

Circassia*

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After a short introduction of Circassians, their language, their neighbours, and their early history, this article describes slightly more in detail the fate of Circassians and their territories since 1917 against the background of Soviet policy in the Northern Caucasus as a whole. Some remarks on the present-day situation and prospects conclude the article.

Circassia

Actually, there is no such place as Circassia; and a single Circassian state uniting all Circassians has never existed in known history.

There are various senses in which the term Circassian is used. The least ambiguous one is linguistic: Circassians are people who belong to groups which have Circassian as their first or—nowadays, in many cases—as a second language.

Today, more than half a million Circassians live scattered across the Northern Caucasus, and an indeterminate number live scattered throughout Anatolia. Smaller numbers are found in Syria and Jordan and very small numbers in Israel, and in the former Yugoslavia. There is a colony of emigrants from the Caucasus in Paterson, New Jersey, and Circassian emigrants from Turkey can be found in many countries of Western Europe.

The language

There are three indigenous families of Caucasian languages: a Western and an Eastern family in the North, and a Southern family to the south of the watershed of the Great Caucasus.

Circassian belongs to the small West Caucasian language family, which is probably genetically related to the much larger East Caucasian family. The West Caucasian family is not genetically related in any way to the South Caucasian family, of which Georgian is the largest and best-known representative.

Genetic relations of West Caucasian languages with language families or language isolates elsewhere, whether dead or alive, have never convincingly been established. It deserves to be stressed that none of the three indigenous

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language families of the Caucasus is related to Russian or to other Slavic languages.

Prehistory

West Caucasians have been living in the Northern Caucasus for a very long time; for so long in fact that there is no sound evidence of the West Caucasian ethno-linguistic group ever having originated from outside the Caucasus region. If the North Caucasian hypothesis is true, whereby it is postulated that East and West Caucasian are genetically related, then we must assume that Proto-West Caucasian as such developed *in situ*, at least some 5,000 years ago.

The area populated by West Caucasians in the time of Graeco-Roman antiquity was larger than it has been in recent times and the number of various West Caucasian peoples probably was larger than in later, historical times. It is assumed that West Caucasian languages were, in classical times, spoken from Abkhazia in the south up as far as the Don in the north. Classical authors only recorded ethnonyms, and the Greeks, who were for a very long period in close contact with the aboriginal population living on the shores of the Black Sea, provide us with little information about the people they dealt there. The first records written in West Caucasian languages only date from the 19th century. The first modest word lists for West Caucasian languages were compiled in the 17th century, which means that no old records are available to facilitate the comparative study of the West Caucasian languages.

Sister languages

Today the West Caucasian family has no more than two members: Abkhaz and Circassian. A third member of the group, the ill-fated Ubykh, ceased to exist as a language in the 1950s, when it was no longer a first medium of communication in everyday life. The last knowledgeable speaker of Ubykh, Tefvik Esenç, died in October 1992.

The two remaining West Caucasian languages, Abkhaz and Circassian, have many dialects, and both of these languages have two distinct written standards, which were developed in Soviet times. At present, therefore, there are four written West Caucasian languages in use in the Caucasus. These are Abkhaz proper and Abaza, and West and East Circassian.

As for their overall structure, the NWC languages show a great deal of common features; however, the differences are considerable. They differ more than, for instance, German, Danish and English.

A cursory glance at Circassian, Abkhaz and the now extinct Ubykh, reveals a relatively great number of correspondences between Circassian and Ubykh. However, this superficial similarity is due to intensive borrowing by Ubykh from Circassian in the last few centuries. Comparative evidence does not seem to suggest that Circassian and Ubykh are genetically closer to each other than either of them is to Abkhaz.

Circassian dialects

The dialects of Circassian fall into an Eastern and a Western group. The two main dialects of East Circassian are Kabardian and Besney, also known as Besleney. Commonly, however, the whole of East Circassian is referred to as Kabardian. West Circassian comprises four major dialects: Bzhedug, Shapsug, Abadzekh and Temirgoy. The whole of Circassian is usually conceived by linguists as one language; it does not take long even for Circassians from the most remote dialect areas to understand each other.

Circassian:

East Circassian/Kabardian: Kabardian proper
Besney (Besleney)

West Circassian/Adyghe: (Western) Bzhedug
(Eastern) Shapsug
Temirgoy
Abadzekh

In Anatolia one finds a fair number of Circassians who claim to be Ubykh. Most of these ethnic Ubykh have—besides Turkish—a particular form of West Circassian as their second language. Their brand of West Circassian, which may be called Ubykh Circassian, is strikingly uniform among Ubykhs in various parts of Anatolia.

Circassians

The year 1989 saw the last great Soviet census, and since *perestroika* and *glasnost* came relatively late to the Northern Caucasus, 1989 may also serve as a good point of reference for past and recent developments.

