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Issues of repatriation of Adygs (Circassians) to their historical homeland: the current state and problems

Svetlana I. Akkueva

Doctor of history,

leading researcher,

Institute for Humanitarian Studies (branch),

Kabardino-Balkarian Science Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences,

360000, 18 Pushkina st., Nalchik, Russian Federation;

e-mail: siak2000@mail.ru

El'berd M. Kotsev

Postgraduate,

Institute for Humanitarian Studies (branch),

Kabardino-Balkarian Science Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences,

360000, 18 Pushkina st., Nalchik, Russian Federation;

e-mail: kotsev1992@gmail.com

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issues of repatriation of descendants of Adygs who moved in the XIX century to the Ottoman Empire from the historical homeland, the North Caucasus. The authors examine the activities of the International Circassian Association, which has become a kind of union of the existing public associations of the Circassians. One of the current activities of the ICA is the work on an objective assessment of the nature and consequences of the Caucasian War. Recognition of the consequences of the Caucasian War raises the question of recognizing the genocide by tsarist Russia and mass exile of the Adygeans, simplifying the procedure for returning to the North Caucasus and granting Russian citizenship to the descendants of the Mukhajirs. In modern Russian realities, the fulfillment of these requirements has come up against a whole range of objective and subjective factors. At present one of the components of the "Circassian issue" and the most important problem related to the Circassian (Adyg) diaspora remains the problem of repatriation of Circassians (Adygs) to their historical homeland, which, after the beginning of the armed actions in 2011 in Syria, has become actualized. The authors cover the measures of public organizations and authorities of the republic on the issues of adaptation of repatriates in Kabardino-Balkaria, including the issues of studying the Russian language and solving domestic issues.

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Keywords

Compatriots, repatriates, Adygs, authorities, institutions of civil society.

Introduction

The annexation of the North Caucasus to the Russian Empire was a long and difficult process, it led to a protracted Caucasian War, which in the XIX century led to the moving of the population of the North-Western and partly North-Eastern Caucasus, known as Muhajirstvo, to the Ottoman Empire. All the Muhajirs (Adygs, Chechens, Ossetians, representatives of peoples of Dagestan, Karachai, Nogai, etc.) in the Ottoman Empire and in the countries formed after its disintegration, were known as the Circassians. In the Middle East and Turkey a new North Caucasian ethno-cultural education was created, known as "Circassian Diaspora". In Russian literature, the term "Circassians" was fixed for the Circassians, and in this article the concept of "Circassian Diaspora" is used in this sense.

The problem of genocide of the Adygs (Circassians)

In the late 1980s – early 1990s, under the rise of national consciousness in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Adygea, the problem of the Caucasian War, the foreign Adyghe Diaspora became one of the most actively discussed. In the early 1990s, the international Adyghe organization, the International Circassian Association (ICA), was formed. This organization was created to unite the Circassian (Adyghe) people in all countries of residence. The ICA has become a sort of union of existing public associations of Adygs. It also included the Kabardino-Balkar branch of the "International Association for the relations with compatriots abroad", "Rodina" [Kotsev, 2016, 65]. On the recommendation of the ICA, in all countries, in all regions of the Russian Federation, where Circassians (Adygs) live, in all settlements with a compact Adyghe population there are Hase (societies or cultural centers), which include committees for the preservation and revival of the Circassian language; questions of history; cultural relations, etc. One of the most important activities of the ICA is the work on an objective assessment of the nature and consequences of the Caucasian War [Akkieva, Dzamikhov, 2016, 103]. Recognition of the consequences of the Caucasian war raises the question of recognition of genocide by tsarist Russia and mass exile of the Adygs, simplification of the procedure for returning to the North Caucasus and granting Russian citizenship to the descendants of Muhajirs. In modern Russian realities, the fulfillment of these

requirements has come up against a whole range of objective and subjective factors and become protracted.

