

## THE ADYGHE FACTOR IN THE ETHNOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Oleg BUBENOK

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor, Head, Department of the Eurasian Steppe,  
the A. Krymsky Institute of Oriental Studies,  
National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine  
(Kiev, Ukraine)*

### ABSTRACT

**T**he 150th anniversary of the end of the Caucasian War, which caused havoc in the lives of the Circassians, coincided with the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi organized on the land where Circassians (Adyghe) had long lived. These two events revived an interest in the Circassian ques-

tion and showed that the lacunae in the history of the Adyghe, making an unbiased approach to the issue, impossible should be filled with facts. Repatriation of the Circassians to the Caucasus and a unified Adyghe republic are impossible in Russia's political reality.

**KEYWORDS:** *the Russo-Circassian War, the Winter Olympics, genocide, Adyghe, Adygheans, Shapsugs, Circassians, Kabardians, Adyghea, Karachaevo-Circassia, Kabardino-Balkaria, national republic, Adyghe Khase, repatriation.*

### *Introduction*

On the eve of the Winter Olympics-2014 in Sochi, the Russian media, as well as the media of other countries, carefully avoided certain historical facts that were vitally important for the Adyghe who live in the Krasnodar Territory and in the republics of Adyghea, Karachaevo-Circassia, and Kabardino-Balkaria.

The year 2014 marked the 150 anniversary of the end of the so-called Caucasian War, Sochi being one of the ports through which Circassians were deported to the Ottoman Empire. The media carefully ignored the fact that the Olympic Games were organized on land that had once been home to a large number of Adyghe (Circassians), while academic publications pointed out that Shapsugs, descendants of the local Adyghe, were still living around Sochi.<sup>1</sup>

The Sochi Olympics and the stormy events in Ukraine distracted the world's attention from the Circassian Question, which forced Circassian activists, on 20 May, 2014, to ask Speaker of the Supreme Rada of Ukraine Alexander Turchinov (at that time acting President of Ukraine) to recognize the genocide of the Circassian people. The request authored by Editor of the Natpress Information-Analytical Agency Aslan Shazzo gathered, among others, the signatures of Circassian activists living in Adyghea I. Soobtsokov and E. Tashu, A. Khuade, who represents the Patriots of Circassia international organization in Adyghea, as well as several public figures from Kabardino-Balkaria, Azerbaijan, and the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The response from the Russian authorities was negative. Shazzo, Khuade, Tashu, and Soobtsokov, who lived in Adyghea, were invited to corresponding structures that wanted to hear their answers to the question, "Do you realize that this request may cripple Russia's security?"

Ilyas Soobtsokov answered: "There are two requests from the parliaments of Adyghea and Kabardino-Balkaria to the State Duma of the Russian Federation to recognize the genocide of the Circassians. Circassian public organizations, likewise, repeatedly asked the Russian authorities about this." He was convinced that these requests should be addressed not only to Ukraine, but also to all the member states of the U.N., and argued: "Russia recognized the Armenian genocide, despite its friendly relations with the Turkish authorities. Why not do this in relation to our people? I think that we, like the Armenians, should ask every country to do this."<sup>3</sup>

It should be said that the initiative of the Circassian activists stirred no enthusiasm among the leaders of the Elders of Adyghea movement. One of them, the chairman of the movement's Council Askarbiy Ajgiriev, went as far as expressing his dissatisfaction with the activities of the *public* organizations of Adyghea, Karachaevo-Circassia, and the Kuban, which had asked President Putin to recognize the genocide of the Adyghe, and said: "The Elders of Adyghea dismiss letters of this kind addressed to the authorities of Ukraine and Russia as provocative and marring the reputation of the Adyghe people."<sup>4</sup>

One cannot but wonder: "What are the Russian authorities and the political movements in the Northern Caucasus dependent on them afraid of? Why are they reluctant to recognize the events of the so-called Caucasian War as genocide of the Circassian people?"

The answers to these questions should be sought in the past of the Circassian people, which, until recently, has been gravely distorted.

## The Past of the Adyghe as Interpreted by Historians in the Twentieth Century

Soviet and émigré historians have been equally interested in the history of the Adyghe, also known as Circassians. Soviet historiography presented the relations between Russia and Circassians

<sup>1</sup> See: N. Shakhnazarian, *Adyghi Krasnodarskogo kraia*, Krasnodar, 2008, p. 22; I. Babich, "Urgent Problems of the Western Circassians in the 21st Century," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 15, Issue 2, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See: "Obrashchenie Adygov k ukrainskomu pravitelstvu," available at [<http://blog.i.ua/user/2805707/1425421/2015-02-04>].

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>4</sup> "Stareyshiny Adyghei obratilis...", available at [[http://www.adigeatoday.ru/?article\\_id=11102](http://www.adigeatoday.ru/?article_id=11102) — 2015-02-04].

as friendly, the fact of Russian expansion to the Northern Caucasus in the eighteenth-twentieth centuries being safely ignored.

In the 1940s-early 1950s, Soviet historians interpreted the events unfolding at that time in the Northern Caucasus as the Russian Empire's aggressive policy. In the latter half of the 1950s-1980s, they started talking about the voluntary adherence of the North Caucasian peoples to the Russian state that took place in the sixteenth century.

The two-volume collection of mainly Russian documents *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia v XVI-XVIII vv.* (Kabardian-Russian Relations in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries) published in 1957 is especially interesting,<sup>5</sup> if only because those who selected the documents stopped at the nineteenth century, a time of dramatic or even tragic upheavals.

