

The Caspian Region

Volume II

The Caucasus

Edited by Moshe Gammer

2004
 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

The Congresses of the International Circassian Association: Dilemmas of an Ethno-National Movement¹

Chen Bram

Founded at the beginning of the 1990s, the International Circassian Association (ICA)² brings together Adyghe and Abkhaz activists from the republics and districts in which Adyghe (including Cherkes, Adygheans and Kabardians) and Abkhaz (Abkhazians and Abaza) reside in the North Caucasus, as well as activists from the Circassian diaspora throughout the world.³

The ICA's activities have given rise to a number of questions about continuity and change in the Caucasus: the ICA represents a new phenomenon, and has embraced novel formulas for action. At the same time, it has rallied to a banner last unfurled by the United Circassian Front during the final stages of their war against Russia in the nineteenth century – although the Circassians have never had a common political entity of their own.⁴

The aim of this chapter is to review the evolution of the ICA, the congresses it has held, its components and activities. In particular, it will examine several major dilemmas relating to the ICA's activities. More noteworthy than the mere novelty of the ICA's activities is the insight this provides into broader issues, and the fact that it leads one to engage in a yet broader discussion of the Circassian question – a discourse on the Circassians in the Caucasus against the background of the developments and ethnic conflicts in the region, and an examination of the Circassians as a diaspora people.

CIRCASSIANS, ADYGHE AND ABKHAZIANS

The Adyghe and the Abkhaz are indigenous Caucasian people. In the wake of the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, a good part of the

Circassian people fled/left their homeland, settling eventually in various areas within the Ottoman Empire. It is difficult to determine the number of emigrants who left at that juncture: estimates range from hundreds of thousands to 1.5 million persons.⁵ The majority of Circassians have lived within the confines of the present day Republic of Turkey, although a small portion of them were settled by the Ottoman authorities in other parts of the empire – primarily in regions that were far from the centre in order to counterbalance local forces that were straining against Ottoman rule.⁶ Thus, some Circassians settled east of the Jordan river,⁷ in various parts of Syria – particularly on the Golan Heights – and in the eastern Galilee in Israel. During the twentieth century, secondary migration patterns produced Circassian communities in Europe and the US.

Demographic statistics on concentrations of Circassians throughout the world are virtually non-existent. Various estimates place the number of Circassians in the North Caucasus today at around 0.5 million people.⁸ The largest Circassian population resides in Turkey – probably 2–3 million – it is, however, very difficult to arrive at any estimate of this population.⁹ Populations of under 100,000 reside in Syria and Jordan, with significant numbers residing in, for example, Germany, Holland, the US and Yugoslavia.¹⁰ These communities are primarily Adyghe, with some Abkhaz as well. The largest population of Abkhaz outside the Caucasus is in Turkey – about 350,000.¹¹

The Circassians who remain in the Caucasus are nowadays divided among three autonomous republics within the RF. According to the last Soviet census, approximately 570,000 Circassians lived in the Caucasus in 1989.

About 391,000 Kabardians (roughly 93 per cent of the Kabardians in the Caucasus) resided in the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic. Accounting for 48.2 per cent of the population, the Kabarda – one of the Circassian tribes – were, thus, the largest nationality in the republic. In Adyghea some 95,000 Adyghe were counted, or 76 per cent of those who identified themselves as 'Adyghe'. They constitute 22 per cent of the population of Adyghea, the majority being Russian. At the time of the census Adyghea was an Autonomous District. In 1990 it declared itself an Autonomous Republic and this status became official some time later. In Karachai-Cherkessiia about 40,000 Cherkes were counted, making up 9.6 per cent of the population.¹² Karachai-Cherkessiia had been an Autonomous District too, which declared itself an Autonomous Republic. Circassians also inhabit the area of Shapsugia, on the shores of the Black Sea, which is part of the Krasnodar *krai* in the RF. A small Circassian community lives in the city of Krasnodar, as well as in other cities and towns in the *krai* – 21,000 according to

the 1989 census. Additional groups live in various parts of the Caucasus, and in the major cities of Russia.

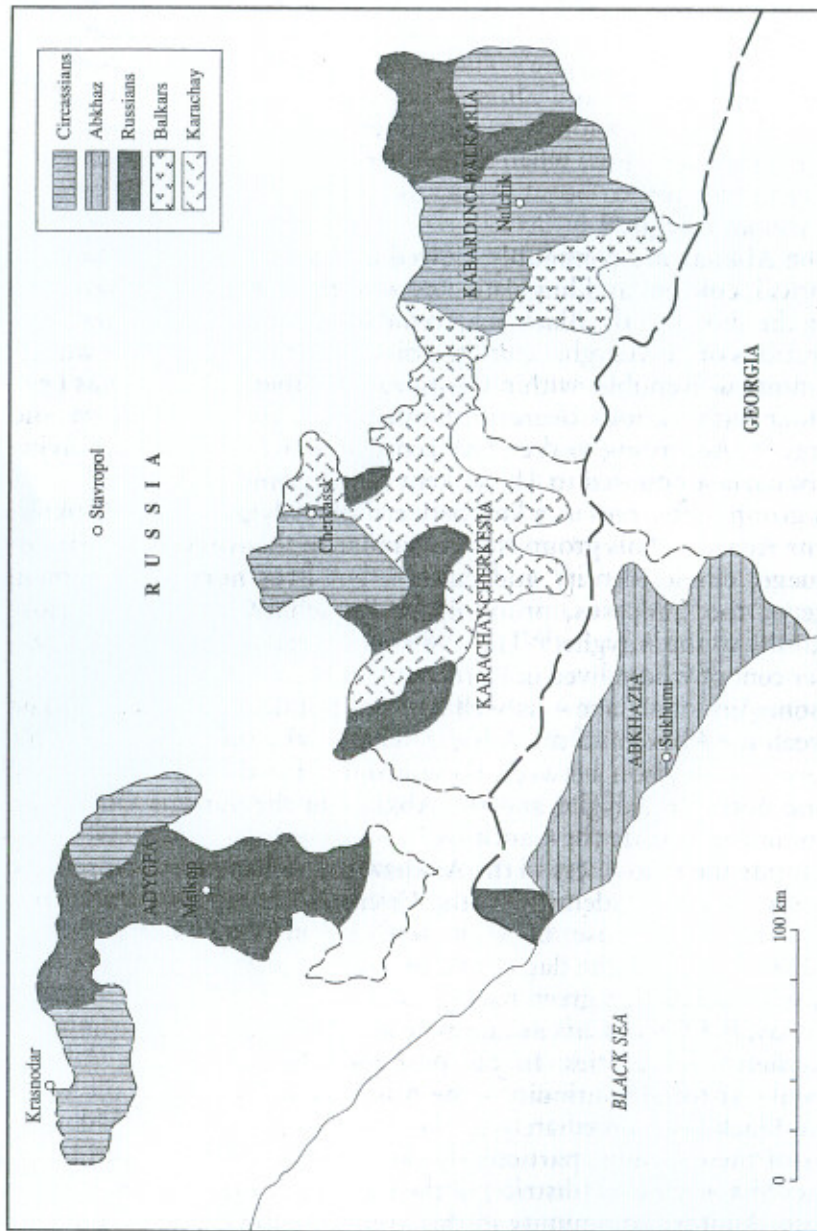
The majority of these populations speak one of the various dialects of the Adyghe language (Kabarda, Western-Adyghe, etc.), and identify themselves as 'Adyghe'. The term 'Adyghe' implies a common identity and outlook and hints at the ethical-behavioural code that unites all Adyghe – though in a number of distinct variations – the *Adyghe Khabzah*. Thus, when a member of this people encounters a person he suspects to be an insider, he will ask in his native tongue, 'Are you an Adyghe?'

The Abkhaz are commonly viewed as a separate people, in close historical, cultural and linguistic ties with the Adyghe. Abkhazia lies along the shores of the Black Sea, to the south-west of the largest concentrations of the Adyghe. Until the dissolution of the USSR it was an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. Since then a conflict has been seething with various degrees of intensity between Abkhazia and Georgia.¹³ According to the 1989 census 93,267 Abkhaz then living in Abkhazia amounted to 18 per cent of the population.

A group that serves as a link between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz are the Abaza.¹⁴ This group is quite similar to the Abkhaz in terms of language, ethnic identity and culture, but lives north of the main range of the Caucasus, primarily in Karachai-Cherkesia, in close proximity to the Adyghe.¹⁵ The 1989 census reported 33,000 Abaza, 88 per cent of whom lived in Karachai-Cherkesia. Social ties – including some intermarriage – as well as local political cooperation exist between the Abaza and the Adyghe. This is why they have been able to serve as a liaison between these groups, for the Abaza also live among both the Adyghe and the Abkhaz in the various Circassian communities outside the Caucasus.

Despite their closeness to the Abkhaz, the Abaza like to emphasise their own separate identity; at the Circassian congresses this manifests itself in the use of their separate symbols alongside the Abkhazian flag and the flag common to all the Adyghe (12 stars and 3 crossed spears on a green background).

Today, the Great Caucasian range separates Abkhazia from most Circassian communities. In the past the Abkhaz and the Adyghe enjoyed territorial continuity – the Adyghe dwelling along the shore of the Black Sea immediately to the north of the Abkhaz. The remnants of these groups, particularly the Shapsug, can be found in the greater Shapsug *raion* (district) of the Krasnodar *krai*, near the city of Tuapse. Another community in this area were the Ubykh, who lived in between the Abkhaz and the Adyghe in the district surrounding the city of Sochi. The Ubykh thus formed a cultural, linguistic and geographical bridge between their two neighbours.¹⁶ As a result of the



Map 4: The North-Western Caucasus: Ethnic Composition

Russian conquest in the nineteenth century, the Ubykh ceased to exist as a separate group with its own language. Today, the descendants of the Ubykh live among the Adyghe in Turkey.

The term 'Circassian' has had a number of different meanings and shades of meaning at different times and in different places. In Russia and the Caucasus the name takes on a double meaning: it is used generally to refer to all the Adyghe, and specifically to identify the Adyghe-speaking residents of Karachai-Cherkessia. Thus, although actually an external label, great weight is attached to the term 'Circassian', since this is the principal label by which the Adyghe are referred to. Their name for themselves, 'Adyghe', is not even familiar to many of those who use the term Circassian freely. As a result, this originally outsiders' label has to a large extent been adopted by the Circassians/Adyghe themselves, both in and outside the Caucasus.¹⁷

In the Middle East, on the other hand, the term 'Circassian' refers to any person of Caucasian origin, and particularly to Adyghe and Abkhaz. In fact, this is the name commonly used everywhere to refer to the diaspora communities of the north-western Caucasus. Indeed the name has also, to a large extent, been adopted by these communities themselves, and expresses the strong affiliation and cooperative organisational efforts between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz outside the Caucasus.

