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Circassian Question: Transformation of Content and Perception

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Abstract

Public space discussion of various aspects of the Circassian (Adyghe) problematics and the so-called Circassian question became extremely hot in the mid-2000s in connection with such a significant event like the Olympics 2014 in Sochi. The viewpoint that the Circassian question itself does not exist outside the Olympic agenda is prevailing in the Russian research environment.

The authors of the current article argue against the binding of the Circassian question exclusively to the Olympics and consider it in a broad historical and cultural context, tracing the transformation of its content and perception by the international community. The article gives a retrospective picture of the Circassian question in relation to the place, time and processes of both local and global significance, identifies the factors that influenced its coverage in a particular way and the main actors that determine the formation of public opinion.

The authors distinguish the main historical stages of development of the Circassian national movement, give a detailed description of each of them, reveal the basic mechanisms and features, examine topical Circassian issues. The article gives a large amount of data on the Circassian organizations, their appeals to the governmental and international organizations.

As follows from the analysis, the authors conclude that the sharp growth of the relevance of the Circassian problematics after 2007 is conditioned not only by the objective internal processes of the Circassian national movement, but even more by foreign policy factors and the Circassian question perception in the international arena has historically predetermined outcome.

Keywords: Circassians; Adyghe; Circassian Diaspora; Circassian National Movement; Circassian Question; Caucasus.

Introduction

The public space discussion of various aspects of the Circassian (Adyghe) problematics became extremely actual in the mid-2000s. The so-called Circassian question of the political status of the Northwest Caucasus [1] nowadays is familiar not only to the scientists, public figures, politicians, but also, thanks to the media, to the ordinary citizens at least of three continents.

Many experts attribute the actualization of the Circassian question with such a momentous event as the Olympic Games of 2014 in Sochi [2]. Indeed, one of the key demands voiced by Circassian activists was the abolition of sport mega-event on the "Circassian lands" where, they claimed, the Russian Empire committed "genocide of Circassians" in the 19th century.

The accentuation of political engagement of the theme leads researchers to the belief that the end of the Olympics also means the end of the international attention to the Circassian question. As Petersson stated: "once the Games are over they will risk returning to the status of an internationally little-known minority that they have basically had until just a few years ago" [3]. Moreover, the viewpoint that the

Circassian question itself does not exist outside the Olympic agenda is prevailing in the Russian research environment [4]. Research community does not take into account the nearly two-century history of the development of the Circassian question, accompanied by the transformation of its content and perception.

Materials and Methods

The structure of the article is set by an attempt to give the periodization of the phenomena in question, basing on the principle of historicism and using the comparative analysis. Tracing of changes in perception of the Circassian question was made possible due to the use of discourse analysis, and the constructivist approach enabled the identification of the main actors. The study is based on a wide range of materials in Russian, English and Turkish languages, including official documents and public statements by opinion leaders.

Discussion

Although the Circassian national movement and the Circassian problematics as a whole have attracted many researchers, there are still not enough of the objective generalizing works [5] that provide a retrospective picture of the development of the Circassian question in relation to the place, time and processes of both local and global significance. The aim of this paper is twofold – to examine the Circassian question in a broad historical and cultural context and trace the transformation of its perception by the world community. For this it is necessary to identify the factors that influenced the coverage of the Circassian question and the actors that determine the formation of public opinion.

Results

The Eastern Question and the Circassian Answer

The first half of the 19th century marked the emergence of the Circassian question in European agenda. By that time, the balance of geopolitical forces had changed significantly. The Ottoman Empire got, according to the figural expression of the Russian Tsar Nicholas I, the status of the “sick man of Europe”, which provoked intense conflicts of interest among the claimants upon the Ottoman legacy. The victory of the Russian Empire in the Russian-Turkish war of 1828-1829 caused the strengthening of its position in the region and in the international arena, making the competition between the great powers even more acute. In the Treaty of Adrianople it was said that “the whole Black Sea coast from the mouth of the Kuban to the pier of St. Nicholas inclusively would abide be in the eternal possession of the Russian Empire”.

