

The Chechens of Austria

<http://legacy.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?rog3=AU&peo3=11317>

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Introduction and History

Austria holds the fifth-largest Chechen population outside their homeland to the east in the Caucasus Mountains of Russia, with 15,000 members of the 1,489,725 global Chechen population residing throughout the Karnten region.¹ This Northeast Caucasian people group has inhabited the Caucasus mountain range dating back to 600 B.C.² Because the region they inhabited is resource-rich and geographically advantageous for military action, the Chechens have been fighting for their homeland since around 200 B.C.³

Virtually all Austrian Chechens are trilingual, fluent in Chechen and Russian and competent in German. The majority of Chechens in Austria often reside in urban centers, with the rest working as farmers in rural areas. Their diet, attire, religion, expressive culture, and social structure resembles that of their native Chechnya. Therefore communal areas known as “Little Chechnyas” are often found wherever in the world Chechens have settled.

Chechens in Austria, much like their counterparts around the world, are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim. Their strong ties to Islam relate to their warrior history, as they have constantly had to defend their prosperous region primarily against Christian or antireligious nations. They have resiliently defended invasions by Romans from the south throughout the first century, the Mongol Horde from A.D. 1241 to 1300, the Persians and Turks from A.D. 1300 to the sixteenth century, and the Russians from around 1598 until they were defeated in 1859.⁴

Their Muslim ethnic identity was especially hardened when the Chechens allied with the other Muslim peoples of the Caucasus region to form a new republic called North Caucasia on the eleventh of May, 1918, which allied with Turkey just one month later.⁵ The Chechens were betrayed by the Bolsheviks after switching sides in the Russian Civil War and were soon subjected to genocide by the White Volunteer Army. When they appealed for help to the primarily Christian allied nations, especially the British as the only nation with forces in the region, they refused to intervene. The Chechens were freed from the Whites by the Bolshevik Red Army in early 1920, revolted against the antireligious Soviet government in 1927, and were eventually forced into submission by the Soviets in 1936. From 1937, the Soviets “purged, killed, or deported the Chechens’ entire religious, political, and cultural leadership” into Siberia (modern-day Kazakhstan and Mongolia), which sparked another revolt and the cycle of

¹ A Nitzsche, “People Name: Chechen of Austria”, People Groups, <http://www.peoplegroups.org/explore/GroupDetails.aspx?peid=48858#topmenu>. (17 March 2015).

² *Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations*, “Chechens.” 437.

³ *Ibid.*, 437-42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 437-38.

⁵ *Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations*, “Chechens.” 439.

Russian dominance and Chechen revolt that still continues to this day.⁶ Because of their long-standing struggle for independence with the Russians, Chechnya has become a breeding ground for terrorist groups against Russia and many other Western nations.⁷

Chechens are strongly patriarchal, to the point that if a father dies and is buried in a certain area, his surviving family will likely remain in that place forever unless they are forced out militarily. Chechen men are fully responsible for providing for the family unit while the women are responsible for any and all family matters. The women essentially are “owned” by the immediate head of the household, often her husband, father or brother.⁸

What Are Their Beliefs?

Due to the Chechen peoples’ warrior history and the way that the Muslim Turks often came to their aid militarily, the Chechen people are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim, observing the Shafi rite. Because they have historically fought against or have been refused aid from Christian and anti-religious nations, they are fiercely resistant to the gospel message. Sometimes called the “Mafia of Russia,” these strongly Islamic people are known for fighting and military action.⁹ Christians among the Chechen people are likely to face torture or death at the hands of the general public. Because Chechens residing in Austria were deported there by the Soviets in the early twentieth century, these “Little Chechnyas” are also resistant to Christianity or any other religions.¹⁰

What Are Their Needs?

The New Testament was translated into Chechen in 2007 and a complete Bible translation was not available until 2012. The Jesus Film and audio Gospel recordings are also available in their heart language, but there is not yet a radio broadcast reaching out to them. There are no known churches or believers among this people group. They desperately need missionaries to go to them to live among them, earn the trust of the local leaders, and courageously share the gospel there.

Prayer Points

- * Ask God to call Christian workers who are trained in the Chechen language to take the Gospel to the Chechens in Austria.
- * Ask God to soften the hearts of the Chechen people in Austria, especially the local elders, so they would be receptive to the Gospel.
- * Pray for peace between Chechnya and Russia.
- * Ask God to bring salvation to the Chechens and provide opportunity for strong local churches to be planted among them.

⁶ Ibid., 439.

⁷ Ibid., 438-441.

⁸ *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, “Chechen-Ingush.” 71.

⁹ “Chechen”, Ethnopedia, “Chechen.” Ethnopedia. June 10, 2013. Accessed March 17, 2015. <http://en.ethnopedia.org/wiki/index.php/Chechen>, March 17, 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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