The complexity and multi-level uses of these terms stem from geographical and historical links but, as one would like to suggest, they also enable context-dependent choices in relation to identity. Against this background, the fact that the ICA – the organisation that unites Adyghe and Abkhazians – has adopted the name 'Circassian' is of enormous significance, even if it is dominated by the Adyghe. Thus, on the one hand, the ambiguity occasioned by this multi-level use is exploited by the movement's leadership, for it enables the movement to simultaneously be an Adyghe organisation and a general organisation that unites Adyghe and Abkhaz-Abaza. On the other hand, the name is indicative of the partnership between the various Adyghe sub-groups, and the Abkhaz and Abaza.

THE ICA AND ITS CONGRESSES

The idea of establishing a comprehensive worldwide organisation of all the various Circassian communities throughout the world was raised in a meeting of representatives of the Circassian diaspora in Europe and Turkey, that was held in Holland in 1989.¹⁸ Following that, the first congress of representatives of the Circassian communities of the Caucasus and the diaspora was held in Nalchik, the capital of the

Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Republic, in May 1991. At that congress the ICA was officially established, its leadership chosen, its various internal institutions established, and a decision was taken to hold a congress of the organisation every two years.

The second congress of the ICA was held in 1993 in Maikop, the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Adyghea. In 1995, a congress was to be convened in Abkhazia, but due to the conflict there and the general situation in the Caucasus at that time, it did not take place. Thus, the third congress of the ICA was held a year later, in the summer of 1996, in Cherkessk, the capital of the Karachai-Cherkess Autonomous Republic. The fourth congress of the organisation was initially scheduled to take place in the Shapsug Autonomous District, but was held, due to organisational difficulties and, apparently, political considerations, in the city of Krasnodar in 1998. On the final day of the congress, representatives of the participating delegations visited Shapsugia. The fifth congress was held in Nalchik between 27 and 30 July 2000 under heavy security provided by the Kabardino-Balkarian authorities (which reflected the tension in the region following the outbreak of the second war in Chechnya). Zaurbay Nakhatova, a member of the Kabardino-Balkar parliament, was chosen as the new ICA Chairman and replaced Boris Akbashev.¹⁹

Participants in the ICA congresses represented Circassian communities from the Caucasus and elsewhere. The delegations from the Circassian/Adyghe communities in the Caucasus were divided according to official Russian/Soviet classifications: Kabarda, Cherkesia, Adyghea, the Shapsug district, representatives of the Circassian community of Krasnodar and representatives of other communities in Russia (for example Moscow and St Petersburg) formed by 'internal migration'. There were also delegations from Abkhazia and of the Abaza from Karachai-Cherkesia. Representatives of the Circassian diaspora in the Middle East included a delegation from Turkey, which was actually composed of several groups from different regions (these included Abkhazians from Turkey), a delegation from Jordan (which, at least at one of the congresses, included representatives of two competing Circassian organisations in that country), a delegation from Syria and one from Israel. There were also delegations from communities in Europe and the US.²⁰

At the second congress of the ICA in Maikop, a delegate from Yugoslavia also participated. But under the prevailing state of affairs in the region in 1996, no representative of this small community arrived.²¹ There has been a great deal of continuity among the congress participants, since in many instances the same delegates continue to represent their communities time after time; on the other hand there has also been some turnover.

In some cases, ambiguity has arisen concerning the method of electing delegates. Because no uniform system of election has been instituted, differences have occurred between the better organised communities (the so-called Adyghe Kh'ase, meaning Circassian council – a term generally used in the diaspora to refer to local or regional organisations), and those with state-wide or national representation. As it stands, the ICA generally equates voting mandates with the size of each delegation. Thus, the last congress in Krasnodar approved a new division of mandates. For instance, four mandates were accorded to the representatives of each of the autonomous republics of the Caucasus, four to the Abkhazian delegation, nine to the representatives from Turkey, four to those from Syria (one of which goes to the Syrian Abaza community), and so forth. Among the groups to be accorded mandates will be the representatives of Rodina – the organisation in the Circassian republics responsible for maintaining contacts with Circassian diaspora.²²

The ICA has a permanent secretariat under the direction of a chairman elected during the course of each congress. This secretariat is currently based in Cherkessk. The first chairman of the ICA was Iurii Kalmykov, who resigned from this position shortly after the second congress in Maikop in the summer of 1993, having been appointed in April 1993 as Minister of Justice of the RF. The chairmanship was restored to Kalmykov after he stepped down from the Russian government in December 1994, in consequence of events in Chechnya.²³ Since Kalmykov's death in 1997, his former deputy, Boris Akbashev, has served as chairman.

Despite the confusion regarding the manner of selecting representatives, and other organisational difficulties, the ICA has succeeded in laying the foundations of continuity and organised activity through a novel combination of an established organisation based on the representation of constituents, with by-laws and resolutions decided by vote, and the more voluntary character of Circassian community organisations outside of the Caucasus. This voluntary character, along with the network of informal ties that exist between the various community activists, constitutes an important factor in the establishment of the ICA (this in spite of the numerous difficulties and tensions inherent in these renewed affiliations). This network of relationships offers a counterweight to the overly bureaucratic and convoluted character of Russo-Soviet political culture and organisational attitudes that some of the Circassian delegates from within the Caucasus brought with them to the ICA.

The congresses were planned in cooperation with the autonomous republics in which they took place. This cooperation was particularly evident in the congresses of Maikop (1993) and Cherkessk (1996).

The atmosphere prevailing at these meetings reveals the many changes that have occurred in the region, and testifies to the long road traversed by the Circassian congresses. The first congress was organised in relative secrecy, in an atmosphere of apprehension and doubt as to the significance of the congress, to Moscow's reaction to it, how it would be viewed by other ethnic groups in the Caucasus, and how local Russian leaders might react to it. The Maikop congress was planned in close cooperation with the Republic of Adyghea, and great emphasis was laid on the ceremonial aspect and on publicising the existence of the congress, both locally and with sights set on Moscow. In Cherkessk in 1996 as well, there was cooperation between the ICA and the local Autonomous Republic, but the grave situation in the Caucasus weighed heavily on the proceedings – the congress followed closely upon the outbreak of hostilities in Abkhazia, and in Chechnya. The importance of the congress was also diminished by the general economic recession undergone by the region during that period. The arrangements for the Krasnodar congress were the direct result of political cooperation between the leadership of the ICA and Kondratenko, the governor of the Krasnodar *krai*. Indeed, one could say that it was the government of the Krasnodar *krai* that hosted the congress and the governor was anxious to be seen as the event's patron.

THE ICA'S OBJECTIVES: BETWEEN CULTURAL REVIVAL AND NATIONAL REAWAKENING

Boris Akbashev, the current president of the ICA, noted in an article published in 1998 in the ICA journal that the organisation's goal was 'to serve the idea of the cultural and historical revival of the Circassian people'.²⁴ Earlier in the article, Akbashev remarked that 'it is very difficult to preserve ourselves as a united people today, without well defined and understood national interests and a general national idea which would unite us'.²⁵ Akbashev was summarising a several years long foundation-laying process. In similar terms the Circassian congresses have, since their inception, been moving along a continuum between clearly nationalist-oriented activity and congresses with primarily social and cultural aims.

The objectives, declared at the congresses over years of activism, can be divided into a number of categories:

- To create a movement that will reinforce Circassian identity, and will act to strengthen ties between Circassians the world over – particularly between Circassians in the Caucasus, and the Circassian

diaspora – through the establishment of a world Circassian movement. Beyond this objective lies the concept of working towards the return of Circassians from the diaspora to the Caucasus.

- More immediately: to get recognition of the 'genocide and exile of the Circassian people' implying recognition of the movement, and of the Circassians' right to return to their homeland, and to foster their own identity.²⁶
- Social and particularly cultural goals, including efforts to promote, resuscitate and preserve the language and traditions, and general activities in the field of education and culture. A specific goal in the cultural realm which has encountered numerous difficulties, is the aspiration toward the creation of a unified written Circassian/Adyghe language. At the moment two close written languages exist – Western Adyghe and Eastern Adyghe (Kabarda). The differences between them are brought into sharper relief by dissimilar spelling systems. There are also voices advocating latinisation of the language (a demand coming mainly from Turkish Circassians).
- Political objectives related to the current situation in the Caucasus, like the status of the Circassian-Adyghe republics and the issue of Abkhazia.

These categories are interconnected, and quite broad by nature. They contain internal factors related to what is going on within each community, as well as an attempt to achieve external recognition of the Circassians, and acknowledgement of the dilemmas they are trying to deal with by various bodies – international organisations, like the UN, and national governments, particularly that of Russia.

The objectives of the ICA, summarised briefly above, have been expressed at most ICA congresses in lengthy documents bearing a broad and vague character. Furthermore, many of the ICA's goals overlap with those of other bodies – either organisations within the autonomous republics in the Caucasus where Circassians live, or various organisations represented in the ICA. This duality has produced covert tension in the operations of the ICA. Is the primary aim the holding of these conferences *per se*, letting the relationships and interaction established between different groups promote these goals, or is the ICA a practical organisation taking concrete actions to achieve its purposes? The results of this tension, as well as the accomplishment in holding the congresses were best expressed by Shami:

Although little programmatic action is adopted, and less executed, the meetings provide the opportunity for the development of a common discourse, one with clear overtones of nationalism.²⁷

Yet, what is precisely the essence of such a 'nationalism'? And what does it lead to?

A comparison with movements of other diaspora peoples evokes another question: political independence of the Adyghe areas has not been marked as a goal by the ICA; nor, for that matter, was the unification of these regions within the RF. Formally, it appears that the ICA has not been challenging the political *status quo* with regard to the status of the Circassians in the Caucasus. The nationalist objectives of the ICA have been limited to raising general awareness of the Circassian issue, and to resolving specific problems such as a change in the status of Adyghea from an Autonomous District to that of an Autonomous Republic, or an improvement in Shapsugia's position within the Krasnodar *krai*. The question of repatriation was also presented as an issue to be advanced through cooperation with the Russian authorities.²⁸

The nature of the organisation's activity and the definition of its goals thus raise the question as to whether this is a national movement, a movement for cultural and social revival, or a combination of both – that is, an ethno-national movement that takes a pragmatic approach, whose activities remain mainly within the cultural and social domain but proceed on the basis of a nationalist rationale. In light of worldwide developments, such as globalisation, the unification of Europe and a concurrent ethnic awakening, the question arises as to what extent the ICA's activities evidence a new direction in ethno-national movements in general in the admixture of a moderate, pragmatic political approach, in a combination (inherent in the ICA's components) that engenders, as shall be seen below, countless paradoxes of multiple identities manifesting themselves simultaneously at the congresses, and a few types of interrelated discourses carried on simultaneously on the ethno-national, local (the various autonomous republics), regional communities, and in the diaspora communities and the socio-cultural levels. Traditional nationalist discourse stimulated the ambition for a great uniformity of all the components of the discourse, in an attempt to amalgamate the nation. In this case, it seems that even if aspirations to uniformity are sometimes expressed at the different kinds of discourse, in actual fact the actions are taken in acceptance of more pluralistic basic precepts – both in regard to the ICA itself, and even more so in reference to the issue of the ethno-national identity of the Circassian people.