This opened up new opportunities for Russian trade and led to a serious confrontation with the British Empire, which perceived the presence of Russia in the Black Sea and the Caucasus as a direct threat to its trade interests not only in the Ottoman Empire, but also in Iran and India. The great concern was caused by the growing influence of the Russian Tsar over Mahmoud II, backed by military support that Nicholas I gave to the Sultan in the Turkish-Egyptian war with the former Ottoman vassal Muhammad Ali. The presence of the Russian fleet and 30 thousand soldiers saved Constantinople in 1833 from occupancy by the Egyptian troops. In the same year the Unkiar-Skelessi treaty of peace, friendship and defensive alliance between the two empires was signed, engendering the official protests of England and France.

In this tense atmosphere of the Eastern Question aggravation, the British diplomats' attention was attracted to the possibility of usage of the Northern Caucasus Circassian tribes to counter the advance of the Russian Empire in the region. Construction and maintenance of national liberation movements in the Ottoman Empire territories was a trend of the time, and these developments could be successfully used against Russia. Constantinople became the center of Anglo-Circassian contacts, and the key person in the implementation of these plans was David Urquhart – turkophil and a leading Russophobia propagandist [6;7], a trade mission employee since 1931, and a Secretary of the British Embassy since 1935, who had gained the support of the King William IV himself.

Having experience of participating as a volunteer in the liberation war of Greece, Urquhart in 1834 went to the Circassians, urging them to unite in the fight against the Russians and promising them full support of Britain. He not only made every effort to consolidate disparate Circassian clans and tribal groups, creating for them a unity government, a declaration of independence and the national flag [8], but did everything possible to bring the international attention to the Circassian question.

Urquhart allies were Polish immigrants of Hôtel Lambert, for whom the Circassian question became a way of attracting the major powers for solution of the Polish question, as: “For them it was the most means of likely involving England in a dispute with Russia, which would serve in turn to make the restoration of Polish independence a live issue for the diplomats of Europe” [9]. Together they engaged in propaganda of the Circassian question through newspapers, magazines, and as of 1854 through Foreign Affairs Committees, together planned the creation of the Polish Legion in Circassia [10], together realised ambitious plans on sending Vixen (1836) and Chesapeak (1862) schooners filled with weapons to the Circassians, provoking an open confrontation between Russia and Great Britain [11]. These projects were supported by other Englishmen who were carrying on agitation work among the Circassians, supplying them with weapons, teaching the latest techniques of warfare, creating secret aid societies and so on [12]. The texts of their articles, speeches and memoirs have served as the source for the formation of ideas about the Circassian question in Europe [13].

However, despite the fact that “At the beginning, the project of unifying Circassians under a single government seemed quite simple and natural” [14], attempts to create a unified Circassia did not bring the expected result. According to Charles King: “For all the desire of outsiders to present the Circassians as a nation-in-the-making, boundaries and territorial control remained blurry at best” [15]. The interest of British elites to the Circassian question was gradually fading and up to 60th the attempts to extend the Circassian resistance turned into “the work of private individuals like Urquhart, supported by a small number of wealthy backers in such centres of industry as Newcastle or Sheffield, and not the result of Government action” [16].

Although the project of creating a separate Circassian state under the protection of the Ottoman Empire or Britain was actively developed during the Crimean War, the Treaty of Paris of 1856, due to the position of France, did not include a mention of the independence of the Circassians. Petitions sent by the Circassians to Queen Victoria and Napoleon III in 1856, 1857 and 1861 did not receive any official support. The Circassian delegation of 1862 consisting of Hacı Hasan and Haydar Kustaroklu Ismail also could not influence the high society decision-making of Britain and France, and even failed to make summit meeting. However, it fulfilled the other function as through the active mediation of Urquhart “The arrival in England of the two deputies, the first time a delegation of such a nature had been seen in this country, created, indeed, something of a sensation. Throughout their tour of the midlands and north, which took them also into Scotland, they addressed, with the help of their interpreter, large and enthusiastic audiences attracted in large measure by the exotic figures of the two Circassians” [17].

