

symbols. Although national and ethnic symbols can influence shaping of ethnic and national consciousness, their transformation is rather difficult. Also, artificially created symbols are often unable to replace deep-rooted symbolism.

The authors conclude that today the level of ethnopolitical mobilization of the Crimean Tatars is quite high. Crimean Tatars are integrating into Russian society, but at the same time they retain their identity and are a political subject. Turkey influences the Crimean Tatars at the cultural and ideological level, seeking to increase interethnic conflict in Crimea, and thereby expand Turkish sphere of influence. By providing assistance to the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, the Turkish elite destabilizes political situation in Crimea. This, in turn, may destabilize domestic political situation in Russia, thus facilitating Turkey to enhance its own status in the Black Sea region.

SVETLANA AKKIEVA. CONFLICTOGENIC FACTORS OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN KABARDINO-BALKARIA // *Article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, public organizations, funeral rites, COVID-19, extremism, repatriation, land disputes, celebration of the accession of Balkaria to Russia.

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Abstract. The Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR) has civil society institutions that have become active actors in public life. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant change in the way of holding annual history and culture related festivities and mourning ceremonies, which were taking place online via social networks.

The Circassian public organizations consider repatriation of the descendants of the Muhajirs to the North Caucasus, assistance in their return and adaptation as one of the most important objectives. In Kabardino-Balkaria vast support is given to repatriates from Syria. In 2020, the Circassian public organizations provided material assistance to Syrian repatriates; many of them are engaged in business, trade, etc., but the pandemic has led to a decline in their income. The International Circassian Association (ICA) works to create a positive image of Kabardino-Balkaria and Russia among representatives of the Circassian diaspora abroad, encourages children of muhajirs travel to the Republic for recreation, taking them on sightseeing tours.

In 2020, Balkar public organizations and activists once again raised the issue of establishing a Remembrance Day of the accession of Balkaria to Russia, but to date there is no official celebrations. With no official Remembrance Day, the Balkars find themselves in a position of inequality in relation to other peoples of Russia.

The religious situation in Kabardino-Balkaria in 2020 remained stable, with the Spiritual Administration of Muslims (SAM) of Kabardino-Balkaria revisiting the issue of reforming funeral rites aimed at banning costly commemoration, the reform that has been protracted for 16 years.

Also, there is a complex land problem in Kabardino-Balkaria. It is aggravated by the fact that the collective farmers (kolkhozniks) in the KBR have not received plots of land; the land is leased from large tenants, which gives rise to conflicts.

The author of the article notes that authorities of Kabardino-Balkaria, given the multi-ethnic character of the Republic, pay particular attention to the formation of civil society institutions as one of the most important actors. The government of Kabardino-Balkaria includes the Ministry for Interaction with Civil Society Institutions and Ethnic Affairs, a special department that deals exclusively with the issues of interethnic relations. In addition, there is the Government Commission on Interethnic and Interfaith Relations in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, an advisory body, which was established to provide recommendations for devising and implementing state policy in the field of interethnic and interfaith relations in the Republic [1]. Also, Commissions on interethnic and interfaith relations have been established and now operate in all administrative and city districts. The meetings of the commissions are held at least twice a year and as needed.

For many years, the Kabardino-Balkarian Cultural Foundation has been addressing issues of interethnic relations. Moreover, the Public Chamber of the KBR, headed by Kh. Berdov, is also dealing with the interethnic related problems. An Inter-commission Working Group, which is supposed to harmonize interethnic and interfaith relations in the Republic, has been established as part of the forth Public Chamber of the KBR (formed in November 2018). It comprises 15 members of the Chamber, who represent different ethnic and confessional groups in the population of the KBR [2].

