

Caucasus Studies 4

**CAUCASUS STUDIES:
Migration, Society and Language**

Papers from the conference,
November 28-30 2008, Malmö University

Edited by Karina Vamling

Malmö University
Department of Language,
Migration and Society
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Preface

Caucasus Studies 4 includes papers presented at the multidisciplinary conference *Caucasus Studies: Migration – Society – Language*, held on November 28-30 2008 at Malmö University, shortly after the dramatic events of the Georgian-Russian war. Researchers on the Caucasus from a variety of disciplinary perspectives gathered around the themes: Armed conflicts and conflict resolution, The Caucasus and global politics, Identities in transition, Migration and identity, Language contact and migration, and Diaspora studies. Papers from this broad spectrum of topics are represented in the volume. The languages of the conference were English and Russian, and the volume therefore includes papers in both these languages.

The organizing of this international conference and the presence of a large number of colleagues from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and North Caucasus would not have been possible without the generous support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). I would also like to thank the Department of International Migration and Ethnic Relations (IMER), Malmö University, for hosting the conference. Special thanks go to colleagues Revaz Tchantouria, Märta-Lisa Magnusson and Manana Kock Kobaidze and students Maria Hamberg and Karolin Larsson for engagement and support.

The views expressed in papers in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or *Caucasus Studies* at the Department of Language, Migration and Society (formerly IMER).

Karina Vamling

Malmö, December 2011

The North Caucasian and Abkhazian Diasporas; Their Lobbying Activities in Turkey

Ergün Özgür

In this paper, the composition the Circassian (the North Caucasian) and Abkhazian Diaspora organizations, federations, foundations and civil initiatives will be addressed. Moreover, the connections of the Circassian and Abkhazian organizations with other organizations in the world will be explained. Thereafter, the Turkish-Georgian military relationships and the lobbying activities of the Circassian-Abkhazian Diaspora organizations, especially during times of wars, etc. in their motherlands will be discussed in detail.

Introduction

The integration of the Soviet Socialist Republics was well organized, but the disintegration of the union happened suddenly and left huge problems behind. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasian republics within the union declared their independence and were recognized by the world community (eg. Georgia, 8th April 1991; Azerbaijan, 30th August 1991; and Armenia, 21st September 1991). Some of the autonomous republics within these republics also declared their independence and wars have taken place (like Georgia-South Ossetia; Georgia-Abkhazia). However, they are not recognized by the world community, and they stayed as “de facto” independent states until 26th August 2008 when the President of the Russian Federation recognized the Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Today these two newly recognized states and the North Caucasus republics within the Russian Federation, except Kabardino-Balkaria, are having demographic problems in their ethnic identity due to having a major Diaspora outside their homeland. The North Caucasian and Abkhazian Diasporas, comprised of several millions of people, live in Turkey. The wars in the Caucasus (Abkhazia, Chechenya, South Ossetia) have strongly enhanced national feelings among Diaspora members. During these wars, meetings were held, solidarity committees were founded, money was collected, and volunteers joined to armed militias.

The collapse of the Soviet Union also generated some possibilities to the North Caucasian¹ (the Circassian) and Abkhazian Diasporas to visit their motherlands. This contributed to a rise in ethnical identities among Diaspora members. In terms of the preservation of the cultural peculiarities, the North Caucasians and Abkhazians have to some extent preserved their languages and folklore, especially those living in the villages up to the present. The general customs of the Abkhazians (Apsuwara) and the Circassians (Khabze) have been kept, especially among those living in the villages, or those living in cities but maintaining links with the villages, or having close

¹ The “North Caucasian” and “Circassian” will be used simultaneously in this article.

connections with their associations. But the usage of the cultural and linguistic practices among Diaspora members is diminishing because of the high urbanization rate, mixed marriages, etc. Although there is a diminishing usage rate of the cultural, linguistic practices among Diaspora members, the number of its young members claiming their ethnical identity is rising. This may be a result of the better democratic situation which occurred in Turkey during the European Union integration process and also due to the possibility of establishing connections with their motherlands.