AMBIGUITY AND DUALITY: AN ADYGHE OR A CIRCASSIAN MOVEMENT?

As already noted, the ICA unites the various groups of the Adyghe, the Abkhaz and the Abaza – although to a great extent the Adyghe are dominant. Probing the conduct of the ICA, one is led to question the framework in which it is constructed, in particular with regard to the cooperation between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz. The partnership between these two groups within the framework of the ICA may be analysed from two points of view: the factors which brought about and facilitated this partnership, and its significance for the participants in the ICA.

The war in Abkhazia played a major role in this partnership, although its seeds had been planted long before – during their shared exile and even before that, in the cooperation between the Adyghe, the Abkhazians and the Ubykh in their resistance to the Russian conquest in the nineteenth century. The close ethno-linguistic relationship of the Adyghe and the Abkhaz, and their long historical bonds are at the root of their partnership. Emigration intensified the strength of these bonds, as Adyghe-Abkhaz communities were formed in the Middle East. In some cases, adjacent Adyghe and Abkhaz villages were established; in others mixed villages were set up. The shared destiny and cooperation between these two groups of émigrés is expressed directly in their partnership within the ICA, although, as shall be seen below, current developments in the Caucasus have played an equally important role.

Structural Factors and Common Components of Identity

The shared experience of exile is crucial to understanding the bond between Adyghe and Abkhaz. In Turkey, all immigrants from the Caucasus are viewed as Circassians. Thus, a common Circassian identity has developed among those immigrants, in parallel to a tendency to preserve the separate identity of each specific group. In Turkey, Caucasian immigrants do not learn their traditional languages, and one of the principal tools for maintaining their identity is the immigrants' club. In these clubs, and in other organised community activities, both Adyghe (that is, the various groups of Adyghe) and Abkhaz participate.²⁹ Their joint endeavours contribute to the shaping of a common over-all group identity, without obstructing the existence of their separate identities. These activities are usually carried out in Turkish, both because this is the language common to all the various groups, and as a direct result of Turkification and a concomitant erosion of command of the Caucasian languages – a

trend that strengthens the bonds among all the immigrants from the north-western Caucasus. As the status of the original languages weakens, cultural symbols become increasingly central for the preservation of identity. Renewed ties with the Caucasus have served, in recent years, as an additional channel for identity preservation among some of the diaspora Circassians.³⁰

As a distinct group in the diaspora the Abkhazians stand out mainly in Turkey. In Syria as well as in Jordan, where their numbers are smaller, the Adyghe and the Abkhaz live together. This integration is carried on in the Circassian communities of Europe and the US. In most communities the Adyghe are in the majority, which is underlined by the fact that Abkhaz sometimes learn the Adyghe language.³¹ In some cases the Abkhaz and the Abaza have become integrated into the Adyghe Circassian communities while in other, communes of Abkhaz have maintained their distinct group identity.

The partnership of the Circassians in the diaspora, and their critical role, especially that of their largest group, the Circassians of Turkey, in the establishment and activity of the ICA, have undoubtedly contributed to the reflection of this relationship within the ICA, and to its evolution as a 'Circassian' ICA – with all of the duality of meaning inherent of the term, as denoting the Adyghe on the one hand, and all the residents of the north-western Caucasus on the other.³²

Political Factors and Symbolic Components

Cooperation between the Abkhaz and the peoples of the North Caucasus existed prior to the establishment of the ICA. In 1989, in reaction to the implied threat that Georgian nationalism posed to Abkhazia, the Assembly of North Caucasian Peoples was founded. In November 1991, this body was reformulated as the Third Congress of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus convened in Sukhumi. At this congress, the Assembly was redefined as the Confederation of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (CMPC). 'The new confederation', declared the statement, 'is the legitimate successor of the independent North Caucasian Republic (Mountain Republic) created on 11 May 1918.'³³ The CMPC included representatives of 16 peoples from the North Caucasus (among these were the Adygheans, the Abaza, the Kabardinians, the Cherkess and the Shapsug) as well as the Abkhazians.³⁴

The intensification of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus limited the scope of the CMCP's activities, which certainly merits separate study.³⁵ For the purposes of this article, it suffices to note that around the mid-1990s the organisation adopted a more inclusive appellation

– the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples (CPC)³⁶ – but it was also around this time that the organisation's influence began to wane. An important factor in its decline was the CMCP's vague framework with regard to defining the identity of its members. It seems that the shared North Caucasian identity is a minor component in the concrete ethnic identities. This is particularly true with regard to the affinities between the peoples of the north-eastern and the north-western Caucasus.³⁷

Against this background, it seems that the union between the Adyghe (and their subgroups) and Abkhazians within the framework of the ICA followed a trend which began with their concurrent cooperation within the CMPC, and later became their major channel of cooperation. Colarusso observes that the Abkhaz, 'as most of their kinsmen from the North Caucasus massif have already come to realise . . . must federate with other people to survive'.³⁸ Developments since these words were penned have only served to reinforce their significance. Whereas the CMPC provided a loose framework for such a federation, the cultural and historical affinities and the strong ethnic ties between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz served as a more solid foundation for a federation assured of continuity, and less subject to external influences. As noted above, this cooperation developed within the framework of the CMPC, not in opposition to it. Iurii Shanibov, the president of the CMPC, was an active member of the ICA, and took part in its conferences. The cooperation between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz has thus been expressed within the framework of the ICA, which enabled it to emphasise ethno-national and not only purely regional elements. This union supplied the participants with a strong position with regard to regional cooperation, as was clearly manifested in the cooperation between the ICA and the administration of the Krasnodar *krai* at the last conference.

Collaboration with the Adyghe, and with Northern Caucasians generally, has been virtually the Abkhazians' sole option in their struggle with the far more powerful Georgia, given the fact that Russia does not support their position and their increasing international isolation. This policy was clearly discernible when fighting erupted in Abkhazia in August 1992. Shanibov's organisation, the CMPC, played an important role in enlisting volunteers from the North Caucasus to fight alongside the Abkhazians. (Their participation in the fighting apparently influenced the outcome.) Nevertheless, the ICA also had an effect. After all, most of the volunteers were Adyghe who came from the Adyghe communities of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkesia and Adyghea. A number of activists at the Circassian congresses in Maikop (1993) and Cherkessk (1996), including some who had served as commanders of these volunteer

forces, claimed that these volunteers, who numbered in the thousands, were a decisive factor in some of the most important battles in the conflict. The UN report on events in Abkhazia, for example, records the involvement of volunteers from the North Caucasus in the conquest of the city of Gagra on 1 October 1992.³⁹

The influence of Circassians from the diaspora upon the ties between the Abkhazians and Adyghe has been discussed above. This influence took concrete form in the Circassian agitation over the issue of Abkhazia, expressed in protests and demonstrations (one such demonstration took place in front of the UN headquarters in New York), and recruitment of aid and assistance for Abkhazia. These actions strengthened the Abkhaz-Adyghe partnership, and institutionalised it.

The events in Abkhazia were of central importance at the Circassian congress in Maikop in 1993. Fighters returning from these battles were honoured throughout the congress. A great many of its resolutions dealt with the situation in Abkhazia and called on Russia, Georgia, the West and the UN, to end the conflict by recognising the right of the Abkhazians to self-determination in their homeland, and condemning Georgian aggression.

This alliance was given a cultural-symbolic dimension at the conferences. Thus, for example, a Kabarda music composer was presented as a composer of the Abkhaz people as well; an Abkhaz vocalist sang in Adyghe, and Adyghe singers performed songs dedicated to the Abkhaz people. This akin cultural framework is thus being used to build a symbolic bridge that fortifies the joint organisational framework within which the distinct identity of each member group is preserved.

Practical considerations apart, the symbolic significance of the collaboration between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz is not a matter to be viewed lightly. The symbolic dimension is critical to understanding the Adyghe involvement in this conflict, and sheds light on an additional facet of this alliance. The Abkhazians have viewed the conflict as a struggle for survival, first and foremost the survival of their culture and language. The Circassians generally, and diaspora Circassians particularly, viewed this struggle as a continuation of their own nineteenth-century struggle for survival against Russia, and at the same time as an heroic manifestation of the struggle to preserve Circassian identity, both in the Caucasus and in the diaspora. For the Adyghe, the war in Abkhazia was both a symbol and a conduit for nationalist feelings. The demographic realities of the north-western Caucasus – the Russian supremacy and the Adyghe status as a minority in their own homeland – created a situation in which meaningful change in the region was inconceivable. Moreover, many Adyghe activists expressed the feeling

that the Adyghe 'had already paid a heavy price for their unbending struggle – the genocide of the Adyghe ensuing from the exile/transfer of most of the population, which involved the deaths of tens of thousands of victims'.⁴⁰ These feelings were expressed particularly with regard to the contemporary Chechen struggle, emphasising the very different strategic choice made by the Adyghe.

Nevertheless, a forming national movement needs a struggle, and in this sense the war in Abkhazia became a national struggle around which the Adyghe ethno-national movement could unite. This does not mean at all that the Adyghe were not profoundly involved in and deeply concerned for the Abkhaz. Rather, it means that simultaneously to this concern, the circumstances enabled the Adyghe to re-channel nationalist feelings to an adjoining theatre, where the enemy were the Georgians rather than the Russians. This term applies both to Russia as a vastly superior power, and to the Russians who have for more than a century co-existed (or rather multi-existed) with the area's original population – or what was left of it. One result of this co-existence is the adoption by a significant portion of the population of a certain layer of the Russian (and in previous years Soviet-Russian) identity, at least in the sense of citizenship and occasionally also as an additional layer of cultural identity among the educated strata.

In addition to being an outlet for nationalist feelings reinvigorated by the disintegration of the USSR, the war in Abkhazia was a consolidating factor and stimulated the ICA's establishment. This could be seen in the manner in which participants in the congresses related to the war – emphasising motives of heroism, sacrifice and military success. From a political perspective, involvement in the Abkhazian conflict both extended the power of the ICA, and supplied the Adyghe in their various autonomies with an additional bargaining chip *vis-à-vis* both Moscow and other groups, especially when the situation in Chechnya escalated. Thus, the Adyghe involvement in Abkhazia served as a tool for both achieving local political goals and conducting a policy of relative conciliation and understanding with the Russians.