External forces (of the US, the EU and Turkey) with geopolitical interests in the Caucasus and aimed at weakening Russia and its positions in the Caucasus, use different methods and forms of influence in the struggle for influence, including taking advantage of existing problems in the region. In the "struggle for influence in the region, they began to practice not only economic, but also information tools that influence and create the necessary public opinion in their interests. The Circassian issue was used as a geopolitical instrument of influence on Russia" [Belyakova, 2015, 178]. The Circassian problem was most actively discussed in the international arena during the preparation and holding of the Olympics in Sochi, as the date of the Olympics (2014) coincided with the 150th anniversary of the end of the Caucasian War and the mass moving of the Adygs to the Ottoman Empire. Some Circassian groups united in the "No Sochi Circassian movement" positioning themselves as an expression of the will of the Circassian people, opposed the 2014 Olympics in the land of the Adyghe. However, this movement did not have a serious impact on the Circassian Diaspora and the Adygs living in Russia, and its activity decreased after the end of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games [Akkieva, Dzamikhov, 2016, 109]. Georgia also tried to use the Circassian issue during Saakashvili's presidency: on May 20, 2011, the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution on recognizing the Circassian genocide by the Russian Empire during the war in the Caucasus. The Georgian initiative was aimed at strengthening its influence among the North Caucasian peoples, but did not achieve the desired result. A number of foreign and Russian Circassian activists in 2014-2015 appealed to the leadership of Poland, Estonia, Ukraine, and Finland to recognize the genocide of the Adygs (Circassians) in the XIX century. Experts consider these appeals as "another attempt to pedaling the Circassian issue in the anti-Russian interests" and as an instrument of information and political pressure on the Russian Federation and its geopolitical interests. Each time the appeals are sent to the "state", which is "in unfriendly relations with Russia" in this period, that forms a negative perception of the Circassian problems by a certain part of Russians and prevents the establishment of a constructive dialogue on this issue with the political leadership of our country" [Bogatyrev, www]. Experts are inclined to conclude that the "theme of the genocide" of the Circassian people fits into the general outline of Western policy in the Caucasus region. As long as the Black sea remains beyond full control of NATO, the topic of the "Circassian genocide" will regularly emerge in the right place at the right time " [Gulevich, www].

Repatriation of the Adygs (Circassians) to their historical homeland: questions, problems, prospects

At present, one of the components of the "Circassian issue" and the most important problem associated with the Circassian (Adyghe) Diaspora is the problem of repatriation of Circassians

(Adygs) to their historical homeland, which after military actions in 2011 in Syria was updated and moved to the practical plane. In late 2011 – early 2012, Syrian Circassians has requested the assistance of the Circassian public organizations and the heads of the Republic of Adygea, the Kabardino-Balkar Republic and Karachay-Cherkess Republic, the President of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation in returning [Kapaeva, "Circassian Congress"..., www; Kushkhabiev, www].

Appeal to the President of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, the Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on assistance to voluntary resettlement of Syrian Circassians were accepted by the legislative bodies of the Republic of Adygea, the Kabardino-Balkar Republic and Karachay-Cherkess Republic. They consider Federal Law No. 179-FZ "On state policy of the Russian Federation in relation to compatriots abroad" (as amended on July 23, 2010) as the legal basis for repatriation from Syria. In accordance with it, the category of "compatriot" began to include "persons living outside the territory of the Russian Federation and belonging, as a rule, to the peoples historically living in the territory of the Russian Federation, as well as persons whose descendants on a direct line had previously lived in the territory of the Russian Federation, who made a free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal ties with the Russian Federation" [Baranov, www]. The basis of belonging to compatriots is the principle of self-identification, supported by social, professional activities, "or other evidence of free choice" in favor of Russia. It was planned to use the positive experience of the repatriation of the Adygs from Kosovo and Karachais from Central Asia. In early February 2012, the delegations of Syrian Circassians met with the head of Kabardino-Balkaria A. Kanokov and civil servants of Adygea and Karachay-Cherkessia. The Commission for the coordination of work on support of compatriots was created in the republics [ibid.].

According to the ICA about 100 thousand descendants of Muhajirs (90% of them are Adyghi) lived in Syria. The first Syrian refugees began to arrive in Kabardino-Balkaria in December 2011, and by the summer of 2012, more than 400 people arrived there, who were placed in sanatoriums and rest homes in Nalchik. The public organization "Peryt" was engaged in their arrangement. For adults repatriates lack of knowledge of Russian, and often Kabardian language was one of the main problems of staying in the historic homeland. In addition to the language problem, returnees were faced with delays in the preparation of documents for obtaining a temporary residence permit. According to the migration legislation, if a foreign citizen has not managed to issue a temporary residence permit in three months, he must leave the Russian Federation. Therefore, many of the refugees went to Abkhazia and then returned to the Kabardino-Balkar Republic [Orazaeva, www].

Since 2012 the quota on the number of temporary residence permits for temporary residence of foreigners in the KBR has been fixed annually. Thus, in 2012, the quota was 450 units; in 2013 it increased to 1000 units. Of these in 2013 temporary residence permit was issued to 334 foreigners, in 2014 – 72 foreigners, in 2015 – 179 foreigners, and in 2016 – 182 foreigners. At the meeting of

the government commission on compatriots affairs abroad on December 2016 Deputy Head of the Migration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the KBR Aslan Karanashev said that for the period from 2012 to 2016, 142 residence permits were issued, and the number of Syrian citizens in Russia was 1451 people. Since Kabardino-Balkaria was not included in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, where the state program of resettlement of compatriots living abroad was approved, only general requirements of migration legislation were applicable to them. He noted that the main difficulty in the registration of the temporary residence for the repatriates from Syria was the inability to provide certificate of criminal record issued by the competent authority of the Syrian Arab Republic [More than..., www]. In 2016, 87 people applied for temporary asylum, 85 received it. Currently, the number of returnees from Syria is about 1,500, including 171 children. All children attend school or go to kindergartens and many are already fluent in Russian [Maratova, 50 children..., www].