1864, the year of the end of the Caucasian war, summed up the first period of the actualization of the Circassian question. Mass migration of the Circassians into the Ottoman Empire was carried out with the encouragement of Russia and Turkey [18], as well as Britain, assisting in the development of the resettlement plan [19]. The Circassian resistance in the Caucasus became impossible. Russian diplomacy made every effort to prohibit the settlement of Circassian immigrants in the vicinity of its borders, and to prevent their return to the Caucasus, taking into account their anti-Russian sentiments and participation in all actions of the Ottoman Empire directed against Russia [20; 21]. According to Borov, after the end of the Caucasian War “Circassians in the Russian and the Ottoman Empire had no real power and opportunities for active and mass struggle for their own interests, and political ‘national movement’ of the Circassians did not develop either in the one or the other Empire” [22].

Caucasian national movement during the First World War

The next period of the Circassian question actualization [23] was due to the global changes in the balance of geopolitical forces, that clearly demonstrated itself during the First World War. It should be noted that since the center of the Circassian resistance moved to Turkey, the Circassian problematics closely intertwined with the common Caucasian one. This trend entrenched itself due to the expansive understanding there of the ethnonym “Circassian” as a representative of any North Caucasian people.

By this time, the process of institutionalization of the Circassian national movement had already begun in the Ottoman Empire [24]. Naturally, Germany, to whom Turkey was an ally in the World War I, took advantage of the Circassian question to achieve its military and political objectives. Even before the formal entry of Turkey into the war in 1914, realizing the strategic importance of the Caucasus the German authorities through the ambassador in Istanbul H. Wangenheim promised the North Caucasian diaspora leaders – Circassian Müşir Fuad Paşa and Dagestani Muhammed Fazıl Paşa – material support and information assistance in the organization of anti-Russian actions in the Caucasus, and after the war – the recognition of the independence of the Caucasus confederated state. Germany had also nurtured plans for creation the Circassian Legion to use it in fighting in the Caucasus [25].

In 1915 under the leadership of Müşir Fuad Paşa and with the support of the Ottoman government the Committee for the Liberation of the Caucasus (*Kafkasya İstiklâl Komitesi*) was formed, aiming at the formation of the Caucasian Confederation – a voluntary union of the North Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the same year the Committee sent a delegation [26] to Germany and Austro-Hungary, that voiced to the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the two states the requirements for independence of the Caucasus and the request for both moral and material support [27]. The opportunity to carry out agitation work among the North Caucasus emigrants in Germany and Austro-Hungary and in camps for Russian prisoners of war was given to the Committee. In 1916 the organization was renamed into the Committee of the North Caucasian political refugees in Turkey (*Türkiye'deki Şimali Kafkasya Siyasi Muhacirleri Komitesi*) and under this name participated in the Third Congress of the “Union of Nationalities” in Lausanne that had wide response [28]. The independent Caucasian state was represented at the conference by a Dagestani delegate Seyid Tahir El Husein and a Circassians delegate Ismail Bedanok, and at the same time, another Circassian delegate Aziz Meker met in Switzerland Vladimir Lenin to discuss the situation of non-Russian peoples of Russia [29].

In 1918 under the mediation of the Circassian diaspora leaders the first formal contacts of the Ottoman State first persons (Enver Pasha, Talaat Pasha and the sultan Mehmed V) with the representatives of the newly formed Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus were established. The Delegation of the Republic declared the need for the separation of the North Caucasus from Russia and its entry into confederal union with the South Caucasus peoples under the Ottoman protectorate, and asked the Young Turks for military, economic and political support [30].