There was an alternative trend represented mainly by the works of émigré Circassian historians, the most important of them being the monograph by Ramazan Trakho *Cherkesy* published in Munich in 1956 and re-issued in 1992 in Nalchik to familiarize the local public with it: under Soviet power there had been no access to it. Ramazan Trakho, who after World War II lived and worked in Munich, offered a history of his people in the mid-sixteenth century very different from what his Soviet colleagues had written.<sup>6</sup>

All researchers are unanimous in their opinion that until the Mongol invasion, the Circassians who lived mainly in the Northwestern Caucasus were known as "Meotes," Zychi, Kasogs, and Cherkesy.<sup>7</sup> According to archeologists and historians, in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, the valley part of Alania in the Terek basin was populated by Adyghe tribes who had come from the Kuban area. They settled on the left bank of the Terek to form Greater Kabarda. By the late fifteenth century, the ancestors of the Kabardians had settled on the right bank of the Terek, in what is known as Smaller Kabarda. At the same time, Kabardians moved into the steppe and piedmont of the Terek basin and went as far as its lower reaches.<sup>8</sup>

Georg Interiano from Genoa, who visited the south of Eastern Europe in the fifteenth century, "expressly says" that "the people called in the Italian, Greek and Latin languages Zychi, by the Tartars and Turks, Tscherkessians, and in their own tongue Adiga, inhabit the whole sea-coast above Lasia."<sup>9</sup>

*There is no agreement about the origin of the ethnonym "Kabardian" or of the geographic name Kabarda that appeared in fifteenth-century written sources: L. Lavrov, for example, believed that they were derived from the proper name Keberd.*<sup>10</sup>

The Kabardians are still very proud of the fact that their princes acquired a lot of political weight in the piedmont valley stretching from the Azov to the Caspian seas, as well as in the piedmont where they controlled all the mountain passes as soon as the Golden Horde fell apart. Later, they established control over the Balkars and Ossets.

By the early sixteenth century, the Adyghes-Circassians were living in a vast territory stretching to the Black and Azov seas in the west and to the Terek basin in the east.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See: *Kabardino-russkie otnosheniia v XVI-XVIII vv.*, Documents and Materials, in 2 vols., Moscow, 1957.

<sup>6</sup> See: R. Trakho, *Cherkesy*, Munich, 1956, Nalchik, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> See: R. Trakho, op. cit., Nalchik, pp. 3-9; *Adygea, Istoriko-kulturny ocherk*, Part I, Maykop, 1989, pp. 17-18; N.G. Volkova, *Etnonimy i plemennye nazvaniia Severnogo Kavkaza*, Moscow, 1973, pp. 18-25; A.V. Gadlo, *Etnicheskaia istoria Severnogo Kavkaza X-XIII vv.*, St. Petersburg, 1994, pp. 71-137; L.I. Lavrov, "Kabarda i Balkaria v XIII-XV vv.," in: *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy ASSSR*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1967, p. 81.

<sup>8</sup> See: N.A. Shafiev, *Istoria i kultura Kabardintsev v period pozdnego Srednevekovyia (XIV-XVI vv.)*, Nalchik, 1968, pp. 38-40.

<sup>9</sup> J. von Klaroth, *Travels in the Caucasus and Georgia: Performed in the Years 1806 and 1808 by Command of the Russian Government*, Henry Colburn, London, 1814, p. 332.

<sup>10</sup> See: L.I. Lavrov, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Narody Kavkaza*, Moscow, 1960, pp. 78-79.

The Soviet historians and their émigré colleagues made different assessments of what had happened in the 16th century.

The Soviet historians insisted on the “voluntary adherence” of Kabarda to the Russian State: in 1555, under Czar Ivan IV, Andrey Shchepotyev returned from the Northern Caucasus to Moscow accompanied by a large embassy of Kabardians and representatives of Western Adyghe tribes. He told the czar that the Adyghes had come to vow allegiance to the Russian czar. Ivan IV responded with “his great benevolence” and announced that they had been accepted as eternal subjects of Russia.

Two years later, in 1557, another Circassian embassy reached Moscow; as a result the Adyghes officially became subjects of the Russian czar. This was when Czar Ivan IV married daughter of Kabardian Prince Temryuk Idirrov Kugeney, who was baptized as Tsarina Maria.<sup>12</sup>

This was the official Soviet version devised to explain the celebration in 1957 of the 400th anniversary of the “voluntary adherence” of Kabarda to the Russian State.

While the preparations for the pompous celebrations were in full swing, Ramazan Trakho, who disagreed with the Soviet interpretation of history, wrote in Munich: “This is another attempt of Soviet historiography as a ‘general line of the Party’ to write a new history of the non-Russian peoples. I cannot go into the details of these absurdities lest to upturn my consistent exposition of historical facts, which convincingly say that there was no voluntary adherence of Kabarda to Russia.”<sup>13</sup> “In July 1557,” said Trakho, “a Kabardian embassy headed by prince Kanklich (Klich) Kanuko reached Moscow. This very limited connection led the Bolsheviks to stir up a lot of political noise 400 years later and insist that 400 years earlier Kabarda had joined Russia on its own free will.”<sup>14</sup>

Soviet historians wrote that very soon Western Circassians became subjects of the Russian czars: in 1614-1615, Western Adyghes, who allegedly needed allies to stand opposed to the Crimean khans, vowed loyalty, together with other North Caucasian peoples, to Russian Czar Mikhail Fedorovich. It was argued that in the seventeenth century the titles of all the Russian czars included “czar of the land of Kabarda and of the Circassian and Mountain princes.”<sup>15</sup>