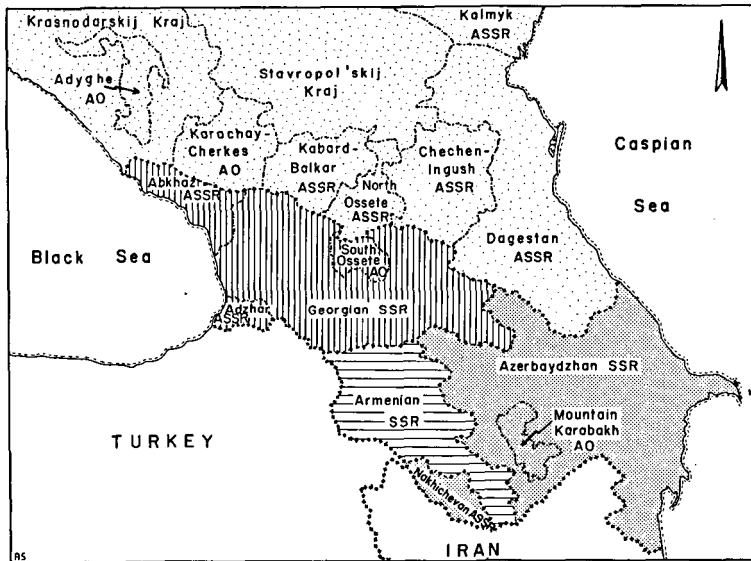
At that time there were about 570,000 Circassians in the whole of the Soviet Union, more than 90 per cent of whom lived in the Northern Caucasus itself. It is important to note that for more than 90 per cent of the Circassians in 1989 Circassian was the first language. Generally speaking, therefore, the Circassians preserved their language well.

There appear to be more Circassians outside than within the former Soviet Union. No exact numbers can be given, primarily because the Turkish census figures of 1946 are unreliable, at least as far as the minorities are concerned. One million Circassians in Turkey and the Middle East is a reliable estimate.

Here, a caveat is in order: *being* Circassian in Turkey does not mean the same thing as being Circassian in the former Soviet Union. A majority of Circassians outside the Caucasus—and this applies particularly to the younger generations—no longer use Circassian as a first language. They are usually loyal citizens of the countries whose passports they hold, and being Circassian occupies a second place in their sense of identity, if not a third place after their awareness of being Muslim. In this respect they may be compared to people of German or Dutch descent living in the USA, who consider themselves to be American citizens of foreign extraction.

As for religion, the Circassians in the Northern Caucasus are Sunni Muslims, if they profess any religion at all. Islam came comparatively late to the West Caucasus and is certainly a less important feature there than in the Eastern Caucasus, or amongst Circassians living in Turkey and the Middle East.

Republics and Provinces



The map shows the variety of administrative divisions in the Northern Caucasus as it was in 1989. Then the whole Northern Caucasus formed part of the RSFSR, the huge Russian republic, which has been succeeded by Yeltsin's Russia.

In 1989, in the Northern Caucasus there were four ASSRs, so-called autonomous republics which had a much lower level of autonomy than the 15 Union republics. There were, in addition to the ASSRs, two AOs or autonomous provinces, which enjoyed a still lower level of autonomy. Three out of these six ethnic-based territories were home to Circassians.

In 1989 the following administrative divisions in the Soviet Union were based on ethnicity:

- 15 Union Republics. The RSFSR: Rossiyskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika—(today: the Russian Federation) + 14 SSRs: Sovetskie Sotsialisticheskie Respubliki —Union Republics;
- 20 ASSRs. Avtonomnye Sotsialisticheskie Sovetskie Respubliki—Autonomous Republics;
- 8 AOs: Avtonomnye Oblasti—Autonomous Provinces;
- 10 NOs: Natsional'nye Oblasti (before the 1970s: Okrugá)—National provinces (Districts).

Three Circassian territories and peoples

From east to west, the regions inhabited by Circassians in 1989, were the Kabard-Balkar ASSR, the Karachay-Cherkess AO and the Adyghe AO.

Kabard-Balkaria, as an ASSR, was directly subject to the Russian Federation. The two autonomous provinces formed part of the Stavropol'skiy and Krasnodarskiy Territories. Small groups of Circassians lived in the north of Northern Ossetia and along the Black Sea Coast near the town of Tuapse.

Soviet policy distinguished, in accordance with a territorial and a divide-and-rule principle, three Circassian peoples: Kabardians, Cherkes and Adyghe, which were served by two written standard languages: East Circassian for Kabardians, and Cherkes and West Circassian for the Adyghe. Kabardian, then, is the designation for East Circassians living in Kabard-Balkaria and Cherkes the designation for East Circassians living in Karachay-Cherkessia. This division into three peoples is an artefact of ethnic engineering.

Terminology

Circassians call themselves Adyghe and have a large variety of lower-rank ethnonyms. In Soviet-Russian terms Circassians are referred to as Adygi (singular: Adyg), West Circassians as Adygejtsy (singular: Adygeets), and East Circassians, depending on where they live, as Kabardintsy (singular: Kabardinets) or Cherkesy (singular: Cherkes). It is rather confusing that some sources reserve the term 'Cherkes(s)' for West Circassians as distinct from East Circassians, who are then referred to as Kabardians. A more loose use of the term Cherkes, which is widespread in Turkey, encompasses not only the Circassians proper but also varying sets of other North Caucasians (Turkish: Çerkes, Çerkez).

Kipchak Turkic neighbours

Two of the three Circassian territories were named not after one, but after two so-called titular nations. Kabard-Balkaria was named after the East Circassian Kabardians and after the Balkar, whereas Karachay-Cherkessia is named after the equally East Circassian Cherkess and the Karachay.

The Karachay and Balkar, who lived in the southern regions of the two territories in question, separated by the impassable Mount Elbrus, speak one and the same language, a language of Kipchak Turkic stock. Their separate treatment originally was as artificial as that of the Cherkess and the Kabardians. Circassians mainly live in the northern parts of their three units, in enclaves within the area which was theirs alone a few centuries ago.

Kabard-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia have had complex and traumatic histories in the Soviet era, and in the early 1990s the Karachay, just like the Balkars, expressed the wish to develop along separate lines.