To mediate between the national movements of the North Caucasus on the one hand, and the Government of the Young Turks and the Ottoman society on the other, in Turkey the North Caucasian Association (*Şimali Kafkas Cemiyeti*) was created. The Association included representatives of the bureaucratic and military elite of the empire and was directly supervised and funded by the Young Turk leaders Enver Pasha and Talaat Pasha [31]. It is due to the efforts of the Association members that the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus was immediately recognised by the Young Turks just after the promulgation in Constantinople of the Declaration of the proclaimed state. The military aid commitments were backed by the Ottoman military activity in the Caucasus in 1918.

Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus existed only a few years. After its defeat the Mountain government emigrated abroad and continued their activities promoting nationalist and anti-Russian ideas. The war loss withdrew Germany from the Great Game in the Caucasus, forcing to forget the Circassian question.

The "Circassian question": a new perspective

In Turkey all of the initiatives on the use of the Circassian national movement, came to an end with the formation of the national-oriented Republic of Turkey. When at the Lausanne Conference Lord Curzon raised the question of recognition of the Circassians as one of the national minorities, the chief negotiator of the Turkish delegation İsmet İnönü categorically rejected the proposal, saying: "The Circassians are our native brothers. We can not consider them distinctly from us as Christians and Jews, we can not separate them" [32].

Indeed, the new authorities had decided not to separate the Circassians from the Turks and chosen the assimilation policy, the ultimate goal of which was a creation of a monolithic Turkish nation. A series of drastic measures followed to establish linguistic and cultural hegemony of the Turks, identified with the Turkic ethnic group. All Circassian organizations and schools were closed, organizers and teachers were prosecuted, fourteen Circassian villages were subjected to forced relocations, and the Circassian students were being expelled from military schools because of a lack of belonging to the "Turkish race" [33]. An Abkhaz writer Ashanba Mehmet Fetkeri (Fetgerrey Şoenu) in his letter to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey about the mass deportations of the Circassians into Eastern Anatolia stated that their "only sin is Circassian blood, misconduct – upbringing in Circassian culture" [34].

The expression "traitor-Cherkessian" became widely used, referring to the personality of Çerkes Ethem – the head of the famous guerrilla movement Kuva-yi Seyyare, who slid into direct confrontation with the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. His name, along with another 86 Circassians, was included according to the Treaty of Lausanne in the list of the so-called "Hundredandfiftiers" (*Yüzellilikler*), who in 1924 were denied entry into the country (the ban lasted until 1938) [35].

In addition, the Circassians who turned to communist ideas, for example, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Turkey Ethem Nejat, were also persecuted. Ethem Nejat, along with his colleagues (among whom was the party chairman Mustafa Suphi), were killed while trying to escape from the country (the so-called "Slaughter of fifteen", *Onbeşlerin Katli* [36]). Final reprisal against the influential Circassian military and political leaders took place during the Izmir and Ankara trials in 1926 on the "Izmir attempted assassination" (*İzmir Suikastı*) of the national leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk [37]. The Circassian question began to be understood as a particular fault of the Circassian people in support of reactionary forces (*irtica*) and resistance to the Turkish nationalism.

The defeat of the Circassian national movement in Turkey had led to the fact that the Circassian question for a long time disappeared from the international agenda. However, at the same time in the Soviet Union the other process began, creating the prerequisites for the revival of the Circassian national movement. The Soviet nation-building, that didn't receive wide coverage in the Circassian studies, provided all necessary conditions for the development of the Circassian languages, cultures and national identities. As noted by Zeynel Abidin Besleney, "except for the Kabardian Circassians, pre-1864 Circassian society did not have a long tradition of independent statehood, nor a standing army, nor any sizable urban centres, nor a native bourgeoisie or powerful national élites. In this sense, from a modernist point of view, the autonomous republics created by the Soviets in the 1920s for various Circassian communities (Adygheya for the Adygheys; Karachay-Cherkessia for the Cherkess; and Kabardino-Balkaria for the Kabardians) may well have been considered as a starting point of some kind of nationhood" [38].