The coordination of the Circassian congresses was, at the initial stages, a primarily Adyghe initiative. As the Abkhazian conflict escalated, cooperation with the Abkhazians solidified and the Abkhaz became an integral part of the ICA. In the 1998 congress in Krasnodar, for example, the Abkhazian delegation included a number of ministers and senior officials, including the deputy prime minister.⁴¹ Still, this structure of the ICA also creates many dilemmas, principally revolving around the question: to what extent can the ICA be a movement with Adyghe nationalist and, especially, cultural goals,

while having to overcome pre-existing splits within Adyghe society, and at the same time be a movement which unites Adyghe and Abkhazians? These Adyghe nationalist-cultural aims have been promoted by the main activists in the Congress – most of them Adyghe – while the Abkhaz have been promoting Abkhaz culture within their own structures (usually represented in the ICA).⁴²

It seems that the logic underlying the union between the Adyghe and Abkhazians as a structural basis for the IAC, their common background and shared destiny in the diaspora notwithstanding, is primarily political – that is, based on the exigencies engendered by the current situation in the Caucasus. To a certain extent, the ethno-national duality of the participants is mirrored in the duality of the IAC's aims. On one level, it is an ethno-national movement with political objectives. The emphasis here is on the Circassian – read, Adyghe–Abkhazian – aspect of the movement, and specific goals vary in accordance with the local context of the different partners. On another level it is a movement which places greater stress on the cultural and social renaissance of a diaspora people – and here, the focus is on the Adyghe. The challenge faced by small nations trying to overcome these discordant themes makes their joint endeavours worthwhile, perhaps even essential, despite the dilemmas occasioned by such efforts.

THE ICA AND THE AUTONOMOUS REPUBLICS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS

The Adyghe Kh'ases – the Adyghe councils – are the dominant organisational framework, which, together with diaspora bodies, helped create the ICA. The ICA is actually a network of Adyghe Kh'ases whose existence stems from the Adyghe tradition of local organisations. Usually Kh'ases in central areas, such as the capital cities of the autonomous republics have connections to, or are even incorporated into similar organisations in nearby localities. The ICA started as a loose association among these Kh'ases in and outside the Caucasus. Naturally, the relationship between each of these organisations and the local autonomous government has changed over the time and place span.

The ventures of the Adyghe Kh'ase of Kabardino-Balkaria are particularly noteworthy. During the early 1990s, this Kh'ase maintained an intricate relationship with both the central government in Moscow and the Kabardino-Balkar authorities. The activities of this Kh'ase included an element of opposition, or at least objection, to the present status quo. This was expressed in its involvement in a diversity of

events, including various protests and especially demonstrations in support of Abkhazia. The destruction of the statue of Lenin in Nalchik during a demonstration in the early 1990s and, by contrast, the 'survival' of a similar sculpture in Maikop, are illustrative of the atmosphere in Kabardino-Balkaria, in the creation of which the local Adyghe Kh'ase played a key role. On the other hand, their differences notwithstanding, a fairly high level of ties, even coordinated action, has always been kept between the leadership of the Kh'ase and the authorities of the autonomous republics. The Kh'ase leaders also did their best not to get into direct confrontation with Moscow's representatives assuming that such a conflict could cause manipulations which would result in greater Russian involvement. This approach was consistent with the stated position of the Kh'ase regarding the need for cooperation between all of the ethnic groups in Kabardino-Balkaria.⁴³

The proximity of Kabardino-Balkaria to Chechnya, and the fact that it is the place where the Adyghe constitute a plurality of the population, made the Kh'ase's activity all the more significant in terms of its political potential. Extensive ties exist between the local governments and the Kh'ase, and despite occasional friction between them, these ties persisted throughout the 1990s, including in Kabardino-Balkaria. The first congress, in Nalchik in 1991, enjoyed backing (and even assistance) from the government of Kabardino-Balkaria. Kabardinian leaders have continued to support the congress ever since.⁴⁴

Although differences among the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus make it difficult to generalise, all in all it appears that local governments have remained ambivalent with regard to the ICA. At times there are clear conflicts of interest, with the ICA constituting a certain threat to local politicians, while at other times it seems that the local governments, having come to terms with the existence of the Congress, are trying to gain the greatest possible advantage from its activities. Such advantage may manifest itself in general political terms, for example, the ability to exert pressure on Moscow via the ICA regarding certain issues, without engaging in a confrontation between the local government and the central administration.

One example of this is the question of what status to accord the Circassians who return to the Caucasus. The ICA has a clear stance on this issue, and its actions have served as a conduit for the government of Adyghea to deliver messages and exert pressure on Moscow. However, the issue of return to the Caucasus also exemplifies the possibility for duality and competition between the different republics and the ICA, since the Rodina offices in the republics had been the ones to organise contacts with the diaspora already during the Soviet

period. These contacts had been mainly limited to visits by delegations and hosting students from the Middle East.⁴⁵ This rivalry between the Kh'ase and Rodina was especially conspicuous in Kabardino-Balkaria. Later, rivalry over dominance in relations with the Circassian diaspora also surfaced in some cases between representatives of the ICA and the local governments.

In Adyghea, there was less tension on this front, and a greater degree of cooperation between the ICA and the local government, with regard both to this issue and to the treatment of Circassians requesting permission to return to the Caucasus. In Kabardino-Balkaria, and even more so in Karachai-Cherkesia, the fact that the government represents the multi-ethnic structure of the republic further complicates its already complex relationship with the ICA. It provides an additional source of tension with the ICA, who represent one group (or two, in the case of Karachai-Cherkesia), and whose activities hint at the theoretical possibility of an entirely different political order in the region. The ICA poses, thus, a hidden threat, particularly in the local arena. Yet to openly oppose its activities might constitute a much greater danger.

On the other hand, the ICA provides the ruling bodies in the republics (or the local Circassian-Adyghe leadership, in the case of Karachai-Cherkesia, where the Turkic Karachai constitute a majority) with an additional channel to increase their power and ability to manoeuvre *vis-à-vis* the central government in Moscow and within their own autonomous republics. The ICA also provides a forum for meeting, and an additional channel of communications for leaders of the republics. Indeed, ICA activists are cognisant of the importance of maintaining contact and coordinating operations among the leaders of the various republics, for the sake of promoting common Circassian interests. The third congress, in 1996, proposed to establish a joint coordinating body of the republics. A report to the fourth congress, in 1988, said that this idea was significantly advanced by the agreement between the three republics to establish a joint inter-parliamentary commission.⁴⁶

In conclusion, a situation has developed, in which the governments of the republics have a certain interest in the continued activity of the ICA. At the same time, however, they wish the ICA to remain an amorphous, auxiliary, body and a 'potential threat' to Moscow – not a rival framework to the republics. This paradoxical situation has contributed to the ICA's ability to survive, but has also placed constraints on its development.

The republics have supported the ICA's activities in various forms. It would have been hard to hold the congresses without the consent, and sometimes even the involvement and aid of the local govern-

ments. Still, the ICA in general, and the local organisations that comprise it, have funds of their own – mainly contributed by businessmen and other supporters – which have enabled them to function independently. Furthermore, these funds produce a balance of power with the republics which enables continued cooperation with them. Of course, there is also some overlap at the individual level: the ICA provides a vehicle for local leaders with political ambitions to accumulate political power and rack up achievements – and vice versa.

UNITY AND PLURALITY: A CENTRE-LESS ETHNO-NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Until now the congresses of the ICA have been held each in a different city, which either serves as a centre, or is related to one of the Circassian communities in the Caucasus. This hints at the complex dynamics of unity and plurality, as well as at the lack of a clear centre for this movement – not merely in the geographic sense, but first and foremost in the figurative or symbolic sense. This situation reflects the persistence of the frail character of past Circassian attempts at unity: the existence on various levels of a clear, common identity, coupled with a virtual absence of its expressions in the organisational, and even the day-to-day, context.

What is meant here is, first of all, an amorphous, loose identity common to all the tribes who have considered themselves Adyghe. Parallel to it exists a common Abkhaz–Abaza identity, which is part of a broader identity of the north-western Caucasus. This broader identity gained strength during the war against Russia in the nineteenth century, and included in addition to the above two also the Ubykh. The extent to which these identities exist and their significance, are issues which need to be addressed separately. For the purposes of this article, the question is, to what extent is the joint organisation a novelty and to what extent does it express continuity?

At least in one case, the absence of a clear centre, the continuity is obvious. The complicated relationships with the autonomous republics have contributed to this complexity. Those republics artificially created by Russia have, over the years, developed their own separate existence. Beyond the political and organisational interests of the political establishment in these republics, a local identity has evolved in each based largely on pre-existent tribal identities. These new local identities project on the ability of all the groups in the North Caucasus that describe themselves as Adyghe or Circassian, to unite. An individual's self-identification as a 'Kabardinian' or a 'Karachai-Cherkesian' is no less important than either one's tribal identity, or

even one's identity as a 'Circassian' or one's overall identity as an 'Adyghe'.⁴⁷

This situation produces an inherent tension in the ICA's activities, for much energy is devoted to the perpetual need for maintaining a balance between the various groups (most importantly, between the representatives of the various republics). The lack of a clear centre impairs the ICA's ability to become a truly influential body, able to carry out its resolutions effectively. To this must be added the linguistic division of Adyghe into two primary dialects, each being the basis for a written language, coupled with the necessity of giving expression to the Abkhazian–Abaza languages as well.

The 1998 Krasnodar congress clearly exposed this reality. The principle of representation, and the need to allow for the various component bodies of the congress resulted in the decision to hold the congress in the Shapsug (Lazarovskii) district. However, as noted, organisational difficulties and other considerations resulted in the congress eventually being held in Krasnodar, the capital of the *krai* in which the Shapsug district lies, and at the same time a Russian city containing only a relatively small Adyghe community. Thus, it lacked the greater influence, and the profound significance on both the social level and the symbolic plain which the previous meetings of the ICA in locations with large concentrations of Circassians had had. The Krasnodar meeting represented, thus, a sort of 'routinisation', with the emphasis turning to issues of structure and organisation while much of the enthusiasm and charisma that accompanied the founding of the organisation had subsided.

The headquarters of the ICA has, for the past few years, been located in Cherkessk, the capital of Karachai–Cherkesia. There are a number of practical reasons for this, beginning with plans and preparations for the third congress, held there in 1996. Among these, one might note the location of the city in between the two major concentrations of Circassians – in Kabardino–Balkaria and Adyghea; its proximity to the nearby Russian transportation and communications centres of Mineral'nye Vody and Piatigorsk; and the fact that the republic (Karachai–Cherkesia) is a meeting ground for Adyghe and Abaza, both partners in the ICA. However, beyond these explanations, provided by activists of the movement, the decision, after a discussion about the headquarters' location – or rather the compromise that had led to the decision in the Krasnodar congress to maintain the ICA's headquarters in Cherkessk – is symbolic of some of the fundamental patterns of the ICA. Cherkessk thus represents a compromise between the two strongest segments, first of all numerically, of the movement: the Kabardinians and the Adygheans. As with the linguistic issue, a rivalry persists between these groups, their cooperation

notwithstanding. The choice of Cherkessk enables a compromise; but it also symbolises the movement's character, in that its permanent headquarters are located in a republic in which the Circassians are a minority not only in relation to the Russians, but in relation to the Karachais as well, and where the Russian influence is heavily felt.

