property are filed and granted in civil proceedings on the basis of "unsubstantiated income," long before criminal judgments are delivered. This allows the state to take rapid control of economic resources.

2. Disruption of the balance among local clans. Clan-based guarantees and the concealed distribution of resources through relatives, traditionally characteristic of the North Caucasus, no longer protect against investigations. Security agencies deliberately target officials' family networks, seizing property from brothers, children, and trusted associates.

3. Justice used to mobilize resources. Assets seized from officials are immediately transferred to Rosimushchestvo and offered for auction. With federal and regional budgets under increased strain, the mass seizure of property from corrupt ruling elites has become a lawful means for the state to mobilize and redistribute domestic financial resources.

The human rights community notes that, although fighting corruption is a legitimate public demand, using the courts for rapid, systematic deprivation of property rights without rigorous

evidentiary standards, often in closed proceedings, creates dangerous precedents. It destroys the remaining vestiges of judicial independence and turns the courts into implementing bodies for the federal center’s fiscal and security policies.

Meanwhile, in September 2026, it became known that two residents of the republic would not return from Ukraine: Zurab Kakhunov of Cherkessk and Marat Dzhukaev of Kumysh village in Karachay District. Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the authorities have thus publicly named at least 206 combatants from Karachay-Cherkessia killed in the war.

Conclusions

A human rights analysis of documented incidents, court proceedings, and law enforcement practices in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic during the reporting period reveals the systemic deterioration of legal institutions. The region has developed a sustained trajectory toward suppressing basic civil liberties, legitimizing abuses in detention, and ostentatiously seizing property. The coordinated actions of the republic’s security agencies, prosecutors, and courts reveal the following principal human rights failures: the eradication of political pluralism and independent candidacies; increasing repression of minors; the fabrication of terrorism-related cases and abuse of INTERPOL; a crisis in the prison system and the deliberate denial of medical care; and reversals of privatization and the use of justice to mobilize state resources against the backdrop of the “special military operation.”

In September 2026, law enforcement and judicial authorities in Karachay-Cherkessia entirely abandoned their functions of restoring and protecting rights, acting solely to legitimize the executive authorities’ punitive and confiscatory initiatives. The situation in the republic requires an urgent strengthening of independent legal oversight, investigations by the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office into violations of minors’ rights and the failure to provide medical care in remand detention centers, and referral of the documented cases to international human rights institutions.

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