Meanwhile, the Circassian and Abkhazian Diasporas live in a NATO member country, Turkey, in which the government is helping to the new NATO nominee country, Georgia, in terms of commercial and military means. The representatives of the Circassian and Abkhazian Diaspora organizations, civil initiatives and their members who are not happy with their government's military support to Georgia – support which may have been used against their relatives during the wars (Georgian-Abkhazian [1992-1993]; Georgian-South Ossetian [1991-1992 and 2008]) – are arranging activities to influence their government's decisions, for example, lobbying activities to influence their government's policies towards the North Caucasian republics and the Republic of Abkhazia.

The Composition of the Circassian & Abkhazian Organizations in Turkey

In this section the Circassian organizations, civil initiatives, federations and their activities will be addressed.

The Circassian Solidarity Association (Çerkes Teavün Cemiyeti) was the first Circassian organization founded in Istanbul, 1908. The founders were military generals and intellectuals. Soldiers such as the field marshal Merted Abdullah, Berzeg Zeki, Gazi Muhammed Fazıl, General Pooh Nazmi, General Şaplı Osman and Loh Ahmet Hamdi Pashas should be mentioned. Intellectuals like Ahmet Cahit Therkhet (author of the first Adighe Grammar), Met Çunatuka Izzet (the authors of The Caucasus History and The Ancient Caucasus) and General Ismail Berkok Pashas (author of the Caucasus in the History) are also among them (Aksoy, 2003).

The founding aim of the association was expressed as “the independence of the motherland (the Caucasus)” by Dr. Vasfı Gûsar, one of the writers of the “Ğuaze” (Guide) newspaper (published 1909-1922). The members of this association who wanted to work more actively for “the independence of the Caucasus” founded another association, “The Circassian Progress and Solidarity Association” (Çerkes İttihat ve Teavün Cemiyeti). Its political body was called “The Northern Caucasus” (Şimali Kafkasya- in November 1908) (Aksoy, 2003).

The fourth organization was “The Circassian Women Solidarity Association” (Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti), founded in Beşiktaş (Akaretler) by the leadership of Met Çunatuko Izzet Pasha in 1918 in Istanbul. The founders were Circassian intellectual women as Hayriye Melek Hunç (chairperson), Makbule Berzeg, Emine Reşit Zalique, Seza Pooh and Mrs. Faika. The education was co-education and Latin scripts were used to teach both Circassian and Turkish (Ottoman). Moreover, the founders of the school published a journal called “Diyane” (My Mother) (Hatam, 2007).

All these associations were closed after the Lausanne Treaty in 1923 because the Circassians and Abkhazian, like other Muslims in Turkey, were not accepted as

minorities in the document signed by Lord Curzon and İsmet Pasha (İnönü) in Lausanne. According to the Lausanne Treaty (1923), only non-Muslims were given the minority rights which allowed them to open schools using their languages and to establish organizations or foundations, etc. As a result, there were no Circassian or Abkhazian organizations in Turkey during the single party regime (1923-1946). After this regime, the first Circassian organization, whose name does not contain any word related with their ethnic identity, “Hand of Friendship Assistance Association” (Dosteli Yardımlaşma Cemiyeti) was founded in İstanbul in 1946. The name changed to “The Caucasus Culture Association” (Kafkas Kültür Derneği) in 1952, just after the multi-party regime came into power. The members of the Association were mainly composed of Adyghe, Abkhazian, Chechen, Ossetians etc.

The democratic situation in Turkey was suitable for opening new associations after the acceptance of the 1961 Constitution, which was very democratic and full of freedoms in comparison to that of 1924. The Caucasus Abkhazia Culture Association was founded in 1967 by members of the Caucasus Culture Association in Istanbul (AbkhazAssociation, 2008). During the 1970’s, political life among the society in Turkey was very active; however, this was followed by a military coup in 1980 which led to the closure of all associations including the Circassians and Abkhazians. The associations started their activities when the conditions for democracy and freedoms were better in mid 1980’s. In addition, the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1990s) helped the Circassian and Abkhazian Diasporas to establish links with their mother lands.