The author states that at the end of 2020 there were over 40 non-governmental organizations of ethno cultural orientation in Kabardino-Balkaria [3], which were actively involved in the public life of the Republic. To a certain extent, the state also financially supports their activities. In 2020, 20.3 million roubles were allocated to 38 non-profit organizations, including those of an ethnocultural orientation. There were several Kabardino-Balkarian organizations among them: the Kabardino-Balkarian regional public movement for strengthening civil unity and

harmonization of interethnic relations "Our Republic" (400.25 thousand roubles); the Union of public associations "International Circassian Association for the Unity of the Circassian People and the Development of Ties of the Circassian Diaspora with the Historical Homeland" (410 thousand roubles); the Kabardino-Balkarian regional public organization to assist repatriates "Perit" (Avangard) (320.88 thousand roubles); the Kabardino-Balkarian regional public organization to promote the development of Circassian young people "Circassian Renaissance" (80 thousand roubles), the Kabardino-Balkarian public fund of culture (1166.582 thousand roubles); the regional branch of the "Union of Armenians of Russia" (270 thousand roubles); and the Tersko-Malkinsky District Cossack society (500 thousand roubles) [4].

Since 1992, the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Caucasian War is annually held in Kabardino-Balkaria on May 21. However, in 2020 the Circassian Day of Mourning was celebrated online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The leaders of the Republic and heads of public organizations laid flowers near the "Tree of Life" memorial, the place of annual memorial service. On May 21, President of the International Circassian Association (ICA) Hauti Sokhrov informed TASS that all planned events took place online via videoconferences, online lessons and various meetings. Circassians from Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Europe and many other regions of Russia took part in these activities [5]. Circassian activists and young people created and posted on social media a number of thematic videos and encouraged residents of Kabardino-Balkaria and other regions of the North Caucasus to remember the victims of the war while staying at home. On May 20, Arsen Kanokov, Member of the Federation Council from Kabardino-Balkaria and former Head of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic from 2005 to 2013, gave a speech dedicated to the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Caucasian War. In his speech he noted that the nation had "dwindled in numbers" and became divided, and although the

people had been scattered throughout 40 countries as a result of the cataclysms of the 18th – early 20th centuries, they retained their language, culture and traditions. Kanokov pointed out that the diaspora had adopted and absorbed all the best features of their neighbours. He also emphasized the importance of an unbiased and honest discussion on the issue of the Caucasian War and its consequences, as well as the repatriation related issues, which to date had not been properly addressed [6].

The author singles out activists, who draw public attention to relevant problems of repatriation, cultural integration and preservation of the native language, i.e. Madina Khakuasheva, PhD in Philology; Ramazan Tlemeshok, a leading employee of the Institute for Humanities Research of KBSC RAS and Chairman of the Adyghe Khase of Adyghea; and Abubekir Murzakanov, Head of the Adyghe Heku Circassia. Since the COVID-19 pandemic affected all countries of residence of the Circassians, in 2020 the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the Caucasian War was held online. The Federation of Caucasian Organizations of Turkey (KAFFED) made a statement demanding the recognition of the genocide of the Circassians by all states and, in particular, Russia and the countries of residence of the Circassian people. As noted by Asker Sokht, Chairman of the Adyghe Khase of Krasnodar Krai, all public organizations maintain this position [6].

The author moves on to discuss the 2011 outbreak of hostilities in Syria that forced many citizens to flee the country; some of them, the descendants of the Muhajirs, have settled in Kabardino-Balkaria. In 2015 alone, the Republic received more than two thousand people [7].

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kabardino-Balkaria, a total of 2,302 refugees from Syria received permits for legal stay and residence in the Republic from 2012 to 2020. Of these, 495 people received a temporary residence permit, 834 people were granted a residence permit, and 306 people had the right to apply for Russian citizenship [8]. In the 2018/2019