Ramazan Trakho, in turn, said the following: “After the Time of Troubles, Moscow lost interest in the Caucasus. Until Peter the Great came to power, there were no political or otherwise important acts between the two countries. Circassia was absolutely calm safe clashes with Nogays, Crimeans, Kalmyks, and Cossacks.”<sup>16</sup>

Not infrequently, Soviet historians offered contradictory descriptions of the historical events, fully illustrated by their so-called studies of the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Russia for control in the Northern Caucasus that unfolded in the first half of the eighteenth century. According to the Soviet version, the Kabardians sided with Russia, while the Western Adyghes were fighting in the ranks of the army of the Crimean khan, a vassal of the Sublime Porte.<sup>17</sup>

This raises the following question: If Kabarda and Western Circassia acceded to Russia earlier, how could the Circassians fight on two different warring sides? This could only have been possible if Circassia was a neutral territory in the early eighteenth century.

Soviet historians mentioned that in the latter half of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth century, the ethnopolitical situation around Kabarda changed because, on the one hand, Nogay Tatars and Kalmyks roamed into the steppes to the north of the Terek, which means that the Kabardians had to move out, at least temporarily. While on the other hand, they pointed out that by the second half of the sixteenth century the Terek and Grebenskie Cossacks had come to the right bank of the Terek, and by the eighteenth

<sup>12</sup> See: *Adyghea*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>13</sup> R. Trakho, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Istoria narodov Severnogo Kavkaza s drevneyshikh vremen do kontsa XVIII v.*, Moscow, 1988, pp. 332-333.

<sup>16</sup> R. Trakho, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> See: *Adyghea*, pp. 40-41.

century they had spread to the left bank. This means that even before the Caucasian War, the Kabardians had been squeezed out of their previous territory. The mountain gorges to the south of Kabarda, on the left and right banks of the Terek, were occupied by Balkars, Ossets, Ingush, and Chechens.<sup>18</sup>

Soviet historical science explained the Caucasian, or Russo-Circassian, War by the stiff rivalry between Russia and Turkey in the Northern Caucasus in the latter half of the eighteenth century; this shows why the Russian Empire started to pay greater attention to local religions. In the eighteenth century the czarist government realized that Islam (which had been spreading in Kabarda since the sixteenth century) made Kabardians allies of the Ottoman Empire and a threat to Russia's position in the Northern Caucasus, a plausible excuse of czarist policies in the Northern Caucasus for Soviet historians.

Trakho, on the other hand, wrote that in 1736, during the Russo-Turkish War, the Kabardians sided with the Porte, which promised to recognize their independence. Indeed, "Art 6 of the Belgrade Peace Treaty [18 September, 1739] stated: About the two Kabardas, i. e. Greater and Lesser, and the Kabardian people, both sides agree that they should be free and not under the influence of either the one or the other Empire."<sup>19</sup>

The czarist government was not ready to accept this; earlier the Russian Empire, after pulling the Ossets, who had already been embracing Islam under the influence of the Kabardians,<sup>20</sup> to its side, responded by spreading Christianity among them, its proselytism facilitated by the fact that the larger part of Ossetia had joined the Russian Empire in the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

This interest in the Ossets is explained by geography: the Daryal Gorge, which gave access from Russia to Transcaucasia and Orthodox Georgia crossed the territory of the Ossets.<sup>22</sup> Early in the eighteenth century, the Russian authorities had been seeking ways to create a Christian corridor in the Northern Caucasus across the domains of non-Christian peoples, the Kabardians being the most prominent among them.

In 1745, Russia initiated an Ossetian Spiritual Commission, first in Kizliar, to restore Christianity among the Ossets.<sup>23</sup> In 1770, its residence was moved to the left bank of the Terek, to the Mozdok Fortress founded seven years earlier. In 1792, the bishopric headed by Bishop of Mozdok and Majar was set up in Mozdok; in 1816, the spiritual commission was moved from Mozdok to Tbilisi.<sup>24</sup>

The territory on which Mozdok was later built was captured for political considerations; earlier it had been a settlement called Mozdok, which means "dark forest" in Kabardian.<sup>25</sup>

Since under the 1739 treaty between Russia and Turkey, Kabarda should have remained neutral, Russian fortifications in its territory violated the treaty. In October 1761, however, the Senate submitted a report to Catherine the Great on settling the Ossets and other mountain peoples in the Mozdok environs and building a fortress there. The fortress was founded in 1763.<sup>26</sup>

The Russian authorities expected the fortress to help colonize the Central Caucasus; Ramazan Trakho had the following to say on this score: "In view of these intentions, the town of Mozdok, built by the Kabardians in 1759, acquired great importance; it was open to direct threats; four years later Russia turned it into a fortress connected along the military line with Kizliar in 1763. This year can

<sup>18</sup> See: *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1967, p. 200.

<sup>19</sup> A. Namitok, "The 'Voluntary' Adherence of Kabarda (Eastern Circassia) to Russia," *Caucasian Review*, Munich (CRM), No. 2, 1956, p. 17 ff.

<sup>20</sup> See: B.A. Kaloev, *Osetiny*, Moscow, 1971, p. 287.

<sup>21</sup> See: *Istoria Severo-Osetinskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, 1959, pp. 132-136.

<sup>22</sup> See: B.A. Kaloev, op. cit., p. 287.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> See: *Istoria Severo-Osetinskoy A.S.S.R.*, p. 156; B.A. Kaloev, op. cit., pp. 287-288; idem, *Mozdokskie osetiny*, Moscow, 1995, pp. 8-11.