In Kabardino-Balkaria, the organization "Paryt" has been supporting repatriates since 2008, but in 2014, it ceased to exist. In the summer of 2015, a new organization was established in the republic to assist Syrian Circassians. It was created on the initiative of members of the group "Help to compatriots from Syria" of the social network "Facebook". The organization was registered on 24 August by the Ministry of Justice of the KBR as a regional public organization to facilitate the return of compatriots "Jiegu" (Hearth). Members of the organization have been providing material and moral support to returnees from Syria for more than three years [Maratova. Organization..., www]. Among the main tasks is to assist the descendants of Muhajirs in returning to the Caucasus and provide them with legal assistance in obtaining the necessary documents for temporary residence, residence permit, citizenship, for settling in Kabardino-Balkaria, as well as any other assistance for their adaptation in Russia. "Heart" carries out different initiatives on supporting returnees: provision of repatriates with medicine, conducting festive events for children and adults, the campaign aimed at collecting funds. So, in 2016, two actions were organized: "Buy a calendar – help a compatriot" and "Buy a book – help a compatriot". The main problems of Syrian Circassians in Kabardino-Balkaria are domestic, employment problems and language problems, as many of them do not know either Russian or Kabardian (Circassian) language.

Therefore, to solve this problem the National Fund for Cultural Assistance "Amra" implemented the project "Russian language as a means of strengthening civil unity and inter-ethnic relations" in 2015. Funds for the implementation of the project were allocated from the federal and republican budgets in the form of subsidies. During the implementation of the project, language courses were organized to study Russian and native language for compatriots from the Adyghe Diaspora living in Kabardino-Balkaria, 60 people were provided with an opportunity to study at these courses and receive certificates.

Repatriates who had savings were able to buy an apartment, but they were limited, many of repatriates live in apartments that are paid for by sponsors, 90 houses for repatriates were purchased through sponsorship [Kapkaeva, www].

Regional and municipal authorities of the republic provide all possible assistance to returnees. So, the local administration of Leskensky, Baksansky, Chegemsky, Urvansky, Prokhladnensky, Chereksky and Maisky areas provide possible assistance in their employment in enterprises and institutions operating in the district, give building materials for housing and living. All children of repatriates study in schools, repatriates are provided with courses in Russian and their native languages, and measures are being taken to involve them in social, cultural and mass events held in settlements and in the republic. Children of repatriates (171 children) study in schools or attend kindergartens [Akkieva, 2002, 168], despite the fact that there is a queue in the gardens, children of repatriates are admitted first. More than 100 repatriated students from Syria study at the Kabardino-Balkar State University at the expense of the federal budget [More than 100..., www].

Activists of the organization "Hearth" and the head of the Public organization "Kabardino-Balkaria Regional Human Rights Center" V. Khatazhukov believe that the Russian state should recognize Syrian Circassians as compatriots and settle them in Russia. Khatazhukov sent an appeal to the Minister of the Interior Affairs of the Russian Federation on October 2016 asking to clarify the position of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the question "whether Circassians living abroad are compatriots", and he received the answer that "the provision to representatives of the Circassians of temporary asylum in the territory of the Russian Federation, temporary residence permit and residence permit in the Russian Federation, as well as Russian citizenship was carried out in the manner prescribed for foreign citizens and stateless persons staying (living) in the territory of the Russian Federation" [Human rights defenders..., www].

One of the most important problems for the Adygs living both in the Diaspora and in Russia is the problem of creating a single Adyghe alphabet and a single language. The head of the KBR Yu. Kokov noted the need for a single alphabet at the XI Congress of the ICA which took place in September 2016. The task of unification of the Adyghe alphabet has been discussed for a long time. In 1999, there was a conference "Problems of unification of Adyghe and alphabetical systems" in Kabardino-Balkaria, which was focused on creating a common written language, the unification of the alphabet and adopted a program that was supposed to solve the problem of creating a single alphabet. Over the past period, certain developments have been made in this direction. Adyghe linguists say that the task of creating a unified writing system can be solved, but the issue of creating a single literary language instead of the currently existing two literary languages: Adyghe (spoken by the Adygs, and the representatives of the foreign Circassian Diaspora) and Kabardino-Circassian (spoken by the Kabardins and Circassians in the Karachaevo-Cherkessia) is a very difficult task, but there is no other way to preserve the language and culture of the Circassians [Gileva, Experts, www; Protsenko, www].