academic year, there were 138 students from among repatriates from Syria at Kabardino-Balkarian State University (KBSU) and 11 students studied at the Agrarian University. The authorities of the Republic are consistently working on the social and cultural adaptation of students [9]. More than 170 Syrian children attend schools and kindergartens in the Republic. The authorities, businessmen from among the Circassians and even concerned citizens provided all kinds of assistance to the repatriates and helped their swift integration into society. The purchase of over 80 houses in different localities of the Republic for the repatriates was funded from extrabudgetary resources [10]. Migrants have since adapted, many started their own businesses in trade and public catering, which provided them a source of income. However, many of them had to shut down their businesses due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Activists from the “Aid to Syrian Compatriots” group and the “Perit” public organization helped the Syrian repatriates by providing them with 170 food packages; the KBSU students also received 33 food packages. Compatriots living in Moscow and abroad have also helped Syrian repatriates by raising \$ 1,200. In order to help refugees, a charity event has been organized by the head of the KBR with the participation of local entrepreneurs. The “Perit” organization provides assistance in obtaining documents needed to apply for residence permit [8]. The International Circassian Association (ICA) carries out significant work assisting repatriates from Syria and the foreign Circassian diaspora in general. Within the framework of the “Kabardino-Balkaria and Compatriots: People-to-People Diplomacy Removing the Boundaries” project [11], in 2019, 38 children from Syria spent their vacation in a Nalchik holiday house; 80 schoolchildren from Turkey, Jordan and Israel were to have spent their vacation in the KBR, but the trip was cancelled due to the pandemic. According to ICA President Kh. Sokhrov, the practice of children from different countries spending vacation together meets the objectives of the project and contributes to building a positive

image of Kabardino-Balkaria and Russia in general among compatriots abroad [12]. Soon after Adygea in 2019, Kabardino-Balkaria approved the program aimed at encouraging compatriots living abroad to resettle to the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (July 31, 2019) [13]. The program scheduled for the period 2019–2022 aims to attract 200 compatriots (50 qualified specialists and scientists and 150 members of their families). For these purposes 1,748,400 and 991,000 roubles are allocated from the state and regional budgets, respectively [13].

The author notes that for a long time, Balkars and Balkar public organizations have been working to establish a memorable date for accession of Balkaria to Russia. Once again, the issue of establishing a holiday – the Day of the Balkar people joining the Russian Empire – was discussed during a regular meeting of Balkar activists held in Nalchik on January 9. Announced through social networks, the event was attended by deputies of the Parliament of the KBR, heads of a number of Balkar localities and active citizens. The people gathered once again stated that without approved date for celebration, the Balkar people remain in a position of inequality in relation to other peoples of Russia.

The author points out that the Balkar people were displaced from 1944 to 1957. Throughout these years neither history of the Balkars was studied nor were they mentioned in any historical writings. In 1957, the 400th anniversary of the accession of Kabarda to Russia was celebrated in Kabardino-Balkaria, with the Balkars joining the Kabardians for celebrations. The joint festivities made it look as if the Balkars had become part of Russia at the same time as the Kabardians. It was not until 2007 that the Balkars held a celebration marking the 180th anniversary of the accession of the Balkar people to Russia [14]. In January 1827, the Balkar and Digor princes (*knyazs*) submitted a petition to the Russian emperor requesting accession to Russia. In 2012, the Balkars celebrated the 185th anniversary of this event [15], and five years later there were festivities in honour of the 190th anniversary [16]. In 2017, the archival service of the Republic

organized an exhibition in honour of the 190th and 460th anniversaries of the accession of Balkaria and Kabarda to Russia, respectively [17]. Since early 1990s, the accession of Kabarda to Russia has been deemed as a military and political alliance between Kabarda and Russia [18].

In January 2018, a group of Balkar activists appealed to Yuri Kokov, the head of the KBR at that time, requesting to officially set the date for celebration of accession of Balkaria to the Russian Empire. Kokov ordered a working group to be formed, but since then the matter has been under review. However, receiving no response from the authorities of the Republic, the Balkar activists appealed to the federal authorities. According to Dalkhat Baidiev, a member of the Parliament of the KBR, a corresponding decree must be issued on the matter. He also notes that, in fact, the Balkars have been celebrating this memorable date for over 15 years and are now requesting merely its official recognition. Baidiev believes that celebration of the accession of the Balkars to Russia used to be held against the wishes of the authorities of the Republic, but now an understanding at the level of the Government of the KBR has been achieved [19].