<sup>25</sup> See: B.A. Kaloev, *Mozdokskie osetiny*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> See: *Russko-osetinskie otnosheniia v XVIII v.*, Vol. I, Ordzhonikidze, 1971, p. 449.

be regarded as the beginning of a one-hundred-year war between the Russians and Circassians, which ended in the spring of 1864.<sup>27</sup>

It should be said that until recently we drew our knowledge about the Caucasian War from classical Russian literature, which never looked at its causes or its course. The truth about the war cannot be found in official Russian historiography either, which suppressed and still suppresses the truth.

Soviet historians, on the other hand, never denied the fact that at the early stages of the war, Lesser Kabarda was situated to the south of Mozdok.<sup>28</sup>

According to Kabardian historian V. Kudashev, the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca of 1774, under which Kabarda was expected to become part of Russia, added vehemence to the struggle between the Russians and Kabardians. In 1777, the Kabardians started rioting; the riots continued until the end of 1779. As the weaker side, the Kabardians were defeated: on 9 December, 1779, they vowed allegiance to Russia. Under the agreement, the River Malka formed the boundary of Greater Kabarda, while the River Terek was the boundary of Lesser Kabarda.<sup>29</sup>

Kabarda continued its struggle against Russian expansion in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to historians, there were armed clashes in 1809-1810. This forced the czarist government to send a punitive expedition to Kabarda on 19 April, 1810 headed by General S. Bulgakov; 200 burned settlements came as an unpleasant surprise for War Minister of Russia Barclay de Tolly.

In 1816, the Russian troops stationed in the Caucasus were realigned into the Separate Caucasian Corps under General Alexey Yermolov, who dealt cruelly with those who opposed Russia. The mutinous Kabardian princes went high into the mountains from which they attacked the Russian troops and their allies. The Ossets and other North Caucasian peoples were obliged not to allow the Kabardians, who had fled to the Kuban area (where they were called "fugitive Kabardians") in search of shelter, to cross their territories.<sup>30</sup>

The riots of 1822-1825 in Kabarda, stirred up by the construction of the defense line across its territory and setting up an Interim Kabardian Court of Justice, were also suppressed.

In 1827, General Yermolov abandoned the Caucasus, leaving behind the general trend of its policy toward the Kabardians. The Russian authorities built fortresses on the land taken away from the local people, who moved (or were forced to move) to other places.<sup>31</sup>

Under Soviet power, Ossetian historians did not conceal the fact that the czarist authorities had been consistently moving Ossets to the valley, that is, the territory of Kabarda, where the number of Ossets was steadily rising, while number of Kabardians was steadily decreasing. In the first half of the nineteenth century, under Caucasian Viceroy Alexey Yermolov, the process reached its peak.

In Soviet times, this was explained by the desire of Ossetian communities to acquire land in the piedmont valleys.<sup>32</sup> The documents of the early nineteenth century published in the Soviet Union in the 1940s show that, from the very beginning, the Ossets did not move where they wanted to move, but to the places indicated by the Russian administration.<sup>33</sup> This caused cruelly suppressed riots,<sup>34</sup> while the Russian government started moving Cossacks to the best lands of Lesser Kabarda.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> R. Trakho, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> See: *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, pp. 132-148.

<sup>29</sup> See: V.N. Kudashev, *Istoricheskie svedeniia o Kabardinskom narode*, Nalchik, 1991, pp. 66-67.

<sup>30</sup> See: V.N. Kudashev, op. cit., p. 89; *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, pp. 221-228.

<sup>31</sup> See: V.N. Kudashev, op. cit., pp. 90-91; *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, pp. 228-229.

<sup>32</sup> See: *Istoria Severo-Osetinskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, p. 162; B.A. Kaloiev, *Osetiny*, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> See: *Materialy po istorii osetinskogo naroda*, Vol. II, Orjonikidze, 1942, p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>35</sup> See: B.V. Skitsky, "Ocherki po istorii osetinskogo naroda s drevneyshikh vremen do 1867 g.," in: *ISO NII*, Vol. X, Orjonikidze, 1947, p. 151; *Istoria Severo-Osetinskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, p. 168; B.A. Kaloiev, *Osetiny*, p. 65; *Materialy po istorii osetinskogo naroda*, Vol. II, pp. 279-280.

It was in 1830s-1850s, during the time of Shamil, that the czarist administration increased its repressions against the Kabardians and finally suppressed all mutineers. The dissatisfied preferred to leave their homeland; at first they went beyond the Kuban and built new auls there.<sup>36</sup> When their new homeland was finally conquered by Russia, the migration flows moved in different directions.

According to Soviet historians, both the Russian and Ottoman empires profited from the resettlement of Muslims from the Caucasus, which spelled a tragedy for the Circassians. They think that the Turks planned to use the newly acquired population against Russia and the Balkan peoples. The czarist authorities were glad to get rid of at least some of its mutinous subjects.

The process began in 1859 and ended in 1865; many North Caucasian peoples, Kabardians and Ossets among them, were also removed from their lands, to which loyal people were moved.<sup>37</sup>

It should be said in all justice that Soviet historians, despite the pressure from above, used statistics to illustrate the tragic consequences of the war for the Adyghes.