Furthermore, the adaption of the European Integration process of Turkey, with its democratization conditions, allowed for the possibility of the Circassian, Abkhaz and other associations to unite as federations in 2001. The change in the Civil Code (4721) on 8th December 2001 led to a change in the articles of the Associations Law (WRCOCA, 2006).

The following year the associations also gained the right to contact and join associations in foreign countries. This right was very important for the Circassians and Abkhazians, as their populations are mostly outside their homelands. Today there are two Caucasian Federations in Turkey and another in Europe. There are also independent foundations, clubs, business organizations, platforms, forums and civil initiatives, etc.

The first federation is called “The Federation of the Caucasian Associations (KAF-FED)”, the nucleus of which was the KAF-DER (The Caucasian Associations), was organized in a center-periphery structure by 35 members in 1993 (KAF-DER, 2008). In 2003 KAF-DER was abolished and all the member associations were reopened as independent organizations. 50 organizations came together under the name of “The Federation of the Caucasian Associations” in July 2003 in Ankara (Ünal, 2008). The members of the KAF-FED increased to 57 in 2008. The Federation of the Caucasian Associations is the widest federation and tries to spread the idea of repatriation to homeland. Some Activities of KAF-FED are as follows: organizing language courses and conferences; publishing a quarterly journal called Nart (the name derives from Nart Epos) since 1997; sending students to study at the universities of Nalchik and Maikop (Kabardino-Balkaria and Adyghei); arranging summer youth camps and visits to Adyghei, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia for several years. KAF-FED organized a conference named “Languages Under the Danger of Disappearance: the

Situation of the Abkhaz and Adyghe Languages” on 1st July 2006 in Ankara. Other than these activities, KAF-FED dealt with the publication of books on the Caucasus’ culture, history, literature, etc. Moreover, KAF-FED also dealt with the preparation of documentary films, one of which is the “Birth from the Ashes”. Every year KAF-FED and member associations organize the “Commemoration of the Exile Day” on 21st May (in memory of 1864). Besides KAF-FED, other foundations, independent platforms, civil initiatives (especially the Democratic Circassian Platform), etc also participate to this program on 21st May. Further, KAF-FED is a member of the “International Circassian Association” (Dünya Çerkes Birliği) (DÇB; 2005). Since 2000, the book publication project of the KAF-Fed has been managed by another foundation, the KAF-DAV “The Caucasus Research, Culture, Solidarity Foundation” (Kafkas Araştırma ve Kültür Vakfı) (KAF-DAV, 2008).

The second federation is the “Federation of the United Caucasus Associations,” founded in 2003 in Ankara with fifteen member associations. The member associations are composed not only of Adyghe and Abkhaz but also Chechen, Karachai and Balkarian (BIRKAFFED, 2008). This federation upholds the ideal of “the United Caucasus”. Therefore, they start the commemoration of the exile day almost ten days beforehand (21st May), which represents the foundation of the United Caucasus Republic founded in 1918 during the Soviet times.

There are other organizations, foundations, civil initiatives, committees. Some of them are:

- The Friendship clubs in Istanbul, Ankara and Kayseri
- KAFIAD - Association of the Caucasian Businessmen
- The Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Committee (founded just after the Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993)
- The Caucasus Chechen Solidarity Committee (founded just after the first war in Chechnya)
- The Caucasus Ossetian Solidarity and Humanitarian Assistance Committee (founded just after the war in South Ossetia, August 2008)
- Democratic Circassian Platform (founded in 2003)
- The Friends of Abkhazia (founded in 2008) (www.abhazyanindostlari.org)
- The Caucasus Forum (www.kafkasyaforumu.org , founded in 2003)
- The Caucasus House (<http://www.kafkasevi.com>, founded in 2007)
- The Caucasus Foundation (It has a press agency called “Agency Caucasus” working for more than 8 years in Turkish, English, Arabic and Russian languages. It has a rich library on the Caucasus (www.kafkas.org.tr)
- Shamil Foundation (It was founded in 1978 in Istanbul has also very rich library on the Caucasus)
- CA-Circassianacademia (internet based academic group, founded in 2003)
- The Circassian World (<http://www.circassianworld.com>, Website was created in 2005, it contains several articles on the Caucasus, the Circassians etc)
- The Abkhaz World (<http://abkhazworld.com/about-site.html>, Website was created in 2009, it contains several articles about Abkhazia and Abkhazians)
- The Circassian Canada (<http://www.circassiancanada.com/>- Website was created in 2003, new website www.circassiancenter.com/)

Connections of the Circassian & Abkhazian Organizations with Other Organizations in the World

The European federation is called the “Federation of the European Circassians”, and it was founded by six Associations (Almeo, Antwerpen, Basel, Berlin Lyon, and Zwingenberg) in 2003. This Federation has close contacts with KAF-FED in Ankara. Further, the Federation of European Circassians organized the third Circassian Day in the European Parliament on October 6, 2008, which included a program comprised of a conference, meetings and an exhibition. During this day participants from the North Caucasus counties and Abkhazia, especially bureaucrats, had the possibilities to meet EU parliamentarians (EUROXASE, 2008).

The second organization is the “World Abkhaz-Abazinian (Abaza) People’s Association (DAAK- Dünya Abhaz-Abaza Halkları Birliđi),” founded in 1992 in Abkhazia. Members are Abkhazians and Abazas from all over the world, including Adyghei, Abkhazia, Adjara, Germany, Jordan, Karachai-Cherkessia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the Netherlands, Russia, Turkey, etc. The Abkhaz-Abazinian Diaspora representatives of the Association from Turkey are also members of the Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Committee (DAAK, 2008).

The third organization is the “International Circassian Association,” founded in Nalchik (capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria) in 2000. Its aims are to support the revival of the Circassian cultural and spiritual heritage, to support return to the motherland, to protect national existence, to support the enlightenment of real history, to constitute the conditions for the unification of the Circassians in the motherland and Diaspora, and to organize the formation of a literature language among Circassians (DÇB, 2008).

The Connections with the Motherlands (Repatriation Committees)

There are repatriation committees in the North-West Caucasus Republics and Abkhazia which deal with those repatriates who will return back and resettle in their motherlands. The Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Committee in Turkey manages issues related to Abkhazia. Meanwhile, the KAF-FED (Ankara) has contacts with all the North Caucasus Republics and Abkhazia. In 2008 the members of the Friends of Abkhazia have also started to talk about the repatriation issues together with the Abkhaz Social Chamber in Abkhazia (Özgür, 2008)

Turkish - Georgian Relationship and the Circassian and Abkhazian Lobbies in Turkey

All these associations and federations generally work independently and do not have integrated activities. However, this is not the case during times of crises, when their activities become integrated and shared. Several examples of joint activities have been especially noteworthy during the Georgian-Abkhaz War (1992-1993), the Russian-Chechen wars (1994,1996), and the Georgian-South Ossetian Wars (1991, 2008).

The following illustrates such an example: When the former-president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, came to Turkey in 2002, the chairman of the Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Committee wrote an announcement signed by 70 associations and 6,675 people and published in one of the popular newspapers in Turkey. It stated that “As we

are the natural citizens of Abkhazia living in Diaspora, we are ready to defend our motherland in case there will be an attack towards Abkhazia...”. This was prepared against the aggressive declaration of Shevardnadze towards Abkhazia at that time.