THE ICA AND EVENTS IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS

The events in the Caucasus since the dissolution of the USSR call for an examination of the establishment of the ICA and the course it has taken *vis-à-vis* the situation in the north-west Caucasus, the ethnic and national conflicts in the region, the relations between the Circassians and the Russian authorities in Moscow, and most importantly, the conflict in Chechnya. The ICA's involvement in the conflict in Abkhazia has already been discussed. In sharp contrast to that involvement, the ICA – and the Circassians in general – have adopted a much more circumspect, highly ambivalent stance *vis-à-vis* the situation in Chechnya.

Apart from a handful of clashes, the Circassian areas have remained calm in the wake of the hostilities in Chechnya and Abkhazia, the many predictions of ethnic flare-ups throughout the Caucasus notwithstanding.⁴⁸ A change in this atmosphere of calm has taken place only since the spring of 1999, with the eruption of violence between the Circassians and the Karachais in Karachai–Cherkesia centred on the presidential elections in that small republic. Unlike the events in the eastern Caucasus, the conflict in Karachai–Cherkesia is between the two largest ethnic minority groups in the republic,⁴⁹ not with Moscow.

Ever since the ICA's inception, its leaders have been careful to maintain proper relations with the Russian Federal authorities. Throughout the 1990s the Circassians' decision, contrasting to that of the Chechens, to cooperate with the authorities of the RF has become growingly apparent. At the same time, the ICA's leaders have used the congresses in various ways to convey the message to Moscow that this state of affairs should not be taken for granted, but is dependent upon the quality of the mutual relations and their reciprocity. In other words, the implied message was intended to support the Circassians' endeavours to promote their cause within the framework of the current political order. Examples of this can be seen in the achievement of certain rights, and in the eligibility of Circassians returning to the Caucasus to naturalise, in spite of the Russian apprehensions about this process.

Symbolism has played an important role in the communication of these messages. Thus, on the one hand, representatives of the RF were

invited to the second congress in Maikop, but so were representatives of Chechnya and Tatarstan – an autonomous republic which was then exploring the limits of independence from Moscow – and the flags of Chechnya and Tatarstan as well as the RF were unfurled alongside Circassian and Abkhazian flags.

On the other hand, the ICA's president at that time, Iurii Kalmykov, gave notice at the conclusion of the congress that he was obliged to resign his position, due to his appointment as Minister of Justice of the RF. This indecision became untenable when the situation in Chechnya deteriorated.⁵⁰ Kalmykov resigned (or was 'encouraged' to do so) in December 1994 in protest against the Russian policy in Chechnya. Still, the more the situation in Chechnya worsened, the clearer it became that, even if some Circassians identified with the Chechens in one way or another, they would not join an armed struggle against Russia.

The difference between the ICA's approach, and that of the Circassians' generally, to the conflict in Chechnya – where an ambivalent and remote posture was preserved during most phases of the war – and the conflict in Abkhazia is striking. The fears of a conflagration of the Caucasus expressed in the media by all sorts of experts, seem not to have taken into consideration the obvious distinction between the eastern part of the North Caucasus (from Ingushetia eastward), and the Circassian areas. Even at the height of resistance to the Russian conquest in the nineteenth century this division made it difficult for the two sides to collaborate. The fact that the Adyghe, unlike other peoples of the Caucasus, were not 'deported'⁵¹ in World War II, magnified these differences, and influenced their attitude towards Russia.

The 1996 Cherkessk congress, and especially the 1998 Krasnodar conference, marked a new phase in the relationship between the ICA and the RF. The ICA's opting to work within the framework of the RF, and more distinctly this as contrasting the Chechen choice, made its position so clear as to preclude ambivalent symbolic signals like the invitation of Chechnya's representatives to participate in the 1993 congress. At the same time, potential tension with Moscow was now focused on the Abkhazian question, hinting at the problematic role played by Russia while the conflict in Abkhazia had continued and at the blockade on Abkhazia. The message conveyed by the ICA has been centred on unremitting support for the Abkhazians, thus insinuating to Moscow that sharp Russian action against Abkhazia will challenge Russian interests in the north-western Caucasus.

At the Krasnodar conference in the summer of 1998 a new element was added – regional cooperation between the ICA and the administration of the Krasnodar *krai*, headed by Kondratenko, which is

increasingly important, in light of the growing tensions between centre and periphery in the RF. Ostensibly there are tremendous differences between Kondratenko, the Russian nationalist strenuously opposed to immigrants, foreigners and Jews, and the ICA. Nevertheless, in spite of the differences in style, the two do share common interests. The Krasnodar *krai*, like other areas in the North Caucasus, has been flooded with immigrants from other areas and saturated with ethnic tension. Immigration from Abkhazia, where economic distress is palpable, has lately joined that from other areas; in this sense, the Krasnodar authorities and the Circassians have a common interest in trying to change the state of affairs in Abkhazia. Moreover, cooperating with the Circassians actually increases Kondratenko's power both inside the *krai* and *vis-à-vis* Moscow.

From the Circassians' point of view, cooperation is desirable for a number of reasons. First, it stems from the will to improve the lot of the Shapsug Circassians who live along the coast of the Black Sea in the Lazarevskii district within the Krasnodar *krai*. In this sense holding the congress in Krasnodar followed from the decision to hold it each time in a different concentration of Circassians. The difficulties inherent in holding the conference in the Shapsug area created the platform for cooperation with the Krasnodar *krai*, in which, it seems, Kondratenko's administration was a dominant component. This cooperation is also necessary to the authorities in Adyghea. Finally, in many respects it allows the Circassian leaders to engage in a dialogue with Moscow from a position of relative strength.

On another level, this cooperation expresses the over-all policy of the Circassians towards various determinants in the Caucasus. Relations with the RF apart, it is a manifestation of the Circassians', and especially the Adyghe's, position *vis-à-vis* the local authorities in the *krais* (Krasnodar and Stavropol); the Russian residents of the Caucasus (who now constitute a majority in some areas), including the newly formed organisation of Cossacks; and the other peoples of the Caucasus, some of whom share with the Circassians the government structures in the autonomous republics, i.e. the Karachais and the Balkars. As noted above, the mere establishment of the ICA posed a potential threat to the prevailing order in these two republics and throughout the Caucasus, with ramifications for relations with neighbouring peoples. The congress organisers were well aware of this, and meticulously underscored their cooperation with neighbouring peoples with a symbolic-ritualistic expression. This was especially explicit in the strengthening of ties with representatives of other groups (like the Balkars, the Karachais and the Cossacks), and in the prevention of possible tension. The establishment of the CMPC was also important in this respect, as was its subsequent conversion into the Congress of

Peoples of the Caucasus (with the intention of including the Cossacks and other 'local' Russians). In its congresses the ICA has underlined the importance of maintaining good relations with the surrounding peoples by the inclusion of folkloric orchestras and artists from the different ethnic groups in the region in the artistic programme. Their presence in the region was, thus, symbolically acknowledged.

Despite all of this, the tension in Karachai-Cherkesia has grown into a conflict that remains unresolved,⁵² in which one can see some of the processes discussed above: the renewed Circassian efforts at mass organisation following the break-up of the Soviet Union; ties with the Circassians in the diaspora, which cause apprehensions of a change in the balance in a republic, where Circassians are a minority; and, finally, the construction of a movement that has nationalistic components, while successfully maintaining good relations with Russia. According to partial data it seems that, in the conflict in Karachai-Cherkesia, the Circassian presidential candidate enjoyed the support of the local Russian population and other groups (such as the Greek community). In the case of Karachai-Cherkesia all this caused a shift in the *status quo ante*, and increased tension with the Karachais, which was influenced at the same time by processes of ethno-national revival among the Karachais and their kin, the Balkars. Although this conflict as a whole does not have direct connection with the ICA, the effect of the Circassian reawakening on the events is discernible. In addition to this general influence the selection of Cherkessk as the location of the ICA's secretariat cannot be divorced from the events. Naturally, the Chairman of the ICA, Boris Akbashev, is involved in what is happening and his connections in Moscow might have influenced the tenor of Russia's intervention in the conflict.

To conclude, regarding the issue of relations with the Russian administration, and for the most part that of the internal relations in the north-western Caucasus, it seems that the existence of the ICA has contributed to the relatively peaceful state of affairs in the north-west Caucasus. It has provided a platform for the need for a renewed expression of Circassian identity in the post-Soviet era without undermining the basic political order in the region – that is Russian domination. The general tendency of 'playing according to the Russian rules of the game' can be seen also in the ICA decision to hold the next congress in Nalchik, and not, in line with the aspiration of many participants, in Abkhazia. Also the solidifying patterns of activity emphasise the desire for regional stability, although the events of the summer and fall of 1999 in Karachai-Cherkesia show that the Circassian renaissance does influence the relations among communities in the region, and especially between the Adyghe/Circassians and the Karachais/Balkars.

The ICA's character as an organisation that does not challenge the basic order in the region has also on the whole influenced the nature of the association (and the movement it represents). Although the organisation serves as a channel for the expression of identity, and the advancement of demands, as a separate association, its significance is primarily symbolic. However, while this symbolic significance is salient with regard to the political dimension in the Caucasus, it seems that this symbolic aspect has taken on importance that has practical consequences for the relationship between Circassians in the Caucasus and the Circassian diaspora.

RELATIONS WITH THE DIASPORA

A central facet of the ICA's activity is connected to its being a novel framework uniting all the Circassian communities throughout the world: in the Caucasus, in Turkey and the Middle East, and communities that sprang up as a result of second-tier immigration to western Europe and the US. The ICA's importance stems from its success in creating such a common framework – the first since the Circassians' tragic departure from the Caucasus in the 1860s. The ICA brings together Circassians from all of the communities the world over, although naturally most striking is the encounter between the Caucasus – the centre, the historical homeland – and the Circassian diaspora. The Circassian case stands out as a perfect example of a diaspora people, in that the majority of Circassians live nowadays outside of the Caucasus. This situation affects the complex relations between the centre and the diaspora manifest in the ICA's functions. Further complications lie within the political dimension; the communion between those who experienced life under the Soviet regime and who now live either under Russian rule (i.e. Adyghe and Abaza) or in a state of political uncertainty; and in conflict with Georgia (the Abkhazians), and communities that are more closely associated with the West. This facet is particularly conspicuous in reference to the Circassians who come from Europe and the US; but it is also apparent with respect to the communities in Turkey and Jordan.