1989 statistics

The 1989 population statistics for the titular nations and Russians of the three areas in which Circassians and Balkar-Karachay were titular nations, are as follows (from the Russian weekly *Ogonëk* 2, 1993):

Kabard-Balkaria (ASSR): Kabardians 48.2 per cent; Russians 32.0 per cent; Balkar 13.4 per cent; Total population 753,000.

Karachay-Cherkessia (AO): Russians 42.5 per cent; Karachay 31.2 per cent; Cherkes 9.6 per cent. Total population 414,000.

Adyghea (AO): Russians 68.0 per cent; Adyghe 22.0 per cent. Total population 423,000.

Until the exodus

Originally, the Circassians lived compactly in the lower and middle reaches of the Kuban river. In the 14th century a portion of them, possibly Besney Circassians, started a trek south-eastward to the Northcentral Caucasus, where they filled the power vacuum left by the Mongols and created consecutively Great and Little Kabarda, which had already become well consolidated by the 16th century. The Kabardians had strong feudal structures and became the overlords of their Karachay-Balkar, Ossetian and other neighbours.

By the mid-16th century Russia, for the first time in its expansion southward, reached the Northcentral Caucasus. Intimate contacts were then established with the Kabardian nobility. Russia remained unable to conquer the Northern Caucasus until the Crimean Khanate, which controlled the western and central Northern Caucasus, was subdued at the end of the 18th century. Russia's attention then focused on Transcaucasia, which was richer, strategically more important and easier to take over than the mountainous Northwest and Northeast Caucasus. The conquest of the Southern Caucasus took place between 1801 and 1830. Russia's conquests there were sealed by treaties with Ottoman Turkey and Persia. Before 1830 considerable advances had also been made in the Northern Caucasus, especially in the Kabardian, Ingush and Ossetian territories in the centre. It took the Russians until 1864 before they were able to subdue mountaineers. The Ubykh and some neighbouring Circassian and Abkhaz tribes were the last to surrender.

The exodus and aftermath

For the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Caucasus, the Russian conquest had dramatic consequences. It is estimated that at least half of the indigenous population saw itself forced to leave for the Ottoman Empire. Hundreds of thousands of West Caucasians were involved in this migration. The motives for leaving were manifold: the Russian authorities pressured indigenous Caucasians into leaving, and the Ottoman Empire, on the other hand, beckoned their fellow

Muslims and often lured them into fighting against the Russians, especially in the Balkans. The exodus from the Northern Caucasus formed part of a huge exchange between the Ottoman Empire and Russia, involving mass migrations of Christians, mainly Armenians, leaving Turkey, and newly conquered Muslims, such as Crimean Tatars and North Caucasians, leaving Russia. In total, at least two and a half million people thus changed countries between 1830 and 1920. The extermination of Northwest Caucasians during the Russian colonial war, the expulsions during and after the war and the resettlements of the remaining Circassians deserve the term genocide no less than the treatment that was to befall the Armenians in eastern Anatolia half a century later.

Western Europeans and their governments between 1830 and 1860 showed interest for the Circassian Black Sea coast, i.e. the coast from the Taman Peninsula in the north to Mingrelia in the south. The British and the French had good relations then with Ottoman Turkey and especially the British showed no pleasure in Russia's southwards advance. Individual British travellers and merchants stimulated, witness their diaries, the Circassians to join forces and to withstand the Russians' conquest. Once emigrated, after their situation had become hopeless, large numbers of Circassians went on fighting the Russians on the Balkans.

After the final conquest of the Caucasus, the area was ruled along non-ethnic lines. The Circassians generally had little land, although some Kabardians were relatively affluent. Circassians also suffered at the hands of their own nobility, who had retained many of their privileges from the Russian colonial regime, and from the enormous influx of Slavic immigrants, who received better treatment from the colonial authorities. Only a few Circassians wished, or were able, to leave rural areas to live in the newly established towns in their homeland.

Prior to the Russian Revolution, unrest amongst the Circassians was more of a socioeconomic than of an ethnic nature.

1917–20: complex times

The period 1917–21 in the Northern Caucasus was extremely complex, as in most of Russia. The last traces of central power vanished in the peripheral parts of the Russian Empire in the early summer of 1917, after which these imperial outposts were left to themselves, to Bolshevik agitation and to foreign intervention. In October Lenin seized power, and in December 1917 civil war broke out. That war was to rage in the Northern Caucasus in 1919. Lenin never gave up the idea of recovering Russian territory that had been lost in the wake of the Revolution. In 1920 the Northern Caucasus was bloodily reincorporated into Bolshevik Russia.

A major reason for the complexity of the situation in the Northern Caucasus is that area's ethnic composition. It is no exaggeration to say that the Northern Caucasus is one of the ethnically and linguistically most complex areas in the world. The approximately 40 indigenous peoples of the Northern Caucasus in 1917 numbered about 1,500,000 persons, some 145,000 of which were

Circassians, including about 45,000 West Circassians in the Kuban area (and 1,159 near Tuapse), and about 98,500 East Circassians, most of them in the Terek area.

Russians: Cossacks, Inogorodnye, soldiers

Chaos ruled everywhere in Russia in 1917. Soviets, i.e. councils, soon started to develop and organize affairs at the local level. In the beginning, hardly any council was Bolshevik-dominated. In the Northern Caucasus they were Russian-dominated; in the long run the Bolsheviks were to manipulate the soviets to their own ends.