The war in Syria has led to an increase in the number of Syrian Circassians who want to move to the Caucasus. According to Adyghe historians, the Syrian Circassians occupy a neutral position in the current Syrian conflict, openly supporting neither the rebels nor the government troops; among them there are military, middle-ranking officers who are faithful to the oath and support

the Assad regime, but there are also those who have come over the opposition's side [Neflyasheva, www].

Russia's position on the Syrian issue as a whole is aimed at the benefit of the Syrian Circassians, because it diplomatically prevented the invasion of the Western coalition forces into the country, narrowing the field of maneuver for opponents of Bashar al-Assad, and saved thousands of lives. Foreign Circassian public organizations met military aid to Syria from Russia with a mixed reception, but they talk little about it. The decision of the leadership of Russia about carrying out of military operations against international terrorist organizations on the territory of Syria was supported by the International Circassian Association, one of the priorities of which is the settlement of the situation in Syria [The International Circassian..., www].

Conclusion. The ICA and Russia

At the end of 2016, the ICA, which for more than two decades was the most authoritative Adyghe organization, was split due to the fact that the Federation of the Caucasian Associations in Turkey (KAFFED) on December 18 decided to suspend its membership in the International Circassian Association. Vice-President of the International Circassian Association, the Chairman of CUFFED Yashar Aslankaya on September 2016 has participated in the XI extraordinary Congress of the ICA in Nalchik. When leaving Russia, he was detained and it was announced that until 2020 he was banned from entering Russia. The Chairman of the ICA Kh. Sokhrokov believes that the decision of KAFFED to withdraw from the ICA is related to this incident, and the ICA, for its part, is trying to find out the reasons for the detention of the head of KAFFED, considers the decision of KAFFED hasty and hopes that the organization will remain part of the ICA. However, if this cannot be avoided, the Chairman of the ICA does not see a special problem, because there are other organizations in Turkey that want to work as part of the ICA, there are organizations in other countries that are ready to join it. According to Kh. Sokhrokov, not all members of KAFFED support the position of the leadership of the organization. Kh. Sokhrokov paid special attention to the fact that the ICA had prospects in Russia and only in Russia the Circassians had managed to preserve their language fully, and that the Circassians living in Russia, would not allow to manipulate the Circassian people against Russia [Asheva, www]. The head of the Circassian public organization "Kabardian Congress" Aslan Beshto considers the suspension of membership of KAFFED in the ICA as a systemic crisis, noting that "the crisis began before the 2014 Olympics because the ICA then took an exclusively pro-Russian position. It turned out that the ICA was able to persuade all the other organizations that have a different attitude towards the Olympics in Sochi and in general on the Circassian issue. In return, some preferences were promised for Circassian immigrants arriving in Russia. Few of those, however, have been implemented" [Gileva, Circassian..., www]. According to A. Kabarda (former Vice-President of the Russian Congress of the Peoples of the Caucasus), now living in exile, KAFFED suspended its membership because of the pro-Russian

position of the ICA [Circassians..., www]. Thus, the split in the ICA is caused by the question: to be with Russia or against Russia. The Circassian issue remains a question of geopolitics and is considered by external forces aiming to weaken Russia's influence in the Caucasus.

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Вопросы репатриации адыгов (черкесов) на историческую родину: состояние и проблемы

Алкиева Светлана Исмаиловна

Доктор исторических наук,
ведущий научный сотрудник,
Институт гуманитарных исследований (филиал),
Кабардино-Балкарский научный центр Российской академии наук,
360000, Российская Федерация, Нальчик, ул. Пушкина, 18;
e-mail: siak2000@mail.ru

Коцев Эльберд Муаедович

Аспирант,
Институт гуманитарных исследований (филиал),
Кабардино-Балкарский научный центр Российской академии наук,
360000, Российская Федерация, Нальчик, ул. Пушкина, 18;
e-mail: kotsev1992@gmail.com

Аннотация

Статья посвящена вопросам репатриации потомков адыгов, переселившихся в XIX в. в Османскую империю с исторической родины – Северного Кавказа. Авторы рассматривают деятельность Международной черкесской ассоциации, которая стала своего рода союзом существующих общественных объединений адыгов. Одним из актуальных направлений деятельности МЧА стала работа по объективной оценке характера и последствий Кавказской войны. Как признание последствий Кавказской войны

ставится вопрос о признании геноцида со стороны царской России и массового изгнания адыгов, упрощение процедуры возвращения на Северный Кавказ и предоставление российского гражданства потомкам мухаджиров. В современных российских реалиях выполнение этих требований столкнулось с целым рядом объективных и субъективных факторов и приняло затяжной и трудновыполнимый характер. Авторы освещают меры общественных организаций и властей республики по вопросам адаптации репатриантов в Кабардино-Балкарии, в том числе вопросы изучения русского языка и решения бытовых вопросов.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Соотечественники, репатрианты, адыги, органы власти, институты гражданского общества.

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