It has been established, for example, that by the end of the eighteenth century there were between 165,000 and 200,000 Kabardians; according to certain sources, by the 1830s-1840s, only 40,000 were left due to the Russo-Circassian War. According to far from complete information gathered by Baron Pavel Vrevsky, in 1837 there were 10,243 men living in Greater Kabarda and 377 men in Lesser Kabarda. In the first half of the eighteenth century, there were 8,500 households in Greater Kabarda and two times fewer in Lesser Kabarda.

Resettlement to Turkey proved to be fateful for all Adyghes and Kabardians; according to Soviet historians, in 1860-1867 about 10,000 people were moved away from Kabarda (in 1865, 3,000 were deported). About 500,000 were moved away from the Kuban Region (where a great number of Kabardians lived) to Turkey; in 1867, only 44,000 Kabardians (7,384 households) were left in the Northern Caucasus.<sup>38</sup>

The lot of Western Adyghes was no less tragic, yet Soviet historians left numerous lacunae in what they wrote about the Caucasian War; until recently it was absolutely impossible to find out who had lived on the northeastern part of the Black Sea coast until the mid-nineteenth century.

In the post-Soviet period, historical science in Russia demonstrated certain shifts.

According to N. Shakhnazarian, the 1829 Adrianople Peace Treaty, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829, transferred the eastern Black Sea coast from the mouth of Kuban to St. Nicholas Bay to Russia. The Adyghes refused to obey, which started hostilities. By 1861, Russia established its control over the larger part of the Northwestern Caucasus, while "the local population started moving to the Ottoman Empire; there was no place in the Caucasus for them."<sup>39</sup>

Today, Russian historians prefer to pass over in silence much of what should be said on the subject.

Ramazan Trakho wrote: "The first unofficial resettlement of Circassians began immediately after the Crimean War when active fighting in Circassia resumed. In 1859-1860, the larger part of the Abazins who lived between the Kuban and Urup were moved off their land. It was planned to move the Besleney and some other peoples in 1861. By late 1863, most of the Abkhazes had also become forced migrants."<sup>40</sup>

According to the documents of that time, over 1.5 million Circassians were resettled to Turkey; Trakho concluded that the lands along the Northeastern Black Sea coast had been vacated to be resettled with Cossacks. The Circassians who remained in the Caucasus were small and disunited groups of a formerly large people.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See: *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, p. 233.

<sup>37</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 234; *Narody Kavkaza*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1960, pp. 98-99.

<sup>38</sup> See: *Istoria Kabardino-Balkarskoy A.S.S.R.*, Vol. 1, pp. 196-208, 221, 234.

<sup>39</sup> N. Shakhnazarian, *Adyghi Krasnodarskogo kraia*, Krasnodar, 2008, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> R. Trakho, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 29.

The same author wrote: "It was at this early stage that Russian imperialism revealed its true face as an exterminator of nations."<sup>42</sup>

In late Soviet times, there were positive trends in dealing with the Circassian issue.

## The Adyghes in the Soviet Union

The events that followed the October coup and the Civil War affected the position of the Adyghes of the Northern Caucasus and awakened the local peoples to the struggle for national self-determination. In November 1920, the All-Peoples Congress of the Terek Region met in Vladikavkaz to declare its autonomy. In January 1921, the Presidium of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of the R.S.F.S.R. (VTsIK) had to legitimize the Mountain and Daghestan A.S.S.R. The former included the Chechen, Ingush, Osset, Kabardian, Balkar, Karachay, and later Sunzha districts and the cities of Vladikavkaz and Grozny as separate districts. In 1921-1924, the Mountain Autonomous Republic was split into autonomous peoples' units.<sup>43</sup>

On 1 September, 1921, the VTsIK passed the decision to remove the Kabarda District from the Mountain Republic and form the Kabardinian Autonomous Region (KAR). In November 1921, the Constituent Congress of the Soviets of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Men's Deputies of Kabarda finally formed the KAO as part of the R.S.F.S.R. On 16 November, 1922, the VTsIK of the R.S.F.S.R. passed a decision, under which Balkaria was removed from the Mountain A.S.S.R. to become the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Region.<sup>44</sup>

According to official Soviet sources, Balkaria and Kabarda were detached from the Mountain Republic for geographical reasons. Kabarda occupied the valley part of the Nalchik District, while Balkaria was higher up in the mountains. The Soviet authorities argued that this made it harder for Balkaria to communicate with the Mountain A.S.S.R., while Kabarda became an independent autonomous region.

Kabarda and Balkaria were finally united in December 1922 at a regional congress of the Soviets, which formed the regional executive committee and other structures. At the time of the "triumphal march of the Constitution of victorious socialism" (1936-1937), the autonomous region was transformed into the Kabardino-Balkarian A.S.S.R.<sup>45</sup>

In 1944, the Stalinist authorities exiled the Balkars to Central Asia, and the Kabardino-Balkarian A.S.S.R. lost the second part of its name to become the Kabardian A.S.S.R. On 28 April, 1956, under Khrushchev, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. passed the Decree on the Rehabilitation of the Peoples Repressed during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945; the Balkars started coming back.

Significantly, the leaders of the Kabardian A.S.S.R. did not occupy the abandoned Balkar villages, which helped avoid ethnic clashes.

On 9 January, 1957, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. passed a Decree on Transforming the Kabardian A.S.S.R. into the Kabardino-Balkarian A.S.S.R.<sup>46</sup> This meant that for many years, until the destruction of the Soviet Union, the Kabardians, who used one of the Adyghes dialects, and the Balkars, who spoke a Turkic dialect, lived in one republic. According to the official

<sup>42</sup> R. Trakho, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> See: M.M. Kuchukov, *Natsionalnoe samoznanie i mezhnatsionalnye otnoshenia*, Nalchik, 1992, pp. 129-131.