In 1917, there were almost as many Russians as Mountaineers in the Northern Caucasus, and the Russians, too, were not homogeneous. There were two large groups: the Cossacks, who were very numerous, and the *Inogorodnye*. The Cossacks were relatively wealthy. They had for centuries been used as guards against the Mountaineers, especially against the Chechen and Ingush, who bitterly hated the Cossacks. They were the Czar's favourites. There are three distinct groups of Cossacks north of the Caucasus, each named after a river: the Kuban Cossacks in the west, the Terek Cossacks in the centre and the Don Cossacks to the north. *The Inogorodnye* (i.e. people from other towns) were more recent Russian immigrants who worked in what little industry there was, or on the railways. Some also leased land from the Cossacks. The *Inogorodnye* were to play an important role in Soviets, and they were no friends to the Cossacks. A third Russian element were soldiers who returned home, along the railway after the Czar's armies in Transcaucasia and Turkey had collapsed. They were in a revolutionary mood. The soldiers, too, were not on good terms with the Cossacks. Many Cossacks longed for the old order and were to support for a long time Denikin's White Army.

Local governments 1919–20

In the summer of 1917, nationalist Mountaineers proclaimed a Union of Mountain peoples. The Terek Cossacks first tried to organize a local government with the Cossacks of the Kuban and Don, but in October they joined the Mountaineers and a Terek-Daghestan government was formed in Vladikavkaz, at the Ingush-Ossetian border. Fighting between Cossacks and their old enemies, the Ingush and Chechen, brought an end to the Terek government as early as January 1918.

All Russians now banded together, and general fighting broke out between Russians and Muslims. The importance of the soviets grew. The Bolsheviks, still cooperating within the soviets with other political groups, coordinated the struggle against the Mountain peoples. In the west of the Northern Caucasus, a Kuban-Black Sea Soviet was organized, and in March 1918 in the north-central Caucasus the Terek Soviet Socialist Republic was founded. This administration wielded more real power than the Mountaineers' government the previous year.

In May 1918 representatives of the Mountaineers government attended the negotiations between Turkey and the Transcaucasus. There they proclaimed North Caucasian independence, sought and, like Azerbaijan, were promised Turkish protection.

In August the Cossacks attacked Vladikavkaz and drove away the Terek government and its leader Ordzhonikidze. Ordzhonikidze hid in the mountains of the Chechen-Ingush, and the Ingush recaptured Vladikavkaz on his behalf. Afterwards, the Bolsheviks got the upper hand and initiated a reign of terror. However, the vitality of the Bolshevik Terek administration declined and, in fact, was almost non-existent by the time Denikin appeared in 1919.

Denikin was a bad politician and succeeded very soon in rousing a united nationalist, religious and socialist front against himself, especially after he introduced forced conscription in August 1919. The ensuing war in the Caucasus consumed much of his energy and contributed to his defeat by the Red Army in January 1920.

In 1920 a North Caucasian Revolutionary Committee was created and Ordzhonikidze appointed at its head. Local power was given to local leaders, whether Bolshevik or not, as long as they had cooperated with the Bolsheviks.

A *Gorskaya*—or Mountain Republic—was created as early as January 1920 (20-1-1920). The Gorskaya Republic covered a huge territory in the Northern Caucasus and was larger than the territories that had been under the control of the Mountaineers' and the Terek Soviet governments. In November 1920 the Dagestanskaya ASSR split off from the Gorskaya Republic, and in the initial years of Soviet rule several more splits were to follow—c.f. R. Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union*, p. 223.

Rationale behind splits

Whether the division of the Mountain Republic into a large number of ethnic-based republics has to be ascribed to rivalries among local leaders or to the wish of Stalin to dismantle a political area that seemed too well consolidated, is a question to which simple answers cannot be given. When we look at the whole of the young Soviet Union we cannot fail to notice that what was happening in the North Caucasus was not unique. It fits well into what is called Lenin's nationalities' policy.

In the Czarist Empire minorities had never been treated in a friendly way, but in the last quarter of the 19th century their situation deteriorated considerably. Leftist parties, therefore, had easy access to them. Though many peoples of the Caucasus never fully accepted annexation by Russia, their main grievances were nevertheless social, only in the second place nationalist and hardly ever separatist.

Lenin and Stalin had already worked out ideas on how to counter Russia's minorities problems once Soviet rule was established. Lenin tried to reconcile older Marxist ideas with the ideas of Austrian socialists like Renner and Bauer. The orthodox Marxists had been in favour of large states and against federalism.

Like them, Lenin believed that nationalism is a by-product of capitalism and, therefore, of a transitional nature. He supposed that in the long term, in a socialist world, there would be no differences whatsoever between people originating from different nations, religions and classes. Lenin was opposed to the ideas of extra-territorial cultural autonomy that were developed in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Double-Monarchy, but he was ready to give in to demands for cultural autonomy. He regarded a moderate form of self-determination as a means by which people might be persuaded to merge into larger states. Though originally not an advocate of federalization, Lenin realized soon after the October Revolution that serious concessions had to be made in order not to frighten the minorities. He also saw that he could exploit nationalistic sentiments to his own ends. And so federalization was introduced, though, from the beginning, under a very strong centre. The minority nationalities were to flower, at least as linguistic communities, illiteracy was to be eradicated and native cadres were to be raised in their own languages. The various peoples of the young Union were to be sovietized through their own languages. The period up till the early 1930s was that of nativization: literary standards were created and put into use for about 60 languages. This was a gigantic effort, without precedent elsewhere in the world. For quite a number of hitherto neglected peoples the development of literacy occasioned an enormous emancipating impact, especially for those peoples that were also granted their own ethnic-based administrative units. Lenin apparently miscalculated when he thought that the eventual merger of the peoples of the Soviet Union would be facilitated by an initial period of nativization. Recent history confirms that the Soviet Union with its specific approach to minorities functioned rather as an incubator of nationalism than as a melting-pot for nations.