The Cold War and the revival of the Circassian question

Once more the interest to the Circassian question arose on the international scene in the 50-s of the 20th century as a consequence of the beginning of the Cold War. In 1952 Turkey joined NATO, which largely contributed to the formation of politicized anti-Soviet movement among Circassian immigrants and their descendants in Turkey. This movement was institutionalized in the form of various Caucasian Associations since the establishment of the Circassian associations in Turkey remained under a ban [39]. The Circassian organizations began to appear in the West: firstly in the United States and Germany [40].

Numerous North Caucasus cultural organizations drew special attention of the international community not only to the culture and history of the Circassians, but also to the political and legal status of the Caucasian peoples. They required the separation of the Caucasus, forming the idea of forcible takeover of the Caucasus to the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, of the alleged feud between ethnic Russians and the Circassians. Their work was in demand in the conditions of the Cold War. For example, in 1976 the

North Caucasian problematics were raised in the session of the US Congress, where the speech of a Governor of New Jersey Brendan Byrne on the oppression of peoples of the North Caucasus took place in connection with “the 58th anniversary of the independence of the peoples of the North Caucasus” [41].

It should be mentioned that the international agenda had practically no effect on the Circassian peoples of the USSR, as the real contacts between the Circassians of the Northwest Caucasus and foreigners were limited by the Iron Curtain. Interaction was held as part of special programs and regulated in accordance with the priority goals and objectives of the Soviet Union. For this purpose, the Association for Relations with Compatriots Abroad “Rodina”, established in 1955, and Kabardino-Balkaria branch of the Soviet Committee for Cultural Relations with Compatriots Abroad, formed in 1966, were used. The Soviet public organizations, research institutions, the Ministry of Culture and Education, radio and television committees, universities and other organizations took part in this work [42].

The activity of these organizations was so effective that they not only became a source of knowledge about the achievements of the Circassian culture and the Circassian history in a positive way, but also successfully spread socialist ideas. Due to them strong leftist movement unfolded among the Circassians in Turkey.

Parade of Sovereignties, Circassian Genocide and Adyghe Civilization

The starting point of the next stage of actualization of the Circassian question can be shifted to the second half of the 1980-s. The reforms of “perestroika” and “glasnost” policies, carried out on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union and coupled with the weakening of the central government, led to a resurgence of ethnic nationalism. This was made possible due to the developing of local peoples’ national consciousness during the Soviet era.

In 1990, Boris Yeltsin, then a chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFS), made a statement: “Take as much sovereignty as you can swallow” [43], that sparked the so-called “parade of sovereignties” of the autonomous republics.

In 1989 in Sukhumi at the First Congress of the Peoples of the Caucasus, with the active participation of the Circassian peoples was created the Assembly of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus. In 1990 at the Second Congress in Nalchik, it was announced that the Assembly was the successor of the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus. At the Third Congress in Sukhumi in 1991 the representatives of the twelve nations signed an agreement and adopted a declaration on the establishment of a sovereign nation-state formation – Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, into which the independent states of Kabarda and Adygheya were to enter. Characteristically, the representatives of the Caucasian Turkic peoples – the Karachai, the Balkars, the Nogais and the Kumyks – ignored this initiative.

In 1990 the sovereignty of Adyghe Autonomous Region was proclaimed, that turned into a republic within the RSFSR. In 1989-1991 the congresses of the peoples of Karachay-Cherkessia began to appeal to the government of the Russian Federation for the restoration or creation of separate autonomies. In 1990-1991 the Karachai, Cherkess, Abaza and Cossack republics were proclaimed. However the referendum of 1992 showed that the most of the population of Karachai-Cherkessia voted against the division. This led to the creation in the same year of a single Karachay-Cherkess Republic [44].

At the same time, the local authorities of Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygheya and Karachay-Cherkessia got actively involved into the politization of the Circassian question. They fixed the special status of the Circassian population in the republics and created the conditions for the gradual rapprochement of the republics with the Circassian population. A number of relevant laws, setting the Circassians in a privileged position in relation to other ethnic groups, were adopted by the local authorities. In 1992 the Supreme Council of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic passed a special resolution, which recognized the “genocide of the Circassian people committed by the Russian invaders” during the Caucasian War [45].