<sup>44</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 129-136.

<sup>45</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 139, 142, 146.

<sup>46</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 178-179.



figures, late in the 1980s, there were 304,000 Kabardians and 59,700 Balkars living in Kabardino-Balkaria,<sup>47</sup> which means that the Kabardians were in the majority.

The same can be said about the Circassians and the Karachays, who live to the west of Kabardino-Balkaria.

In 1922, the Karachaevo-Circassian Autonomous Region left the Mountain A.S.S.R. to become a new administrative unit. It brought together the Turkic-speaking Karachays, who lived in the mountains of the Central Caucasus, and the Adyghe, who lived in the left-bank valley of River Kuban. The local population, who spoke an Adyghe dialect, was a blend of several groups of Adyghe, the core formed by Kabardians and closely related Besleney.

In this context, we should talk about the phenomenon of dual self-identity of the local Adyghe, who called themselves *Adyghe*, yet insisted on their kinship with the Kabardians and Besleney. This explains why the Soviet authorities did not think long before giving them the traditional name Circassians (even though the Adyghe had never used this term themselves); hence a new autonomous region with a new and unexpected name—Karachaevo-Circassia.<sup>48</sup>

In 1928, Karachaevo-Circassia was divided into the Karachay Autonomous Region, the Cherkessk National District (later an autonomous region), and the Batalpashinsky District.

In 1944, the Karachay Autonomous Region was liquidated, and the Karachays were exiled to Central Asia and other eastern regions of the Soviet Union.

Thanks to postwar rehabilitation of the rights of repressed peoples, the Karachays came back; in 1957, the Karachaevo-Circassian Autonomous Region appeared, which survived until the Soviet Union's disintegration.

According to official figures, late in the 1980s, there were 109,200 Karachays and 31,200 Circassians in the autonomous region (which was part of the Stavropol Territory of R.S.F.S.R.).<sup>49</sup> The Turkic-speaking Karachays were in the majority.

According to statistical data, it took the Adyghe a long time to form a homogenous ethnic group: during the 1926 population census, some of them spoke of themselves as Kabardians, others as Besleney.

Early in the 1930s, the ethnonym Circassian was rarely used by the Adyghe intelligentsia to define their ethnicity. Ten years later, according to the same official statistics, about 80% of the Adyghe who lived in the autonomous region called themselves Circassians.

In the 1970s, only 2% of the Adyghe population called themselves Kabardians, the rest used the ethnonym Circassian. The Soviet authorities arrived at the following conclusion: "During the years of Soviet power diverse Adyghe ethnic groups of the Karachay-Circassian Republic became a Circassian nationality."<sup>50</sup>

Speaking of the early 1970s, I. Kalmykov wrote: "Even though Kabardians constitute the core of the Adyghe population of the region, the contemporary Adyghe of the Karachaevo-Circassian Republic no longer call themselves Kabardian. Moreover, many of the local people do not know to which Adyghe ethnic group their ancestors belonged."<sup>51</sup>

The history of the Adyghe Autonomous Region is very interesting. In 1920, a Kuban-Black Sea Region was formed in the Northwestern Caucasus as part of the R.S.F.S.R. In January 1921, the problem of an independent autonomy for the local Adyghe came to the fore, but the local Bolshevik leaders objected with the following arguments:

<sup>47</sup> See: *Narody mira. Istoriko-etnografichesky spravochnik*, Moscow, 1988, pp. 84, 192.

<sup>48</sup> See: I.Kh. Kalmykov, *Cherkesy. Istoriko-etnografichesky ocherk*, Cherkessk, 1992, pp. 129-131.

<sup>49</sup> See: *Narody mira*, pp. 203, 504.

<sup>50</sup> I.Kh. Kalmykov, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

- The absence of an economic center and means of subsistence;
- The dearth of communist Circassians;
- The ethnic diversity.<sup>52</sup>

The gap between the Adyghes and Bolsheviks became obvious at the Second Regional Congress of the Working Mountain Peoples of the Kuban and the Black Sea Region held on 2-8 March, 1921. The most radical of the Adyghes came forward with the idea of an “independent North Caucasian Mountain Republic in the area occupied by the mountain peoples until 1800 and return to the Caucasus of the Adyghes who had been resettled in Turkey.”<sup>53</sup>

The Bolsheviks had to take into account the prevailing sentiments among the Western Adyghes: on 27 June, 1922, the Presidium of VTsIK R.S.F.S.R. set up a Circassian Autonomous Region that included three districts (Psekups, Fars, and Shirvan); they were formed from Adyghe territories that included settlements with mixed populations that used to belong to the Krasnodar and Maykop divisions of the Kuban-Black Sea Region. The executive committee, which should have been elected at the next congress of Soviets, acquired the powers of a gubernia executive committee.

The name of the newly established unit—the Adyghe Autonomous Republic—caused certain misunderstanding. In 1922, there were two autonomous regions with practically similar names—the Karachaevo-Circassian Autonomous Region on the upper reaches of the Kuban and the Circassian Autonomous Region on the lower reaches of the same river. On 22 August, 1922, the VTsIK R.S.F.S.R. changed the name of the latter to the Adyghe Autonomous Region “to avoid misunderstanding and confusion.”<sup>54</sup> This means that the contemporary names of these republics were imposed on the people from above.

