



Legitimizing Aina Gamzatova

OE Watch Commentary: The recent article from *Islamdag.ru*, Dagestan's largest and most popular Islamic news and content website, entitled "Why is Aina Gamzatova a Candidate for the Russian Presidency?", is less an article and more a series of favorable editorial justifications for Aina Gamzatova's run for the Russian presidency. Before and since Mrs. Gamzatova made her candidacy official by filing with Russia's Central Election Commission, she has had little to say on the issues except that she supports a stronger unified Russia - Christian and Muslim - and wants an end to the Islamic radicalism that has torn apart her homeland of Dagestan and the region in which she resides.

What is interesting about this article is that it originates from a web news portal that Mrs. Gamzatova owns and operates, *Islam.ru*. One might get the impression that the story was contrived from within her media organization to justify her candidacy to the Muslim population of Dagestan itself—her most probable but problematic supporters. The editorial voices that comprise the article cover topics like instability in Dagestan and the North Caucasus region, unfavorable economic conditions for the population, the threat of radical Islam, public service, Muslim women's rights and Mrs. Gamzatova's right to run for President as a Muslim woman.

The editorial compilation specifically addresses Mrs. Gamzatova's charitable efforts beside her husband, the Mufti of Dagestan. Other topics covered include the threat of radical Islam and the concept in the stricter religious quarters of her home turf where women are restricted in their agency. Much is made of the fact that her husband is the Mufti of Dagestan, which leads to a contradictory thread to her rationale for her candidacy—or perhaps a carrot to appease more fundamentalist Muslims who might oppose her effort because she is a woman acting on her own. The article makes it clear she has the blessing of the male religious figures that matter, by pointing out, "As we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."

Mrs. Gamzatova is also craftily compared to the great Dagestani Imam Shamil (1797-1871). Imam Shamil is the measuring stick one is held to in the region when in a position of power or seeking power and that comparison is one everyone in the region will understand. There will be those who will not accept this comparison for many reasons. Just two decades early another Shamil, the Chechen Shamil Basaev (1965-2006) was the military or combatant face of the Chechen independence movement. He too, especially in the first war 1994-1996 was often compared to the legendary Imam Shamil and part of his initial legitimacy was rooted in that comparison.

Not one of the authors comprising this news piece suggest that Aina Gamzatova has a chance in a Russian national election. In fact, only one, Aisha Anastasia Korchagina, even mentions Russia or its current president, posing the question, "Who can be an alternative to Putin?" Instead the focus is clearly for the people of Dagestan and the north Caucasus. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

"If this was the decision of Aina Gamzatova herself, then, in that case, there could be doubts. But, as we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."



Mufti of the Republic of Dagestan Ahmad-Haji Abdulaev.

Source: www.president.e-dag.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMufti_of_Dagestan.png, CC BY 3.0.

Source: Почему Айна Гамзатова выдвигается кандидатом в президенты России? (Why is Aina Gamzatova nominated as a candidate for the presidency of Russia?), *Islamdag.ru*, 3 January 2018. <http://islamdag.ru/analitika/48109>

"They say a woman should stay at home and watch the fire. There is no doubt. But, every time Alima said 'A woman should stay at home' they added 'She can only go out if necessary.' Until Aina Gamzatova nominated her candidacy for the presidency of the Russian Federation, 99% of women clung to the words 'They can go out only when necessary.'"

...

"If this was the decision of Aina Gamzatova herself, then, in that case, there could be doubts. But, as we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."