In 1994 the Kabardino-Balkar Republic Parliament appealed to the Federation Council and the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation to “recognize the genocide of the Circassian (Adyghe) people, facilitate in every possible way obtaining by them the status of the exiled people, assist the descendants of the deported Circassians who wish to return to their historic homeland” [46]. In this regard, Yeltsin issued a “Message to the Peoples of the Caucasus”, which said: “At the moment when Russia is building a state of law and recognizes the priority of universal human values, there is a possibility of objective interpretation of the events of the Caucasian War as a courageous struggle of the peoples of the Caucasus not only for survival in their native land, but also for the preservation of indigenous culture, the best features of the national character” [47].

Two years later, in 1996, the State Council (Hase) of the Republic of Adygheya passed a resolution, which appealed to the State Duma of the Russian Federation with a proposal to recognize the genocide of the Adyghe (Circassian) people during the Caucasian War [48]. In 1997 the National Assembly of the Republic of Abkhazia “giving the historical, political and legal assessment of the fatal events of the 19th century for the Abkhazians (Abaza) people” recognized “mass extermination and expulsion of Abkhazians (Abaza) in the 19th century into the Ottoman Empire as genocide – the gravest crime against humanity” and qualified the “deported Abkhazians (Abaza) in the 19th century” as refugees [49].

In the second half of the 90-s the requirements of the Circassian national movement found support in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), that appealed in 1997 to the international community, the Russian President, the State Duma and the Government of the Russian Federation to

recognize the Circassian genocide that took place in the 19th century, and assign the Circassians a refugee status, affording them with a dual citizenship and providing the opportunity to return to their historical homeland [50].

In the same year on March 24 the issues of the Circassian peoples were first touched on by the General Secretary of the International Circassian Association (ICA) [51] Alexander Okhtov in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 53rd Session, in Geneva [52]. A year later, May 28 at the meeting of UN Working Group on Minorities a Special Representative of the ICA Teuvezh Kazanoko urged the international community to pay attention to the problem of the Circassian genocide and Russia's unwillingness to facilitate the return of Circassians to their historical homeland [53]. On July 28 the very he at a meeting of UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations asked to put pressure on Russia on these issues [54], and at the meeting of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities (UN Commission on Human Rights) in August once again attracted attention to the Circassians [55].

At this time Circassian diaspora in Turkey showed enormous activity [56]. Its influence on the Circassians in Russia resulted in the development of the unifying tendencies and formation of the All-Circassian identity among Russian Adyghe peoples. However, the Soviet peoples nationality division turned out to be very stable. Moreover, expansive understanding of the term "Circassian" accepted in the diaspora turned out to be objectively impossible in Caucasian realities.

Under these conditions an idea of special Circassian civilization emerged among the Russian Circassians. In 1998 in Nalchik Amur Shodievich Bakiyev defended a thesis titled "The Circassian civilization". The author pointed out the period from the 10th century B.C. to the second half of the 19th century (1864) as the time of formation and establishment of the Circassian civilization. He distinguished separately the period of pre-history, covering the 5th-1st Millennium B.C. [57]. After Bakiyev a number of authors appeared who defended similar messages, in particular, about the "Circassian island civilization" [58]. The development of these ideas let the Russian Circassians talk about their special role in the world historical process, maintain their autochthony in the Caucasus and justify claims for greater rights (including territorial), especially in relation to the "alien" Turkic peoples – Karachai and Balkars.

Olympic flame on the Circassian lands

New impetus of actualization of the Circassian question was given by the decision of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 2007 of holding the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. If in the 90-s the tendency towards sovereignty and discourse about the genocide did not attract much attention of the Russian authorities, busy with solving more acute problems, in this period of time the Circassian question began to be perceived as a serious threat as it jeopardized Russia's image. As Petersson and Vamling pointed before the sport mega-event: "The Sochi Games are likely to be the occasion for the display of Russia as an indisputable great power, capable of organizing strong, secure and maybe even brilliantly staged Games. The Olympics will be intended to mark and symbolize the comeback of Russia at the supreme world stage, and underline the importance of the leadership of President Putin in this endeavor" [59].