North Caucasian territories: 1920–24

By January 1921 the Northern Caucasus had the following divisions: the Kuban-Black Sea Province in the west, the Mountain ASSR in the centre and the Daghestan ASSR in the east. The Mountain ASSR encompassed Karachaya, Balkaria, Kabardia, North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnia, i.e. all of the North Caucasus with the exception of the westernmost and easternmost areas. In the course of three years the whole Mountain ASSR was dismantled. It existed from 1920 till (7-7-)1924. The split-offs were: 1921 Kabard AO; 1922 Kabard-Balkar AO, Karachay-Chechen AO, Chechen AO; 1924 North-Ossetian AO; 1924 Ingush AO. The Adyghe AO was created within the Kuban-Black Sea Province in 1922.

The resultant situation was not yet final. In 1934, the Chechen and Ingush AOs, for instance, were united into a common Chechen-Ingush AO. In 1936 this new Chechen-Ingush AO, along with the North-Ossetian and Kabard-Balkar AOs, were promoted to the status of ASSR. Other changes specifically affecting Circassian areas are treated under the appropriate headings below.

It is a conspicuous phenomenon that the Northern Caucasus became

fragmented in the early Soviet period, while in the interregnum between Tsarist and Soviet rule there had in that region, in fact, been several attempts at federalisation. This all is in sharp contrast to what happened in the Southern Caucasus, where three independent republics had come into existence in that interregnum. These three, Azerbaydzhan, Armenia and Georgia, with Abkhazia since 1921 entering into Georgia as a Treaty Union Republic, were forced into a Transcaucasian Federation in 1922, which was not at all in accordance with the developments that had taken place during the 1917–1921 interregnum.

After 1924

By the late 1920s Stalin was already firmly in power, and collectivization, famine, five-year plans, centralization and russification, the extermination of local cadres and intelligentsia and the Second World War were to follow in the next 15 years.

Resistance to sovietization and Stalin's policies were especially violent among the Chechen-Ingush and the Karachay-Balkar in marked contrast to the Circassians. However, throughout the Northern Caucasus native peoples were for the first time allowed and indeed encouraged to go native and cherish their own culture. It goes without saying that these cultures had to be 'socialist in nature'. In the early 1930s the nativization boom was over, and Stalin enforced centralization and russification. This entailed a switch to Cyrillic writing systems, a dominant place for Russian at school and a waning emphasis on the native languages. This tendency persisted after Stalin's death in 1953. In the Northern Caucasus, for instance, the use of local languages in education was discontinued in the 1960s, even in autonomous republics like Kabard-Balkaria, Ossetia and Chechen-Ingushetia. Consequently, peoples of the Northern Caucasus generally have a good command of Russian as a second language. However, about 90 per cent of the various peoples still have their ancestral language as their first language.

Deportations

Hitler's armies reached the western and central Caucasus in 1942 and were driven back in 1943. The Nazis did not reach Chechen territory, but the Circassian and Karachay-Balkar territories became a theatre of war. Although the peoples of the Northern Caucasus do not appear to have cooperated with the Germans on a greater scale than elsewhere in the Soviet Union, several peoples were deported to Kazakhstan and Central Asia after the war on the charge of collaboration. The deported peoples included: the Karachay (October–November 1943); the Kalmyks (December 1943); the Chechen and Ingush (February 1944); the Balkar (March–April 1944); the Crimean Tatars (May 1944); the Meskhians and neighbours (November 1944).

The deportations constituted a perpetuation of the Czarist policy of clearing the Caucasus of peoples considered unreliable by the central authorities. Both the

Czars and the Communist leaders wanted a quiet Northern Caucasus, populated by a pacified population, not only because of the North Caucasus with all its riches itself constituted a prize to be exploited by the Russian central power, but also because a pacified Northern Caucasus continues to be a prerequisite for good relations between Moscow and the more affluent and politically more important Transcaucasus.

Once the deportations were effected, the names of the former territories were purged of the mention of the deported peoples, and the territories were resettled by other groups, and either renamed in the process, or split up and adjoined to neighbouring regions. Most of these deported peoples were 'rehabilitated' in 1956, and all of them except the Meskhians and the Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to their homelands, which were officially restored in January 1957. However, the boundaries and areas of settlement were often not the same as before.

As far as can be ascertained, Circassians were not involved in the deportations, but the Karachay-Balkar neighbours of the East Circassians were. This has consequences to the present day, especially because justice was never done to the Karachay.

Regional upgrading

In the early 1990s, the peoples of the Northern Caucasus issued declarations upgrading the administrative status of their regions. Some of these declarations were issued by Soviets, others by informal bodies such as popular councils. Some of these upgradings were recognized by the central Russian power. According to the text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation of December 1992, 21 republics were then recognized as member states of the Russian Federation. All 21 republics share the same status, including the following three Circassian-inhabited republics: the Republic Adyghea; the Kabard-Balkar Republic; the Karachay-Cherkess Republic.

A confederation of Mountain Peoples, which was initiated in 1989, then known as the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, was ratified in Sukhum in November 1991. This institution was never recognized by the central government of the Russian Federation. A large number of semi-official organizations and persons of 16 different peoples of the Northern Caucasus are members. Although the Confederation has no more than semi-legal status, it is nevertheless influential. The chairman of the Confederation is the Kabardian Shanibov, and the chairman of the parliament of the Confederation is the Chechen Yusup Soslambekov. The Confederation organized in 1992 armed assistance for the Abkhaz in their struggle with Georgian troops. Today its called Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus.