On 23 May, 1923, the borders of the Adyghe Autonomous Region were determined by a decision of the VTsIK R.S.F.S.R. to stretch in a narrow strip (10 to 30 km) along the left banks of the Kuban and Laba, its total territory being 2,660 sq km, with a population of 114,570.<sup>55</sup>

Until the Soviet Union’s disintegration, neither the borders, nor size of the population of the Adyghe Autonomous Region of the Krasnodar Territory changed: in the late 1980s, there were 86,000 Adyghes living in the region, the numerical strength of those who called themselves Adyghes was 109,000.<sup>56</sup>

In 1990, the Adyghe Autonomous Region detached itself from the Krasnodar Territory to become a national republic.

In 1924-1945, there was the Shapsug National District in the Krasnodar Territory stretching along the Black Sea coast to the south and the north of Tuapse; after 1945, the Shapsugs were not registered as such in population censuses—an eloquent fact.<sup>57</sup> The national district comprised 14 villages, along with the Adyghe population who lived in the spa zone. In 2014, this was the territory of the Winter Sochi Olympics.

To sum up: during Soviet power, the Adyghes lived in four autonomous regions of the R.S.F.S.R.

Soviet ethnographers supplied information about the Adyghes living in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and other countries of Southwest Asia.

<sup>52</sup> See: Ch.Ch. Kubov, “Sozdanie i ukreplenie sovetskoy gosudarstvennosti adygeyskogo naroda—voploshchenie v zhizn leninskoy natsionalnoy politiki,” *Uchenye zapiski Adygeyskogo NII*, Vol. XV, Maykop, 1972, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> *Adyghea. Istoriko-kulturny ocherk*, Part I, Moscow-Leningrad, 1989, p. 111.

<sup>54</sup> *Ustanovlenie sovetskoy vlasti i natsionalno-gosudarstvennoe stroitelstvo v Adyghee (1917-1923gg.)*, Maikop, 1980, p. 236.

<sup>55</sup> See: *Adyghea*, p. 118.

<sup>56</sup> See: *Narody mira*, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> See: N. Shakhnazarian, op. cit., pp. 7, 21-22.

Kabardians lived in the North Ossetian A.S.S.R. and also in the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories.<sup>58</sup>

The above suggests a question: Why did the Bolsheviks never set up an autonomous republic for all the Adyghees contrary to their own policy of the right of nations to self-determination? Ramazan Trakho supplied an answer: “The Bolsheviks pursued the important aim of dividing the tribes, since the belligerent peoples of the Northern Caucasus might have caused a lot of trouble. This policy was applied to nations and individual tribes, the Circassians in particular.”<sup>59</sup>

This is a bit too much. The same author had the following to say about the development of the national autonomies of the Adyghees under Soviet power, as well as the development of their culture, language, and education: “Czarist power did nothing in this respect, therefore what was done can be described as a huge achievement had these cultural institutions not been controlled by the Communist party and implemented its policies. This was not an achievement but a national misfortune, since despite the national façade, the Circassians were deprived of their own word, freedom, and independent thought.”<sup>60</sup>

## The Adyghees in Post-Soviet Time

Contrary to the expectations, the Soviet Union’s disintegration did not restore a justice that would have permitted the Adyghees to return to their lands and unite into a single republic: the post-Soviet changes were superficial.

In 1992, the Adyghean and Karachaevo-Circassian A.S.S.R. and also Kabardino-Balkaria became republics of the Russian Federation. According to the population census of 2010, there were 124,835 Adygheans, 516,826 Kabardians, 73,184 Circassians, 3,882 Shapsugs. All in all 718,727 Adyghees.<sup>61</sup>

Some of the problems, including linguistic, remain pending: it is commonly believed that the Kabardians and Circassians of Karachaevo-Circassia, as well as the Adygheans and Shapsugs speak kindred but different dialects of the Abkhazian-Adyghe branch of the Iberian Caucasian language family.<sup>62</sup> Is this absolutely correct? Indeed, in Soviet times it was commonly believed that the Kabardians and Circassians used the same language.<sup>63</sup> One cannot but wonder what criteria were applied and whether they are dialects of the same language.

Adygheans, Circassians, Kabardians, and Shapsugs are mainly Sunni Muslims; a much smaller number of them are Orthodox Christians. They share many features of their material and spiritual culture, and they all call themselves *Adyghe*.<sup>64</sup>

In Soviet times, prominent Soviet ethnologists argued that ethnic self-awareness realized in a common self-identification was the main feature of an ethnos<sup>65</sup>; this is what the Adyghees think about

<sup>58</sup> See: *Narody mira*, pp. 41, 192, 504.

<sup>59</sup> R. Trakho, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>61</sup> [<https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C0%E4%FB%E3%E82015-03-11>].

<sup>62</sup> See: K. Tishchenko, “The Linguistic-Historical Survey of the Caspian-Black Sea Region,” in: *The Caspian-Black Sea Region: Conditions and Development Prospects. Materials of an International Conference, 26-28 June, 1998*, Kiev, 1998, p. 235 (in Ukrainian).

<sup>63</sup> See: R. Berozov, *Adyghi. Istoki etnosa*, Nalchik, 1990, p. 117; *Narody mira*, pp. 192, 504.

<sup>64</sup> See: *Narody mira*, pp. 41, 192, 504; N.G. Volkova, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> See: Yu.V. Bromley, *Ocherki teorii etnosa*, Moscow, 1983, p. 56; L.N. Gumilev, *Tysiacheletie vokrug Kaspia*, Moscow, 1993, p. 333.

themselves. Thus, it is surprising why in Russia the Adygheans, Shapsugs, Circassians, and Kabardians are treated as separate ethnicities.