It should be noted that the IOC decision was preceded by an open confrontation of the Circassian national movement and the Russian authorities in 2005-2006 on the issue of reintegration of the Republic of Adygheya into the Krasnodar Krai and the possible elimination of its status as a subject of the Russian Federation. Along with this, in the middle of the 2000s the first conflicts occurred, connected with the distribution of land between municipal units in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia in accordance with the Federal Law №131 [60]. As a result of the conflicts the Circassian people "division" factor acquired a new spin [61].

The decision to hold the Olympic Games attracted the international attention to the already exacerbated Circassian question and gave the Circassians, as Lopes stated, a "golden opportunity to reshape its ethno-political agenda and to give a new impetus towards the realization of all its aspirations" [62]. At this stage, as a result of the efforts of activists of the Circassian national movement the Circassian question reduced to three requirements: "recognition of the genocide, unification of Circassian territories in the homeland [63], and repatriation of the expelled population" [64]. The special points of the Circassian question during that period were: non-admission of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games in the "Circassian land" on "the bones of our ancestors", granting the Syrian Circassians refugees, who found themselves in severe conditions due to the military conflict, the right to return to their historical homeland.

Such a global power like the USA and the local one as Georgia became the main actors of the Great Game in the strategically important region. The Circassian agenda was formed in the international arena by numerous Circassian organizations of the USA, Europe, Turkey and, to a lesser extent, Russia and the Middle East. They were trying to put pressure on the Russian authorities and the authorities of countries of residence in order to, first of all, achieve recognition of the genocide and create conditions for the resettlement of the Circassian diaspora into Russia. The organized by the Circassian national organizations wave of applications and requirements shifts the focus of public attention on the "Circassian genocide".

At this period appeared a significant number of Western (in rare cases Russian) scientific articles and journalistic pieces, reasoning the applicability of the term "genocide" to the Russian policy in the Caucasus in the 19th century. A lot of web-portals, broadcasting this position, arose in the Internet [65]. In social networks dozens of thematic groups, spreading calls for a boycott of the Olympics in Sochi, were being created [66], and the same tendency was observed in blogs [67]. According to Hansen, "Circassian civil society actors and

cyber-activists have not only been able to establish a counter-public sphere or develop a new space for action, but also increasingly have been able to move key issues from Circassian spheres into the wider public sphere of mainstream Russian media and politics" [68].

In 2006-2007 various international organizations openly involved into the activity of the Circassian question actualization, acting as initiators or sponsors of the public events. The locomotive of this course became the Jamestown Foundation (USA), which among others initiatives organized the well-known event of 2010 in Georgia "Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes: The Circassians & the Peoples of the North Caucasus Between Past and Future". This conference, at which the official call for the Georgian authorities to recognize the Circassian genocide was announced, is considered to be the starting point of the so-called "war of conferences" – confrontation of interpretations of the history of the Circassians and Caucasus with the support of state structures of the leading actors (USA, Russia, Turkey, Georgia) [69].

The adoption by the Georgian Parliament of the Resolution on the recognition of the Circassian genocide in May, 2011 became a kind of watershed and transferred the Circassian question into a new dimension, legalizing it and at the same time radicalizing it. Furthermore, Georgia for some time became the main defender of the interests of the Circassians, providing the Circassian national movement with political and informational support [70].

However, the public interest to the Circassian question disappeared after the end of the Olympic Games. The analysis of the web-space in Russian, Circassian, Turkish, Arabic and English languages reveals that the Internet activity peak occurred in 2010-2012, and reduced to minimum in 2104. For example, in the English language segment only one-third of the total number of sources on Circassian problematics remained functioning. Even so, the demands on the official recognition of the Circassian genocide remained as the core theme [71].