The complex relationship between the diaspora and the centre was expressed already in the way the ICA was founded. Formally, the founding congress took place in the Caucasus, and thus both the dominant and the controlling role in it was played by the activists from the Caucasus. However, the initiative for the congress, and a significant part of the forces propelling its activities, originated in the diaspora. This situation resulted most probably from the different influences to which activists in the Caucasus and in the diaspora had

been exposed. Circassian activists outside the Caucasus, particularly those in Europe, were exposed to ideas and developments the world over concerning ethnic and cultural identity, identity preservation and self-determination. The debate over these issues was at its height at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, the preoccupation with identity preservation and the meaning of Circassian identity in the diaspora, took on an existential character; and the question of the relationship between the various communities, especially their relationship with the motherland in the Caucasus, became naturally central.⁵³

Moreover, in the meetings, and already at the earliest stages, a clear relation was established between diaspora and centre activists: while the energy and motivation brought by the diaspora activists are essential and crucial to the meetings, domination of the congress and its operations has been left to activists from the communities in the Caucasus. Practical considerations were the main factor in creating this situation: since the conferences are taking place in the Caucasus, the 'host' populations naturally dominate. And, given the poor state of communications with the region until recently, it is also obvious that the majority of the burden and the responsibility for organising the conferences would rest with activists from the Caucasus, and so would control their character.

The relationship between activists from the diaspora and from the Caucasus is rife with complexities and ambiguities. On the one hand, the encounter between representatives of various communities, particularly between those of the Caucasus and the diaspora, is far from being smooth: years of being cut off had created many differences, which have resulted in a lack of trust and in communication difficulties.⁵⁴ In the specific case of the ICA, differences in organisational and political culture are added. On the other hand, there are 'symbolic' elements which even the situation: the diaspora activists regard the Caucasus as the 'centre' in a symbolic sense, which projects on the organisational level as well. Thus, to begin with, many of them have been ready to operate within the dominant role left to the Caucasus activists, or at least they have abstained from expressing any wishes to withdraw from this partnership, which is at the base of the ICA, when differences of opinion arise. In this way, the obstacles notwithstanding, the congresses have become a venue where the interchange was successful, and certainly more optimistic than other encounters. The ability of diaspora activists to mobilise various resources also helps maintain a certain balance of power, although it does appear that one of the by-products of this situation is the reduced participation of young leaders from the diaspora in the congresses.

The great difference among, and the divergent interests of, activists

from the various communities also contribute to shaping the relationship among the participants. Another difficulty underlying this encounter originates in the linguistic situation: difficulties in comprehension exist among speakers of various Adyghe dialects, not to mention Adyghe and Abkhaz. However, beyond this looms the issue of the status of the Russian language at the congresses.⁵⁵ The gradual build up of the status of Russian testifies to the dominant position of the activists from the Caucasus; to the importance of the local and regional political agenda; and to the use of the ICA as a conduit for transmitting messages and for communications with Moscow and with various political forces in the region – especially the administrations of the Krasnodar and Stavropol *krais*.

In the bottom line the organisational dominance of the activists from the Caucasus is expressed also in the political agenda of the ICA. Until now, the role played by the diaspora activists has been relatively limited. Some have underlined their participation by financial terms, through contributions, while others – by promoting cultural projects. Nevertheless, it appears that the cooperation between the Caucasus and the diaspora communities, at least that related to the ICA's activities, is still in its beginning, and its potential has not yet fully been realised. While this is the state of things with regard to specific activities of the ICA, on a broader plain an expanding network of informal ties can be observed between Circassians the world over, and especially between diaspora Circassians and the Caucasus. The regular holding of the ICA's congresses has undoubtedly contributed to this situation. Cultural and educational bonds have grown, taking the form of students arriving to study in the Caucasus, of mutual visits, of exchanges of youth delegations as well as delegations from cultural clubs, etc.

In the case of the tiny Circassian community in Israel, one result of the tightening ties with the Caucasus was the reception in Galilee of an Adyghean teacher, who was sent to teach the Adyghe language in the schools in Circassian villages in Israel – perhaps the only place outside of the Caucasus where the study of the Circassian language forms part of the state school curriculum. (At the same time, however, this entails many difficulties, *inter alia* because of the small size of the community and its multilingual character).⁵⁶ Another thing that stood out in the encounter of this community with the Circassians in the Caucasus, was the religious gap between them. This gap was especially noticeable in the case of the Israeli Circassian community, but it is significant in the relationship between Circassians from the diaspora in general – and those in the Middle East in particular – and the Circassians in the Caucasus.⁵⁷

The differences between the Caucasus and the diaspora in the expression of religious identity have given rise to religious and

cultural-religious activities, which were made possible and assisted by the unbroken bond created by the ICA's meetings. In the ICA's operations, on the one hand, the Circassian identity is emphasised, while the Islamic identity is secondary. In the course of the congresses, symbolic and nominal place is occasionally given to prayer or to Qor'anic verses quoted in the speech of one delegate or another. Beyond that, however, Islamic identity, and even more the need to give it actual collective expression, is allocated a relatively marginal place both by most of the delegates, and in the ICA's operations. Still, some Circassian activists from the diaspora acted during the gatherings to open Islamic religious establishments in Circassian areas where such institutions had previously not existed. In recent years, mosques have been constructed in most of the villages in the three republics where the Circassian population is concentrated. In visits to such villages, one is told that these mosques had been built 'by the residents, who collected money', but it appears that donations from abroad played a major role in this process. Within the limited framework of this article, suffice it to note that these have usually been elements with a moderate orientation, who represent a very different course from the increasing 'Wahhabi' activity in areas to the east.⁵⁸

The involvement of diaspora Circassians in this activity takes a variety of forms, sometimes separate and sometimes combined. In some cases the influence of diaspora activists is felt through financial support to religious institutions. In others through activities influenced by the Sufi movement via activists affected by Sufi brotherhoods abroad (for example in Turkey), as well as through religious-educational action by activists seeking to reverse the total ignorance regarding Islam and its commandments in this region. These act out of a religious motivation which is inter-connected with the view that Circassian and Islamic identities are mutually compatible and complementary. This subject, which is outside the scope of the present chapter, merits further discussion on a broader scale.⁵⁹

The institutionalisation of ties among Circassians in the Caucasus and the diaspora is definitely one of the ICA's successes. The continuity of the congresses sustains such links. Still, in the final account, some of these ties are, quite naturally, reflected in relations with the autonomous republics, who are in possession of the proper apparatus to manage and develop such links. These expanding ties have also significant political consequences. These were manifest in the creation of a Circassian lobby in the diaspora that draws attention toward events in the Caucasus, and works to establish cooperation between the states where Circassians live and the autonomous Circassian republics in the Caucasus.⁶⁰

The most apparent example of involvement by a foreign country in the ICA's congresses is that of Jordan. Prince 'Ali, the son of the deceased Jordanian King Hussein, attended the third congress in Cherkessk (1996). The Prince's participation stems probably from his personal interest in Circassian affairs, but it also reflects official Jordanian policy. It is in Jordan more than anywhere else that Circassians have reached the status of a civilian and military elite close to the royal house.⁶¹ Jordan's involvement in Circassian affairs is thus not at all surprising. In recent years, Circassians in Jordan, and Prince 'Ali personally, have initiated cooperation and coordination among Circassian leaders in Jordan, Syria, Turkey and Israel. Thus, a preparatory meeting took place in Amman between Circassian leaders from a number of countries in the region, in anticipation of the fourth congress in Krasnodar (1998). This resulted in increased cooperation in the social and cultural domains between communities in the region, with Jordan as its epicentre. Leaders of the Circassian communities in the Middle East met again in Amman in February 1999 to condole with the royal family upon the demise of King Hussein.

A major issue in the relationship between Circassians in the Caucasus and in the diaspora is that of the return of exiles to the Caucasus – whether this is termed 'repatriation' or 're-emigration'.⁶² Examining the available options for a return to the Caucasus, and encouraging it, have been at the core of the ICA's activities from the very outset. In June 1991 a repatriation programme was initiated in the three Circassian republics and in Abkhazia. However, in the latter efforts to implement this programme were one of the causes of the rising tension between Abkhazians and Georgians/Mingelians.⁶³ Later developments and the outbreak of war rendered repatriation unfeasible (if one ignores the Abkhaz volunteers who joined the fighting). The day-to-day handling of persons returning to their homeland in the North Caucasus has quite naturally devolved upon the republics themselves. Nevertheless, the ICA has also contributed to these efforts in a number of ways: it exerted efforts to improve the legal status of returnees *vis-à-vis* Russia, emphasised the need to establish institutional frameworks to assist the migrants,⁶⁴ and strengthened ties between potential immigrants from outside the Caucasus with organisations that deal with these issues in the Caucasus. Some of the ICA's activists have provided a personal example, when they themselves returned to the Caucasus and continued from there their activity in the ICA.⁶⁵

Repatriation to the Caucasus is, apparently, a common interest to Circassians the world over. To the Circassians in the Caucasus it promises to alter somewhat the demographic balance in the Caucasus

and, more important, to nourish the development of Circassian culture. For some diaspora Circassians, who live under conditions which hamper the expression of their cultural identity, and in some cases other hardships, it apparently provides a solution. However, for most Circassians in the diaspora, return (to the Caucasus) is not a real option for the immediate future, even though the idea of return has had a tremendous symbolic significance. The congresses in the Caucasus, and the success in making repatriation a real option (at least *de jure*), have created an interesting situation. The existence of this possibility, and the necessity of making a choice between the ideology of return and continued existence outside the Caucasus, have triggered among some of those diaspora Circassians who are not interested in return the evolution of a Circassian identity integrated with a local and civic identity. In other words, it is a process whereby communities proceed from a state of 'dispersion' to the state of 'diaspora'.⁶⁶ This, in turn, fuels the tendency of younger activists to concentrate their energies on this process, and not on activity in the ICA.

Nevertheless, this does not essentially hinder the development of an ethnic and national discourse, although this is a different discourse. The dilemma of 'nation or diaspora' is no longer posed.⁶⁷ Rather it is the replacement of a national idealistic-romantic myth by a renewed struggle for self-determination, both inside and outside the Caucasus. As emphasised by Shami,⁶⁸ the attitude to the Caucasus in this new discourse is ambiguous. Moreover, the modalities of this discourse change in accordance with each local context. Instead of a collection of communities whose existence is partly based on, and who are unified by, a common aspiration – or a sort of 'myth' linked to the notion of exile from the homeland, and, to a certain extent, to the (more or less utopian) hope of a return to that homeland – a new definition is developing, of a people for whom being dispersed all over the world is an integral element in its identity. These definitions have an ethno-national character, but this ethno-nationalism has new components, which distinguish it from the traditional nationalist discourse. Moreover, these new components affect not only the perception of identity adopted by Circassians in the diaspora, but that of Circassians in the Caucasus as well, and the ways they elect to express their own national identity.

In this renewed discourse the motherland, the Caucasus, remains a central place. An illustration to this is a fascinating event connected with repatriation to the Caucasus – the ICA's successful activity and involvement in organising the rescue of Circassians from Kosovo and bringing them to the Caucasus. Representatives of the small Circassian community in Yugoslavia had taken part in the 1993 congress of the ICA, but in 1996 no Yugoslav representative attended. The meetings

were rife with rumours to the effect that many members of this community had been murdered in the bloody events in Bosnia. When the situation in Kosovo deteriorated, in 1998, communication was established between the ICA and the tiny Circassian community in that area. Paradoxically, the Muslim Circassians were being threatened by the Albanians on account of their good relations with the Serbs. After long weeks of agonising preparations, Circassian activists succeeded in obtaining safe passage out of Kosovo for most of the Kosovar Circassians, as well as their orderly absorption in Adyghea. In August, 1998, the refugees arrived in Adyghea. Shortly afterwards, construction began on a rural-style residential neighbourhood for them in the Maikop area.

