



- The “Mountain Tartars” of Kabardino-Balkaria
- Population: 760,000
- Ethnic breakdown: Balkar 8%; Karachay 43%; Russian 33%

The Balkars are a Turkic people who live in the central Caucasus region of southern Russia. Over time the Balkars have become culturally similar to their Caucasian neighbors, but they have faithfully retained their Turkic language. Covering 7,000 mi², the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria is about the size of New Jersey. The north is a gently sloping and undulating plateau, while the Caucasus Mountain chain dominates the southern frontiers. Much of the republic is an unsettled, roadless mountain wilderness. Most of its industry is related to agriculture, while lumbering and mining are also important.

In the 13th century, the Balkar area was overrun by Genghis Khan’s Mongols, and they fought at the side of the king of Georgia, to whose kingdom they belonged. The Balkars later joined the Turko-Mongolian hordes of Genghis Khan. The Mongols, however, played the Balkars against the other peoples and brought their land into civil war.

Centuries later, the Balkar homeland was annexed to Russia, and the Russians gave the name “Mountain Tartars” or “Mountain Turks” to all of the Turko-Tatar people groups of the Caucasus.

In 1991 the autonomous Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria was declared, and in 1992 it signed a federation treaty with Russia. The Republic has significant Islamic roots and is among the poorest regions of the Russian Federation. Widespread unemployment and religious fanaticism are a potentially explosive mixture, though compared to the neighbouring republics of Chechnya, Northern Ossetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria has been considered relatively stable.

For generations, the area has experienced conflicts between the majority Karachay and the minority Balkars. The extremist organization “Jaruk” is considered the inner core of recent terrorist conflict as these fighters want to introduce Islamic sharia law in the Northern Caucasus. Young men from Kabardino-Balkaria have often been found among terrorists in significant incidents throughout recent years.

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Pray

- ▶ Pray for peace in the entire region.
- ▶ Pray for God’s protection and blessing on the small number of Christians among the Balkars.
- ▶ Pray for reconciliation between Russians and the Caucasus peoples.
- ▶ Pray for God’s hope and light to shine on the Balkars and Karachay.