Adyghea

Adyghea was formed as an AO, i.e. an autonomous province in 1922, within the Kuban-Black Sea Region (Kuban'sko-Chernomorskaya oblast'). During most of

Soviet history it was part of the Krasnodarskiy Kray. Nowadays it is, as a republic in its own right, a member of the Russian Federation.

Adyghea was initially called the Cherkes (Adyghe) AO (with 'Adyghe' added between brackets), subsequently it became the Adyghe (Cherkess) AO (with 'Cherkess' between brackets), and finally its name was changed into just the Adyghe AO: (1) Cherkesskaya (Adygheyskaya) AO, (2) Adygheyskaya (Cherkesskaya) AO, (3) Adygheyskaya AO.

Adyghea was continuously enlarged during the Soviet period. By 1989 it was roughly three times larger than at the time of its founding (1922: 2,654 km²; 1987: 7,600 km²). The accretions consisted almost exclusively of southward extensions. In 1936, when Maykop and the Gyaginskiy rayon were added, the total surface became 4,654 km².

As most Circassians lived in the north of the Adyghe AO, the proportion of Circassians within Adyghea was negatively influenced by each extension. On the other hand, the extensions involved territory that had originally been inhabited by West Circassian tribes. However, the former West Circassian homeland was still vaster than the territory of the Adyghe AO at its maximum extent. Due to the 19th century exodus, the influx of Slavic elements and the numerous additions to the Adyghe AO, Circassians have now come to constitute less than a quarter of the population of their ancestral homeland.

The Adyghe AO had at first no real capital; until April 1936 Krasnodar, the capital of the Krasnodarskiy Kray, situated outside Adyghea, served as such. In 1936 Maykop (Circassian for 'Apple Tree Valley'), a town located in a recent accretion, became the capital. In 1987, Maykop had 145,000 inhabitants, less than 10 per cent of whom were Circassian.

Adyghea declared itself an autonomous republic in the summer of 1990 and has since been recognized as a republic by the Russian central government. Nevertheless, Adyghea is still in the grip of the old guard rather than under the spell of *perestroika* and *glasnost*'. The fact that, in March 1990, Aslan Alievich Dzharmov, the First Secretary of the Party Committee, was elected Soviet chairman, is a case in point.

Census return for Adyghea

In 1989 116,000 Adyghees lived in the Krasnodarskiy Kray, 21,000 of them outside, the remaining 95,000 inside the Adyghe AO. (see Table 1.)

Table 1. Some census figures for 1989 and 1970

	1989		1970
Russians	68.0%	294,000	71.7%
Adyghe	22.0%	95,000	21.1%
Ukrainians	3.2%	14,000	no data
Total population	432,000		386,000

The 1989 census also lists considerable numbers of White Russians (2,700), Tatars (2,700), Germans (1,800), Greeks (1,600) and Gypsies (1,100).

Shapsugia

If the Adyghe AO had been slightly extended to the southwest, down to the Black Sea south of Tuapse, then the province would also have encompassed the area inhabited by Shapsug West Circassians. The Shapsug region, like Adyghea, was situated within the Krasnodarskiy Territory. Before the Second World War these Shapsug had an administrative unit of their own, known as the Shapsugskiy Rayon. It was a modest rayon of only 582 km² with 6,500 Shapsug inhabitants in 1932. Today there are some 10,000 Shapsug living in this area, and they are one of the 16 groups participating in the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus. The Black Sea Shapsug have repeatedly tried to have their Shapsugskiy Rayon of the Period 1922–1945 re-established. Their territory is regarded as sacked soil by all Circassians. However, the leaders of the Krasnodar Territory do not give in, as they are afraid to create a precedent.

Karachay–Cherkessia

For the first time a Karachay-Cherkessian autonomous province was created in 1922. The largest group by far was formed by the Turkic Karachay, who in fact constitute a single people together with the Balkars. The East Circassians of that region were called Cherkes in Soviet terminology; they were also called fugitive Kabardians, as their ancestors had fled Kabardia at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Other significant groups in Karachay–Cherkessia include the Abaza, whose homeland is to the west of the town of Cherkessk, and the Turkic Nogay.

In 1926 this unit province split up into the Karachay autonomous province in the south and, initially at a low level, a Cherkes National District in the north. That district was promoted to the status of an autonomous province, i.e. an AO, in April 1928.

The capital of Karachaya, Mikoyan-Shahar, or Mikoyan-town, was founded in 1929. The capital of Cherkessia, founded only in 1931, was first named Batalpashinsk and renamed Cherkesk in 1939. These cities were quite small.

In 1943 the Karachay became the first people of the Caucasus to be subjected to deportation on the accusation of having collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War. The deportation was carried out in a cruel manner. Even the NKVD acknowledge an average percentage of casualties during this and subsequent deportations of about 25 per cent. The Karachay AO was dissolved and most of its territory, including Mount Elbrus, was joined to Georgia, who renamed the capital as Klukhori. Smaller parts were given to Kabardia and the Krasnodarskiy Kray. After the rehabilitation of the Karachay in 1956, they were allowed to return. Their autonomy, however, was never really restored. Before

deportation they had a province of their own. Afterwards the common Karachay-Cherkes autonomous province of the early 1920s was reinstated. Klukhori was then renamed Karachaevsk.

After the return of the Karachay, their autonomy was not only not fully restored, they were also treated as if their rehabilitation had been a mistake. No high officials of Karachay origin were appointed in Karachay-Balkaria until 1980, and memories of crimes they never committed were kept alive in publications and by means of monuments. Suslov, the one-time party ideologist, was instrumental in this prolonged torment of the Karachay.