This project has intertwined the practical and symbolic meanings of repatriation: the successful rescue of Circassians from Yugoslavia supplied an example of a concrete action which would very likely not have been executed but for the ICA's efforts. As such it had also a general importance for the ICA's operations, for while many Circassians acknowledged the importance of the congresses, many lamented that they were 'just talk'. The Kosovo mission took the hypothetical possibility of a return to the Caucasus, and, at a critical juncture, transformed it into a realistic option, underscored the significance of the Caucasus as a homeland, and reinforced solidarity among far-flung Circassian communities throughout the world. Furthermore, it underlined the importance of the ICA as a true representative of this solidarity, and supplied this solidarity with a practical meaning even if its manifestations in other spheres were still at an embryonic stage.

CONCLUSION

The tension between plurality and unity seems to be a central issue in understanding the totality of the groups in the north-western Caucasus, first, the various people and groups who define themselves as belonging to the broad category of 'Adyghe', and second, all people and groups who are called (usually by outsiders) 'Circassians', who upon the founding of the ICA, adopted this name in order to get organised in association with political, social and cultural components. Smeets has pointed out, in an article entitled 'Circassia', that in fact a political entity of that name has never existed.⁶⁹ The establishment of the ICA accomplishes two opposite effects simultaneously. The ICA symbolises the theoretical possibility that such an entity could exist, and gives it an organisational expression by successfully creating a Circassian or even an all-Circassian framework

graced with continuity and even certain achievements. At the same time, the ICA, its structure and methods of operation institutionalise and strengthen patterns which underscore that a Circassian polity of the sort envisaged – at least in the political-territorial sense – is not, for the time being, a realistic option or a credible objective. The ICA and its operations thus continue the fundamental tension between unity and plurality that is typical of the Adyghe and of all the North Caucasus. In this light the ICA may be viewed as a new manifestation of an old pattern, which emphasises a common cultural identity not expressed by a single political organisation. However, the founding of the ICA, and some of its operations, have an unmistakably political character, even if its main political importance lies not in specific actions, but rather in its potential, as a 'marker' and a warning, particularly in terms of internal relations within the RF, and the place of minority groups within it.

Paradoxically, the Circassian diaspora has contributed substantially towards bringing this about. Although internal distinctions among the various Adyghe subgroups have been preserved in the diaspora, as have the distinctions between Adyghe and Abkhaz, their common destiny as a minority in foreign lands has brought them closer, emphasised their common interests and thus cooperation – which has projected on cooperation between the various groups in the Caucasus as well. In this respect, the establishment of the ICA, its activities and especially the continuity of its operations have, first of all, an important cultural-social meaning.

The alliance between the Adyghe and the Abkhaz within the ICA is built through the use of similar cultural contents and historical ties that facilitate the creation of a symbolic union, which in turn strengthens a joint organisational framework within which the distinct identity of each group is preserved. On a different level, exactly the same occurs among the various Adyghe groups, who, though closer to each other, still desire to preserve their separate identities (e.g. differences based on dialect). From another angle attention should be paid to differences among the various communities along lines of citizenship. In other words, the proximity between Abkhaz and Adyghe living in Turkey is no less than that between Adyghe living in Turkey and in Jordan, or in the Caucasus, although here one deals with different axes or variables associated with multidimensional identity. This can lead to tension and emphasis on contrariety in relation to the common identity, which indeed happens in encounters between Circassians from different countries.

Against this tension, a movement has been created with a structure that allows cooperation without tugging the balance of internal power too far. It was not a coincidence that the first Circassian film

was shown at the second congress in Maikop. This was an artistic film that dealt, not with the wars in the Caucasus, but rather with the internal disputes and what they cost society during the period preceding the Russian invasion of the Caucasus. And the lesson about the cost of these disputes in fending off enemies from the outside later on is obvious. This artistic utilisation of a bygone era brings to the fore the debate over the essence of the Circassian efforts to organise within the ICA, and the meaning of the contemporary Circassian identity.

The question of essence of the organisation arises even from the name Circassian. The dimness and the ambiguity connected to this name, which refers both to the Adyghe alone and to all the inhabitants of the north-western Caucasus, have already been pointed out. This ambiguity allows the simultaneous co-existence of various perceptions of the essence of the events and their meaning in the collective sphere, and particularly in terms of the boundaries of that collective, and the essence of the Circassian ethno-national/cultural movement.

The tension between the apparent comprehensibility of the discussion on Circassia and Circassian to the participants – members of the group as well as scholars, both local and external – and the need to qualify this discussion when the scholar relates to the manner in which a discussion on ethno-national units is understood in the modern culture, is the same tension that lies at the very base of the ICA's operations. One of the dimensions of this tension has to do with the question of how relevant to this region is a discussion of nationalism in its modern Western meaning, and how appropriate it is to analyse various developments among the Circassians – since the struggle against Russian imperialism in the nineteenth century, and even before – on the basis of a desire leading to the formation of a national political entity, or to relate to any stages on the road toward forming such an entity.

A study of the ICA can open the door for a theoretical discussion of this issue. It seems that such a tension is reflected in the history of the north-western Caucasus since the Russian penetration of the area as well as in the external understanding of the region in ethnic and national terms. Here the door opens for a wider discussion which has been touched upon by Shami.⁷⁰ However, within the confines of the current discussion, suffice it to state that the ICA's activity is a fascinating subject of study offering the opportunity to examine the theoretical questions of the relation between ethnic identity and national identity. This case demonstrates the need for a less dichotomous theoretical approach to the dispute between those who emphasise 'invented' components in a national identity and 'the creation of traditions',⁷¹ and those who emphasise continuity and affinity between

ethnic and national identity through the reprocessing of common cultural components.⁷² One such example, described above, is the novel use of the category Circassian along with the continuity of cultural and historical components which acquire a new meaning.

No less significant directions for discussion relate to a common situation, which becomes extraordinarily salient in this region and is particularly conspicuous in the ICA's activities – the existence of several identities side by side, and the meaning of this multi-identity in the context of ethnic and political relations. This issue has been mentioned here mainly in relation to the tension between the autonomous republics and all-Circassian activities, and in relation to the significance of cooperation between Adyghe and Abkhaz. However, it is no less relevant to other factors mentioned but not fully developed in this article, such as the importance of the Russian civic (and sometimes cultural and political) identity of the inhabitants of the region, as well as the importance of the local civic identity of diaspora Circassians. These identities are context-dependent and therefore different discourses develop on local and civic identity, and the relation between it and the common Circassian (ethno-) national identity.⁷³ To this one must add the complexity with regard to religion and religious world views, which have not been touched upon in this article. This complexity seems marginal in terms of the ICA, but it is quite important to a broader discussion of ethnic identity in the north-western Caucasus on the one hand (and an additional feature that clearly distinguishes this region from the eastern Caucasus), and in the Circassian diaspora on the other hand. These evoke questions concerning the meaning of ethnicity and nationalism in an era of globalisation which includes post-nationalist components.

Side by side with, and perhaps before these elements, is the demographic factor. That is the activity of Circassian movement, with distinct ethno-national components in a region with a clear Russian majority, is critical to an understanding of the ICA's essence, its constraints, and the status and fate of the Circassians in the Caucasus in general. These circumstances have, in turn, greatly influenced the character of the activity. It seems that the founding of the ICA, and the character of its activities, have had a direct effect on the continued relative stability and calm in the north-western Caucasus, at a time of bitter conflicts in adjacent areas. At the same time, its establishment seems also to have contributed to the measured success of the Abkhazians in their struggle against Georgia – all this despite the fact that during most of the period of its activity the ICA as an organisation has taken very few concrete steps. Despite a 'routinisation' in its activity, and difficulties stemming from a web of problems and multifaceted identities, the ICA's continued operation serves to solid-

ify and intensify the bonds among all the Adyghe, and between them and the Abkhaz. The ICA's very existence yields a change in the status of the Circassians (both Adyghe and Abkhazians) as a diaspora people and expresses the attempts to preserve ethnic and cultural identity while anchoring it in new frameworks adapted to the demands of the epoch. If one looks at the ICA's achievements, and the link between its activity and the preservation of relative stability in the region, one discerns that this form of organisation constitutes a truly interesting development on the background of the debate on nationalism at the close of the twentieth century.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter draws primarily on anthropological fieldwork undertaken within Circassian communities both in and outside the Caucasus, focusing in particular on the three most recent congresses of the ICA: in Maikop (1993), in Cherkessk (1996) and in Krasnodar (1998). In the context of this work, my intention is to provide an overview of the ICA, and to understand the ICA in the broader context of ethnic and national issues, and the form these issues take in the Circassian case. I shall do my best to paint a general picture, focusing less on detailed analyses of specific data collected either from fieldwork or from the discussion of methodological questions relating to ethnographic studies. The ethnographic material within this larger picture will be informed through the integration of an outsider's point of view (the *atik* point of view, in anthropological terminology), with a description based on a participant's point of view, that of the activists at the Circassian congress in whose society I was (the *imak* point of view).
- 2 The official symbols of the ICA congresses include the name of the organisation in three languages: in Adyghe *Duneipsu Adyge Xace*, in Abaza *Aduney Cherkes Adgilara*, in Russian *Mezhdunarodnaia Cherkesskaia Assotsiatsiia*. Another translation from Adyghe might be, 'World Circassian Council' or 'World Circassian Association'. 'ICA' appears in an English language publication recently produced by members of the organisation.
- 3 In this article, the name 'Adyghe' is used as the common self-appellation of all the peoples of the north-western Caucasus who are considered Circassians and speak one of the Adyghe dialects. 'Adyghea' refers to the Autonomous Republic of that name. Residents of this republic shall be called 'Adygheans'. The term 'Cherkes' describes the Adyghe population of Karachai-Cherkessia. 'Abkhazians' refers to speakers of Abkhazian who are residents of Abkhazia – not to be confused with the Abaza who live in the northern Caucasus. The terms 'Circassian' and 'the Circassian Association' are used only where spokesmen for these groups or organisations use them. It thus applies to both the Adyghe and Abkhaz-Abaza, depending on the context.
- 4 R. Smeets, 'Circassia,' *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 1(1995), p. 107.
- 5 According to Ottoman sources 600,000 – H. Inalchik 'Çerkes', *EI* 2, Vol. II, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983, pp. 21–5; according to Russian accounts 418,000 left between 1861 and 1864 – Jersild Austin Lee, 'From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire', in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (eds), *Russia's Orient. Imperial Boundaries and*