The same kind of activities occurred several times after the Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili came to power with the “Rose Revolution”. His declaration that “Abkhazia and South Ossetia would follow Adjara” was accepted as a war threat not only by citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia but also throughout the Diaspora. After this declaration and during Georgian President Saakashvili’s visit to Turkey (on 20th of May 2004), the Abkhazian Solidarity Committee, the Federation of Caucasian Associations and members of the Democratic Circassian Platform and separate organizations prepared a declaration titled “We are under the service of Abkhazia”. It was published in two leading newspapers and press conferences and private faxes also were sent to appropriate government offices, embassies, the UN, and OSCE (Özgür, 2004).

The Diaspora is also affected by the relationship between Turkey and Georgia. One of them is the military cooperation of Turkey and Georgia. Turkey’s NATO membership since the 1950’s and military assistance to a NATO nominee member, Georgia, serve to generate disturbances among Diaspora members, as they are afraid of the possibility of these weapons being used against their relatives. In 2008 when Georgia started the war in South Ossetia, the Diaspora organized several meetings and protests in front of the Georgian embassy (and consulate) in Istanbul and Ankara.

Another example is the political dimension of the Turkish-Georgian relationship. Although the Russian Federation (26.08.2008) and Nicaragua (04.09.2008) recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Turkey supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. Meanwhile, the country still imposes an embargo on direct passenger ships and direct flights from Turkey to Abkhazia. The Diaspora in Turkey wants their government to solve this problem of travel embargo to Abkhazia in the near future by directing passenger ships and flights to Sukhum, Abkhazia. In order to present this problem to the parliament representatives. The Federation of the Caucasian Associations, The Friends of Abkhazia, The Caucasus Abkhazia Solidarity Committee, etc. are giving briefings to the parliament members, bureaucrats, political parties etc. A new signature campaign was started by the members of the “Friends of Abkhazia” to request the Turkish government to let direct passenger ships and direct flights to Sukhum-Abkhazia (Friends of Abkhazia, 2008a).

The war in South Ossetia in August 2008 was another issue which accelerated lobbying activities of the Circassians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, etc. in Turkey. During the Georgian–S.Ossetian War (started in 7th August and ended 12th August 2008), under the leadership of Alan Foundation (Ossetians), all Caucasian organizations came together and held several press conferences, meetings, and protests (Protest, 2008). During these meetings, “The Caucasus Ossetian Solidarity and Humanitarian Assistance Committee” was founded on 10th August 2008 in Istanbul. The Committee opened an assistance campaign for South Ossetians. Moreover, it contacted the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) to send materials to South Ossetia.

What is more, since the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the members of the Friends of Abkhazia and other organizations have organized several celebration activities in their associations (like Caucasus Abkhazia Cultural Association, Istanbul, KAF-FED in Ankara, etc). In the streets of Istanbul, Ankara, flags were waved from

cars while during their round trips. In addition, the Committee, the Federation of the Caucasian Associations and the Friends of Abkhazia organized trips to Abkhazia in order to celebrate the 15th Independence Day and recognition of the country on 30th September 2008 (The Friends of Abkhazia, 2008b).

The third issue is the economic (also energy) dimension of Turkish-Georgian relationship. In order to protect the safety of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, the Turkish government may not try to establish contact with Abkhazia. After the Georgian-South Ossetian war and Georgian-Russian war, the Turkish prime minister has visited Moscow and Tbilisi, where he suggested the Caucasus Pack, which may cover Turkey, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia while not taking into account Iran, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But this project is still under discussion.

On the other hand, Turkey has an economic and a political relationship with Russia, upon which Turkey is dependent for natural gas and energy. The positive Turkish-Russian relations may have a positive effect on Turkish-Abkhazian relationship in the future.

Conclusion

By having major Circassian and Abkhazian Diasporas in Turkey, the North Caucasus republics and Abkhazia will always want to have a connection with them and the Turkish government. However, Turkey has its interest because of the “Realpolitik” — energy and economic reasons; but, today’s politics may change according to new future interests. Hence, the Russian-Turkish relationship may affect Turkey’s politics towards the Republic of Abkhazia. Besides, the Circassian and Abkhaz Diasporas in Turkey will continue to lobby the Turkish government – *their government* – to establish a relationship with their motherlands.

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