It is little wonder that the Karachay recently began to demand the restoration of their autonomy. To achieve that goal the Dzhamagat Society was created in August 1989. A Karachay popular council declared a Karachay SSR, i.e. a Union Republic in November 1990 (18-11-1990). Two weeks later, this Karachay initiative was counteracted by a decision of the Karachay-Cherkes Soviet in Cherkesk who decided that the province was not to be divided, but as a whole to be raised to the status of direct member of the Russian Federation. In 1991, a Karachay committee, backed by the Karachay-Cherkes Soviet, asked for full rehabilitation and threatened to copy Chechen behaviour, should their wishes not be heard. Russians in Karachay-Cherkesia are against a partition as that would mean that the Zelenchuk area, where mostly Russians live, would be divided. In 1990, Party First Secretary Valentin Yegorovich Lesnichenko, obviously neither a Cherkes nor a Karachay, became chairman of the Soviet of Karachay-Balkaria.

In July 1991 (24-11-1990) an Association of Repressed Peoples of the former USSR was founded in Moscow representing the victims of Stalin's repressions. The seat of that confederation was Karachaevsk.

In 1989 the surface area of Karachay-Cherkesia was 14,100 km², and the total population numbered 414,000. The capital, Cherkesk, had a population of 107,000. The Karachay-Cherkes province then still formed part of the Stavropol'skiy Kray. In the most recent text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (December 1992), an undivided Karachay-Cherkes Republic is recognized as one of the 21 republics within the Russian Federation. (See Table 2.)

In 1989 there were also smaller numbers of Ukrainians (6,300), Ossetians (3,800), Tatars (2,500), Armenians (2,400), Greek (1,600), White Russians (1,300) and Kabardians (1,000).

Table 2. Census return for Karachay-Cherkessia

	1989		1970
Russians	42.5%	176,000	47.1%
Karachay	31.2%	129,000	28.2%
Cherkes	9.6%	40,000	9.1%
Abaza	6.5%	27,000	
Nogay	3.1%	13,000	
Total population		414,000	345,000

Table 3. 1989 census returns on ethnicity

	1989		1970
Kabardians	48.2%	363,000	45.0%
Russians	32.0%	241,000	37.2%
Balkar	13.4%	71,000	8.7%
Total population		753,000	588,203

Kabard-Balkaria

In 1921, a Kabardian AO, or autonomous province, was formed as a split-off from the Gorskaya or Mountain ASSR. In 1922 (16-1-1922), Balkaria also split off and came to constitute, together with Kabardia, the Kabard-Balkar AO. This province was raised to the status of an ASSR, i.e. an autonomous republic, in 1936 (5-12-1936).

After the deportation of the Balkar in 1944, the Kabard-Balkar ASSR was renamed as the Kabard ASSR. The new Kabard ASSR was smaller than the previous, joint ASSR. In the south a considerable area was joined to Georgia. At the same time, and under identical circumstances, Georgia also acquired districts in the southern part of the Chechen-Ingush republic.

After the rehabilitation of the Balkar in 1956, the previous situation was restored. The Kabard ASSR became the Kabard-Balkar ASSR, Georgia gave up what it had acquired, and the *Kabardinskaya Pravda* became the *Kabardino-Balkarskaya Pravda*. Nal'chik has always been the capital of Kabard(-Balkar)ia. In 1989 it had a population of 236,000. In 1989, the surface area of Kabard-Balkaria was 12,500 km². The 1989 census returns on ethnicity of the republic's inhabitants are shown in Table 3.

There also lived in Kabard-Balkaria in 1989 small numbers of Ukrainians (13,000), Ossetians (10,000), Germans (8,600), Turks (4,200) Armenians (3,500), Mountain Jews (3,200), Tatars (3,000), and Gypsies (2,400).

Informal congresses of both the Kabardian and the Balkar people each declared, in the early 1990s, their part of the Kabard-Balkar republic to be autonomous. Their point of view has not been adopted by the republic's council, which is dominated by the old *nomenklatura*. In the latest text of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, a united Kabard-Balkaria is mentioned as one of its 21 republics. A Balkar, B. M. Zumakulov, was elected First Secretary of the Party Committee in 1990, while in that same year the Kabardian V. M. Kokov was elected chairman of the republic's Soviet.

Tension over the issue of a division of the ASSR grew in 1992 between Kabardians and Balkars. The Balkars wanted to draw up borders in accordance with the situation immediately before their deportation. The Kabardians prefer to negotiate on the basis of the situation as it must have been in 1853. Balkars are reported to sometimes complain that Kabardians behave towards them as if their rehabilitation was a mistake.

One would like to know whether there are indeed no movements that want to

unite Balkars and Karachays on one hand and East Circassian Cherkes and Kabardinians on the other. I know at least of one concerted action of Karachays and Balkars. In June 1992, it was reported that Shanibov, chairman of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples, had expressed dissatisfaction with a trilateral treaty of Balkars, Karachays and Chechens. It would be of great interest to know the contents and purport of this treaty.

Prospect and problems

Circassians evidently want to survive as Circassians. This wish is an important prerequisite for achieving that goal, but there are serious problems:

- (a) The Circassians in the Caucasus are scattered over a large number of mostly non-contiguous areas.
- (b) In most of these areas Circassians form a minority.
- (c) There is not one single town with a majority Circassian population.
- (d) Circassian has lost its position in schools as a means of instruction. In the 1960s the use of Circassian as a means of instruction was discontinued. Of course, the Circassian languages were taught as a subject, but that is not enough.
- (e) There are many spheres of life from which Circassian was squeezed out of, or into which it was never introduced.
- (f) There are two literary standards, with orthographies which were partly devised on different principles.
- (f) There is a large diaspora, which has no tradition of being organized and which has a poor retention of Circassian, especially among the younger generations. Young expatriate Circassians outside the Caucasus have a first language (e.g. Turkish or Arabic) different from the young generations within the Caucasus, who lack a fluent command of Circassian.