Conclusion

The stages of development of the Circassian question and the transformation of its perception clearly show the certain constants in the international position on the Russian presence in the Caucasus. Coming out of thin air two centuries ago, the Circassian question was repeatedly actualized in connection with geopolitical turbulence, provoking crises in international relations. Becoming a tool for political pressure in the struggle for dominance in the strategically important region, the Circassian question promptly withdrew into the shadows at the stabilization of the situation.

At present the initiative in the actualization of the Circassian question goes on to the numerous associations (especially in the Circassian diaspora), supported by relevant actors. Their interaction with the main international non-governmental organizations and structures becomes a way to influence decision-making at the governmental level. The main platform for the actualization is virtual reality, into which the political activity center shifts.

It should be noted that the implementation of all requirements of the Circassian question in its modern interpretation will inevitably lead to conflicts, connected with land redistribution. The tension will increase between Adyghe and Turkic population of the region. Given that the land issue today has no solution, acceptable to the population of Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, it can be assumed that such a confrontation could go into a phase of open conflict, as already happened in 2006. In turn, the aggravation of inter-ethnic relations in such a multiethnic region as Caucasus may lead to a series of tragic consequences. As one of the leading experts on the Circassians Stephen Shenfield noted: "My 'gut reaction' to this is that the world does not need yet another nationalist movement, yet another ethno-national state. Especially in areas of high inter-ethnic tension like the Caucasus, such state-building projects inevitably entail more ethnic cleansing, more injustice and bitterness, more bloodshed" [72].

To prevent this negative scenario the scientific community should consolidate efforts for objective and unbiased study of the Circassian history and modernity. The excessive politicization of the Circassian nation-building project as a part of a larger geopolitical game is not conducive to peace and stability in the Caucasus.

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16. Brock. Op. cit. Quotation p. 426.
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51. The decision to create ICA with headquarters in Nalchik was announced at the I World (international) Circassian Congress, May 19-21, 1991 in Nalchik. The decision itself was taken a year earlier at

the conference of the Circassian organizations, held with the active participation of the Circassian cultural centers of Holland and FRG in the Netherlands. In 1994 the ICA became a member of the UNPO.

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66. Such as: www.facebook.com/NoSochi2014, www.facebook.com/NoSochiOlympics2014, www.facebook.com/May21org, www.facebook.com/WalterRichmondTheCircassianGenocide, and many others.

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Черкесский вопрос: трансформация содержания и восприятия

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Аннотация. Обсуждение в публичном пространстве различных аспектов черкесской (адыгской) проблематики и так называемого черкесского вопроса стало крайне актуально в середине 2000-х гг. в связи таким знаковым событием как Олимпиада 2014 г. в г. Сочи. В российской исследовательской среде превалирует мнение о том, что сам черкесский вопрос не существует вне олимпийской повестки дня.

Авторы данной статьи возражают против привязки черкесского вопроса исключительно к Олимпиаде и рассматривают черкесский вопрос в широком историко-культурном контексте, прослеживая трансформацию его содержания и восприятия мировым сообществом. В статье дается ретроспективная картина развития черкесского вопроса в привязке к месту, времени и процессам как локального, так и глобального значения, выявляются факторы, повлиявшие на освещение черкесского вопроса в том или ином ключе и основные акторы, определяющие формирование общественного мнения.

Авторы выделяют основные исторические этапы развития движения, дают развернутую характеристику каждому из них, вскрывают основные закономерности и отличительные особенности, выделяют актуальные вопросы черкесов в России и диаспоре. В статье приведено большое количество данных о черкесских организациях, их обращениях в адрес правительственных и международных организаций.

В результате проведенного анализа авторы приходят к выводу, что резкий рост актуальности черкесской проблематики после 2007 года обусловлен не столько объективными внутренними процессами развития черкесского национального движения, сколько внешнеполитическими факторами, а восприятие черкесского вопроса на международной арене имеет историческую заданность.

Ключевые слова: черкесы; адыги; черкесская диаспора; черкесское национальное движение; черкесский вопрос; Кавказ.