The author notes that the day of the revival of the Balkar people and the restoration of the Balkar statehood is celebrated on March 28. On this day in 1957, by the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, the Balkar people were allowed to return to their historical homeland after 13 years of deportation to Central Asia. The decree thus restored the Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1994, this date was commemorated after Valery Kokov, the then President of Kabardino-Balkaria, signed a corresponding decree [20]. In 2020, Kazbek Kokov, the President of Kabardino-Balkaria, announced on Instagram that the celebrations would be postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak. He congratulated the Balkar people and noted that this holiday represents the restoration of historical truth and justice, the steadfastness and eternal value of unity, friendship and brotherhood of the peoples

of Kabardino-Balkaria. Residents of the Republic left numerous comments, showing their gratitude and support [21].

Religious situation

The author notes that in January 2020, Muftiate of Kabardino-Balkaria again spoke out against the pompous mourning ceremonies, still prevalent in the Republic. Back in 2004, the Religious Administration of Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria (RAMKB) adopted an order “On Regularisation of the Funeral Rite in Kabardino-Balkaria”, which prohibited financially burdensome commemorations, but to no avail. Despite the ban, people continue to draw up lists of mourners who have made donations and to give of alms (*sadaqah*) according to these lists. It should be noted that it is primarily practiced in the Kabardian villages. The practice of serving meals to the mourners and distributing food bags also continues. The RAMKB has banned commemorations on the third, seventh, fortieth and fifty-second days after death, as well as commemorations marking six months and a year from the death. People nonetheless hold fast to the traditions, even though sometimes they have to take loans in order to foot the bills for expensive funeral rites. Imams are working to cease these traditions, some of them even refuse to take part in funeral ceremonies, but it seems impossible to turn the tide [22].

The COVID-19 pandemic has made significant changes in the funeral services. At first, not realizing the danger, people did not wear masks while visiting the house of the one deceased, thus leading to an increased incidence of diseases. Islamic personalities of Kabardino-Balkaria and law enforcement agencies worked together to increase awareness of the dangers of coronavirus and rules of conduct while in public places. At last realizing the danger, people reduced their visits to the families of the deceased, shifting to expressing condolences via phone calls and visiting relatives after the funeral. However, the decision of

the Council of Ulama of the Religious Administration of Muslims of Russia (RAMR) [23] to allow the cremation of those who died from coronavirus in the North Caucasus was virtually ignored [24]. People have complained about the prohibitions on traditional elements of the funeral rite imposed by the WHO and Rospotrebnadzor, as well as the requirement to bury the dead without ablution and a shroud. On social media they express their concern that rash policies and unnecessary prohibitions are aggravating low spirits of those of the older generation, who are not as afraid of dying as of being buried without the rituals under Muslim custom.

Prevention of extremism and terrorism

Since early 2000s, attacks by various religious extremists and terrorists have been reported in Kabardino-Balkaria. To date, the largest attack took place on October 13, 2005, when the security forces of Nalchik were set upon by armed fighters. As a result of the attack, 35 law enforcement officers and 15 civilians were killed, and 129 security officers and 66 civilians were injured. During the fighting in the city 95 militants were killed. From 2006 to 2008 the situation in terms of number of extremist and terrorist attacks remained relatively quiet; from 2009 to 2013 the Republic became one of the hotspots in the region. In 2014–2018, largely facilitated by counter-extremism measures and the efficient work of law enforcement agencies, the situation was back to normal; although some attacks were still reported, their frequency decreased significantly.

In March 2020, the security forces of Kabardino-Balkaria discovered that a terrorist attack was being planned. The three alleged militants were killed in a shootout that followed an attempt to apprehend the suspects near the village of Kremenchug-Konstantinovskoye in the Baksansky District [25]. Two of them, residents of the Dygulubgey village, were previously convicted of illegal trafficking in explosives and

explosive devices. That special operation was the first in the Baksansky region since February 2019.

According to law enforcement officers, on July 22, four members of ISIL were killed in the Chegemsky region during the course of an attempted arrest; the fighters had been planning a terrorist attack. In a camp equipped for a lengthy stay near the village of Lechinkai, armed people opened fire at the demand to surrender and were killed by the security forces [26].