Solutions

Being a friend to many Circassian, I venture to dwell on some of the problematic points I have mentioned. However, I am well aware that linguists, historians, and other professionals can only present their one-sided points of view and hope that the Circassians themselves come forward with all-round solutions, which more often than not will be compromises, and therefore hard to implement.

As a linguist, but also for practical reasons, I would advise the Circassians to find one common literary or standard language. In Soviet linguistic studies, much hot air has been devoted to the choice of the dialect designated to serve as the basis for the West and East Circassian standards. However, as far as I know, there was never a substantive discussion as to whether there should be one or two standards. There may be sound reasons for which the Circassians will choose to maintain their double standard, notwithstanding the fact that this promotes disunity and is economically problematic.

The writing system is the next issue. The choice between the continued use of a system based on the Russian Cyrillic alphabet or a switch to a Turkish Latin system is irrelevant for linguistic purposes but has fundamental implications for the political orientation of the Circassian people. Whatever choice is made, the writing system should be user-friendly and consistent. Whether or not the choice is made to continue a Cyrillic-based system (and I am an advocate of that choice), a long-term solution has to be found.

Constant changes in orthography almost force people who are not very versatile writers to resort to another language for writing, especially when an easy alternative presents itself.

Curriculum programmes should be developed which enable instruction in the native language through secondary education and beyond that for the humanities.

Towns and highways

If a people wants to survive in a modern society as a culturally and linguistically autonomous group, then it should have a city or large town of its own. Circassians, too, cannot do without a large town with a Circassian majority population and institutions, such as schools and civil services extensively using Circassian. Such a town might serve as a centre for the study and preservation of Circassian language and culture. Such a centre must be fed from the hinterland, but its influence will conversely keep its hinterland Circassian.

The Western European experience shows the need for urban centres serving regional language areas. With their capital of Reykjavík the 250,000 Icelanders have a much better future than the more numerous Welshman or speakers of Breton, both of which groups lack urban centres of even moderate size where Welsh or Breton are the medium of everyday communication. The death of Irish could have been delayed if there had been a genuine Irish speaking capital and if the Irish had switched to a less unwieldy writing system in time.

Only 11 per cent of the population of Maykop, the capital of Adyghea, is Circassian. In the Kabardian capital of Nal'chik the situation is better, though, there too, there is no Circassian majority. However modest, a majority Circassian speaking urban centre with mainly Circassian language institutions will help to ensure the survival of the Circassian nation.

It is not realistic to think that Circassians will ever be able to obtain one contiguous area by peaceful means or otherwise. However, one language, one strongly Circassianized town and an intensive network that sees to it that all Circassians in the Northern Caucasus can profit from extra-territorial cultural autonomy are indispensable prerequisites for the survival of Circassian culture and language.

But more than that is needed. Also essential are a quality newspaper and a local tabloid press and broadcasting and television in Circassian, and practical things like a Circassian highway linking Krasnodar, Maykop, Cherkesk and

Nal'chik, allowing a drive within a few hours from one extreme to the other extreme of the Circassian regions.

The diaspora

Not only must West and East Circassians come to terms with each other, they must also come to terms with their fellow North Caucasians who are not Circassians, primarily with the Karachay and Balkar, with whom they, possibly, will have to define borders, with the Russians with whom they also share territories, and with their diaspora.

The guesses one sometimes hears about hundreds of thousands of Circassians wanting to return to the Northwest Caucasus are unrealistic. Certainly some will return, but numbers will only become significant when there is a prosperous and stable situation in the area. For the time being, this is asking too much. Moscow's attitude will determine much of the overall situation, and Moscow does not seem to be inclined to make it easy for North Caucasians to organize things their own way. Furthermore, foreign powers will not be eager to intervene in North Caucasian affairs.

One should not forget that many Circassians in the diaspora are loyal and contented citizens of their respective countries, who often like to boast about their Circassian descent, but will not put their words into practice, once this becomes feasible.

I think so not only because I have lived in several Circassian communities in Turkey, but also because this is a common phenomenon. As long as there was no possibility for Alsatian parents in northeastern France to send their children to German-language schools, they complained about the lack of such facilities, and polls showed that most parents were in favour of getting them. Once such a possibility presented itself, numbers shrank to a negligible quantity. This does not mean that people are not talking seriously, but simply that they think and talk differently in different circumstances.

Therefore, whatever the Circassian inhabitants of the Northern Caucasus want to achieve, they must achieve it alone. They must not rely on a large influx of people or financial assistance from their diaspora. The more they achieve on their own, the more attractive their region will become for the diaspora Circassians. Problems now should be resolved based on the situation as it is, and on the needs of Circassians living in the Northern Caucasus, without overstressing possible wishes of Circassians living in Turkey, Syria or Jordan. Circassian language and culture have no real future in those countries. Motivating and organizing the Circassians in the Caucasus itself will be difficult enough. The Circassians that will return to the Caucasus will surely support compromise with their Caucasian brethren. Circassian unity in the Caucasus, enduring peace and a moderate return of diaspora Circassians may lead to a Circassian population in the Northern Caucasus of about one million within 50 years. To have this population speak Circassian and live as Circassians is something that can be achieved only by concerted effort.