Here is a pertinent example: until recently the Ossets were treated as one people despite the fact that there are several local groups among them who call themselves the Iron, Digor, and Tual. The Ossets, who have no common name, are aware of their common origins and use the name that other peoples apply to them.<sup>66</sup> There is no logic in this.

It should be said that no matter where they lived, the Adyghees were aware of their common origins (irrespective of the names used by other peoples). In the 1990s, the Circassian migrants from Kosovo preferred Adyghea to Karachaevo-Circassia. This means that the Adyghees are one people.

They have been fighting for their rights for the last 150 years because of their territorial disunity and insulting historical fate. These feelings became even stronger after the Soviet Union's disintegration.

The Adyghees pinned their hopes on the leaders of new Russia; when it became obvious that these hopes were misplaced, public movements appeared, demanding fair treatment.

They demand that the Caucasian War, which led to the disappearance of the Circassians from the Northern Caucasus, should be recognized as a war of annexation; this has been and remains the most painful issue for the Adyghees. The Congress of Circassians set up in 2004 repeatedly asked the State Duma of Russia and European Parliament to recognize Circassian genocide. The very fact that the Congress was set up and is functioning means that the past is closely connected with the present.

The Congress was set up to preserve the language and the culture of the Adyghees and to consolidate them in their historical homeland; it is also concerned with collecting and systematizing documents relating to the Russo-Circassian War.

The request to recognize the genocide of the Adyghees was repeated at the scientific conference "Concealed Nations and Continued Crimes: Circassians and the Peoples of the Northern Caucasus between the Past and the Future" held in Tbilisi on 21-22 March, 2010.

Late in 2009, the announced intention to set up a Circassian Government in Exile brought the "Circassian Question" to a new level: "Circassia should be returned to its status of an independent state" and unite all the Adyghees. The future government is determined to rely on the Declaration of Independence of Circassia of the time of the Caucasian War (1835) and the Declaration of Independence of Circassia issued by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in 1996.<sup>67</sup>

There is an Adyghe Khase public movement in all the republics with a Circassian component; at first it represented the interests of the Black Sea Shapsugs. It was set up in the early 1990s to restore the liquidated Shapsug National District, among other tasks. Its members did a lot to develop the small autochthonous ethnic community of the Black Sea Shapsugs culturally, socially, and economically.<sup>68</sup>

The Adyghean republican organization Adyghe Khase is coping with several somewhat different tasks: it is opposing the thesis of "Adyghea's voluntary adherence to the Russian State."<sup>69</sup>

In 2004, the Worldwide Circassian Brotherhood (WCB) appeared with a young (under 30) membership determined to preserve and increase the cultural and historical heritage of the Adyghees and establish contacts with compatriots in other countries. The leader, Zamir Shukhov, believes that it should move toward "unity of the Circassians in their historical homeland" but "as part of Russia."<sup>70</sup>

Until recently, all the Adyghe/Circassian organizations shared the following aims:

<sup>66</sup> See: N.G. Volkova, op. cit., pp. 100-121.

<sup>67</sup> See: T.P. Khlynina, "History, Politics and National Construction in the Northern Caucasus," *Historical and Political Science Studies*, No. 4 (54), 2013, pp. 308-309 (in Ukrainian).

<sup>68</sup> See: N. Shakhnazarian, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

<sup>69</sup> T.P. Khlynina, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>70</sup> A. Shmulevich, "Cherkesskiy vopros," available at [<http://www.mesoeurasia.org/archives/120>], 4 февраля 2015.

- (1) Insist on recognition by the official powers of the Russian Federation of the genocide of the Circassian people during the Russo-Circassian War.
- (2) Create conditions necessary to set up one republic for all the Adyghe;
- (3) Promote repatriation of the descendants of Circassian émigrés.

All the Adyghe organizations were determined to boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics.

So far, the ideologists of the Adyghe/Circassian national movements have not agreed whether the future Adyghe republic should be independent or remain part of Russia.<sup>71</sup>

It remains to be seen whether these demands correspond to the current times.

## Will There be an Answer to the Adyghe Question?

The future of the Adyghe depends on the development trends of their ethnic self-consciousness; today, the kindred groups are ready to pool forces.

It seems that the present Russian leaders are not prepared to seek new approaches to the Adyghe question.

If Moscow recognizes the expansionist nature of the Caucasian War and genocide of the Circassians, its foreign and domestic policies will be doubted. So far the leaders of the Russian Federation have been following in the footsteps of czarist Russia: an aggressive and expansionist policy in relation to neighboring states and efforts to impose on them its own federalization model.

From this it follows that Moscow is quite satisfied with the country's political and administrative-territorial organization and will not change anything in the Northern Caucasus.

If the political system of Russia changes, which will not happen any time soon, the problem of recognition of the genocide of the Circassians and unification of the Adyghe into one republic will most likely be resolved. On the other hand, the Northern Caucasus is a patchwork of ethnicities in which there is no compact Adyghe group. This means that an attempt to set up a single Adyghe republic might ignite ethnic conflicts.

The most radical of the Adyghe leaders are talking about bringing the descendants of the Circassians who were exiled to the Middle East to the Caucasus. This, too, is fraught with ethnic troubles.

To sum up: the Circassian problem has been and remains a delayed action fuse for Russia.

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<sup>71</sup> See: N. Nefiasheva, "Cherkesskoe natsionalnoe dvizhenie—rossiyskiy i mezhdunarodny kontekst," available at [<http://georgiamonitor.org/detail.php?ID=255>], 2 April, 2015.