The author praises measures taken by law enforcement agencies that have significantly contributed to the decrease of terrorist activities since 2014; the criminal underground in the Republic has been virtually eliminated. The lingering threat of extremist and terrorist attacks calls for constant improvement of work with regard to the evolving situation. In this connection Kabardino-Balkaria has adopted a programme on prevention of terrorism and extremism that is scheduled to continue from 2021 until 2025. Chairman of the Government of Kabardino-Balkaria A. Musukov signed a corresponding Government Resolution No. 288-PP on the State Program of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic for Prevention of Terrorism and Extremism in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic of December 16, 2020 [27]. Programming practices of solving the problem will ensure implementation and monitoring of consistent, coherent, purposeful and proactive measures aimed at preventing terrorism and extremism.

The author points to the fact that land issue is one of the most complex issues in Kabardino-Balkaria. For instance, members of the Petrov collective farm (*kolkhoz*) went to a rally in an attempt to defend the farm. According to the protesters, raiders under the guise of investors were trying to seize 13.5 thousand hectares of farmland in the villages of Yekaterinogradskaya and Priblizhnaya in the Prokhladnensky District. Since appeals to the municipal authorities did not help, people pleaded with President of Kabardino-Balkaria Kazbek Kokov and the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic to protect the collective

farm from land fraud, referring to the 49-year ban on the sale of agricultural land in the KBR imposed by Valery Kokov, first President of Kabardino-Balkaria [28]. Chairman of the collective farm A. Degtyarenko claimed that since 2016 the collective farm had been facing financial difficulties due to drought and had not received any subsidies. Under these circumstances, the funds were used to pay wages, foot utility bills, purchase diesel and seeds and repay the loan to avoid penalties. The money was also used to pay for leasing, gas and electricity. Having examined all the transactions, the investigators confirmed that the funds were not misused, but pointed out that taxes were priority. The management of the farm had hoped that the inclusion of the collective farm in the investment program would all the problems plaguing it, but instead faced even bigger challenges after the alleged investor had deceived them. Putting their trust in the investor, the collective farmers approved the foundation of LLC “Agrocomplex Ekaterinogradskiy” with 100 percent share of the collective farm in August 2019. The enterprise was supposed to sublease 7,033 hectares for a five-year term for the purposes of investment programmes for livestock. After signing the agreement the chairman of the collective farm discovered that his copy of the agreement was essentially different from the one for which the villagers had voted. In the copy he received, the rights for the entire 13.5 thousand hectares of the collective farm land were transferred to the research and production complex LLC “Novoye Vremya” (established in February 2020) for a 42-year term [29]. The chairman of the collective farm sought the assistance of law enforcement agencies [30]; litigation is still ongoing.

The author emphasizes that the case of “Agrocomplex Ekaterinogradskiy” has not only an economic but also a political background [31]. According to Boris Pashtov, the leader of the Communists of Kabardino-Balkaria and member of the Parliament of the KBR, the Petrovs collective farm and “Lenintsy” are the only two collective farms in the Republic. The Petrovs collective farm employs mainly Russians. Losing a source

of income, people seek to leave the Republic, which leads to a change in ethnic composition of the population of the region and undermines its consolidation. In addition, small farms are significantly more sustainable than agricultural holdings and adequately create jobs for the rural population. Regional branches of the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia advocate the return of the land to collective farmers and are ready to provide assistance in the matter [32].

For many years residents of the Sovkhoznoye village have been bringing up the issue of land. The land is leased by several owners and over two thousand hectares of unregistered land is being cultivated without bidding, it is unknown who manages it. The villagers request that the land be divided into plots and auctioned and the locals be allowed to participate.

The author concludes that in September 2020, the land issue was discussed at the meeting of the Association of Victims of Political Repression in Nalchik. Head of the Association M. Shakhmurzov stated that the land seized by large landowners following the reorganization of collective and state farms, should be returned to the residents of Kabardino-Balkaria. Head of the Council of Elders of the Balkar People I. Sabanchiev also noted that there is a need for a conference on the land issue [33].

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