- Peoples, 1700–1917 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 112, note 11; Smeets, 'Circassia', p. 112; K. Karpat, 'The Hijra from Russia and the Caucasus', in D.F. Eickelman and J. Piscatory (eds), *Muslim Travels* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 132–5; A. Uner Turgey, 'Circassian immigration into the Ottoman Empire, 1856–1878', in W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little (eds), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 193–217. The lack of clarity regarding this subject stems in part from the difficulty of determining what portion of the emigrants were Adyghe and what portion belonged to other Caucasian groups, and what percentage of all the emigrants entering the Ottoman Empire at that time were Caucasians (some, for example, were Bulgarians).
- 6 For example, in Syria various Bedouin tribes. N. Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Trans-Jordan, 1800–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 96–114.
 - 7 S. K. Shami, 'Ethnicity and Leadership: The Circassians in Jordan', University of California, Berkeley, 1982 (unpublished PhD dissertation), pp. 39–52.
 - 8 Sources as in note 5 above.
 - 9 Estimating the number of Circassians in Turkey is problematic due to 'Turkification' encouraged by the government. Official Turkish estimates are thus low. Smeets ('Circassia', p. 109) estimates the Circassian population in Turkey to be approximately 1 million, while Colarusso (J. Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1995), pp. 75–97) notes that around 6 million Turks are of Circassian descent. These figures are not necessarily inconsistent – it is simply a question of what people one is talking about, and which individuals are counted as Circassian. Furthermore, people tend to use definitions of identity in a differential and circumstantial way; thus, the statistics vary depending upon the general state of affairs in Turkey and in the Caucasus, even apart from the questions of identity and demography raised by mixed marriage, linguistic attrition, urbanisation of the originally rural population of the northern Caucasus, etc. Adyghe make up the largest group of northern Caucasians, followed by Abkhazians, Daghestanis and Chechens.
 - 10 Akbashev claims that more than 80 per cent of Circassians live outside of the Caucasus today, and that they are spread out among 40 different countries: B. Akbashev, 'Prophet in his Homeland', *Circassian World*, No. 1 (spring 1998), pp. 5–6.
 - 11 According to Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', p. 81.
 - 12 These demographic data are taken from Smeets ('Circassia', pp. 109–12) and H. Krag and L. Funch, *The North Caucasus: Minority at a Crossroad* (London: International Minority Rights Group, 1994), p. 16. The table presented in this latter work does not relate separately to the Circassian population of Karachai-Cherkessia, but lumps the Cherkess together with the Adyghe – a further example of the problematic nature of ethnic labels and definitions.
 - 13 For a description of the controversy in Abkhazia and the roots of the conflict, see Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', pp. 75–96 and B. G. Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (1993), pp. 267–323.
 - 14 Abaza is the term used by the Abaza themselves; 'Abazinians' can occasionally be seen in literature on the subject.
 - 15 Language is one of the determinants between the Abkhaz/Abaza and the Adyghe. Linguistic identity also clarifies the connection between them: they constitute separate and mutually incomprehensible languages belonging to the Abaza-Circassian group of languages of the north-western Caucasus. Each of these

- languages is further subdivided, so there are in fact four main linguistic subgroups containing numerous dialects: Western Adyghe and Kabarda (or Eastern Adyghe) on the one hand, and Abkhaz and Abaza on the other. See the discussion in Smeets, 'Circassia', pp. 108–9 and Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: A Problem . . .', p. 268.
- 16 Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', p. 76.
 - 17 An additional dimension is added to the complexity of the word 'Circassian' when one considers the clear distinction between the insiders' term, 'Adyghe', and the outsiders' label, 'Cherkess' or 'Circassian' – although even here there are distinctions between sub-groups. Thus, for example, the Kabarda, who – particularly in the Caucasus – generally tend to emphasise their identity as Kabarda, and are less inclined to use the term Circassian in reference to themselves, tend to view themselves as Adyghe, and use this term to define their basic ethno-national identity. And cf. discussion in Smeets, 'Circassia', pp. 107–25.
 - 18 Another conference, with a cultural agenda, was held in Ankara in the same year.
 - 19 The congress took place when this chapter was in the final stages of editing and naturally conclusions regarding it and the current situation in the area deserve a further study. However, reports from congress participants seem to confirm that the main processes described here, and especially the routinisation of the congress activity, continue along the same lines. Nakhatova's election seems to reflect the growing influence of Kokov, the president of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic.
 - 20 In places where the Circassian communities are either very large – as in Turkey – or geographically distant from each other – as in the US – the delegations were quite naturally made up of the various community components. At the first congresses, there was some confusion concerning the exact composition of some of the delegations, and as to the basis upon which their representatives were selected.
 - 21 Indeed, there were even rumours that the community was in dire straits, or had even been partly annihilated in the war in Bosnia. On the subject of the Yugoslav community, see A. Popovic, 'The Cherkess on Yugoslav Territory', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 1/2 (1991), pp. 65–79. In 1998, the fate of this small community, which is concentrated primarily in a village near Kosovo, was one of the principal subjects of discussion which occupied the congress participants, in light of the fighting in Kosovo. (For the return of this community to the Caucasus, see below.) In Bulgaria as well, there are Circassian villages which have undergone complete or partial Turkification. To the best of one's knowledge, there has never been any contact between the ICA and this community.
 - 22 *Rodina* (meaning 'homeland' in Russian) was founded during the Soviet era, with the aim of establishing ties with Circassians in the diaspora. After the break-up of the USSR, the organisation continued to operate from inside the Circassian republics of the Caucasus, especially in Kabardino-Balkaria, which, as an Autonomous Republic within the Soviet system, was the *doyen* of the Circassian-Adyghe areas. Among other functions, *Rodina* made arrangements for hosting Circassian students registered at the University of Nalchik, particularly those coming from Syria and Jordan. The organisation was also involved in student exchanges, and strove to maintain mutual ties with diaspora communities. A very complex relationship existed between *Rodina* and the Kabardian Adyghe Kh'ase. This stemmed in part from intensifying competition between them during the 1990s. In various interviews, informants hinted that an additional, hidden purpose of *Rodina* was to represent Soviet interests in Middle Eastern countries, using the Circassian population of these areas as instruments to further this agenda. The fact that representatives of *Rodina* joined the ICA illustrates a process in which cooperation triumphed over rivalry. Apparently, *Rodina's* acceptance as a body represented in the ICA was facilitated by the opportunity

this gave the ICA to take advantage of *Rodina's* organisational infrastructure, as well as its favourable status in Moscow.

- 23 Kalmykov submitted his letter of resignation on 30 November 1994, and stepped down on 7 December 1994, after attempting unsuccessfully to resolve the conflict in Chechnya and prevent the entry of the Russian army into the republic (Akbashev, 'Prophet in his Homeland', p. 14). An understanding of the way Kalmykov's role is interpreted today may be gained by observing the central position occupied by Kalmykov's image as 'prophet in his homeland' in the first issue of the International Circassian Association's magazine (see that article, and additional articles in the same issue of the magazine).
- 24 Akbashev, 'Prophet', p. 7.
- 25 Ibid., p. 5.
- 26 Ibid., p. 6.
- 27 Shami, 'Ethnicity and Leadership', p. 92.
- 28 This approach has become increasingly sharpened during the 1990s. Akbashev, ('Prophet', p. 7) expresses this with extreme clarity: 'We realise that history can't be turned backwards, that today it is impossible to redraw boundaries, return all Circassians to their homeland, and create united statehood.' It is true that these phrases were influenced by the fact that they were published in the official journal, 'registered in the state committee of the RF', but they apparently do express the opinion of most of the ICA's participants.
- 29 In some of the areas where they reside, they cohabit with immigrants belonging to other groups – Daghestanis for the most part, but Karachai and small numbers of other groups as well. In general, distinct divisions are maintained among these groups, particularly where rural populations are concerned. This, at least, is what I observed during my visit to such communities in Turkey. Emigré communities in Syria apparently maintain the same character and divisions, according to oral reports which reached me during the course of my fieldwork.
- 30 It is possible to differentiate between various trends in the approach to ethnic identity by examining the relationship to the Caucasus, whereas among a certain segment of the Circassian population in Turkey, emphasis is placed on the idea of return to the Caucasus – S. K. Shami, 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity: Negotiating Circassian Identity in Jordan, Turkey and the Caucasus', *New Perspective on Turkey*, Vol. 12 (1995), p. 84. In other communities, such as those of Israel and the US, the emphasis is on cultural and national ties with, rather than return to, the Caucasus: C. Bram, 'Circassian Re-Emigration to the Caucasus', in S. Weil (ed.), *Routes and Roots: Emigration in a Global Perspective* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), pp. 205–22.
- 31 A phenomenon similar to what has occurred to the Ubykh: Smeets, 'Circassia', p. 109.
- 32 For communities composed of a majority of Adyghe (such as the Circassians in Israel), and for some of the Adyghe of the north-western Caucasus, unifying these communities under the single denomination Circassian did not come naturally, in comparison with the acceptance of this term by communities in which Circassian was already used to refer to Adyghe and Abkhaz together. During the course of my fieldwork in the first years of the ICA's existence (upon a visit to Kabardino-Balkaria in 1990, and to Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia and Adyghea in 1993), and particularly during my time spent in a Circassian village in Israel, I witnessed this ambivalence. Whereas the name chosen for the ICA and its meaning, have evoked diverse reactions among activists who have become involved in the ICA's work but who have a less perfect familiarity with all the details. It is also conceivable that the identity of the researcher, and the

point of view he embraces, do have an influence here. In this context, it is interesting that for Shami in her fascinating article focusing on the issues of identity that arise when Circassians from Turkey and Jordan are introduced to the Caucasus, this conflict does not arise. The Abkhaz are referred to as one of the other Caucasian groups found in the Middle East, like the Chechens and the Daghestanis – although in a parenthetical remark, she notes that 'The Abkhaz and Ubykh are usually glossed as Circassian/Adyghe, and there is also intermarriage between the various north Caucasian groups in communities outside the Caucasus' – 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity', p. 83. This brings a number of issues to the fore regarding Circassian/Adyghe identity, which demand investigation in their own right.

- 33 Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: A Problem . . .', p. 288.
- 34 In addition to groups from more eastern regions, including Aki Chechens, Laks, Ossetians and others. See Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: A Problem . . .', pp. 304–5, Appendix 4.
- 35 See Chapter 3 in this volume.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Despite this, the organisation may be credited with a number of achievements: in addition to fostering collaboration between Abkhazia and the North Caucasus, it had a positive influence on reducing tensions in the region, and encouraging cooperation between various groups, particularly in the north-western Caucasus, and between Cossack revivalists and ethnic groups from the Caucasus.
- 38 Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', p. 79.
- 39 Hewitt, 'Abkhazia: A Problem . . .', p. 294.
- 40 Terms other than 'genocide' have been used in various instances in reference to these events: 'catastrophe', even 'the Adyghe holocaust' – a term I heard used on a number of occasions among Circassians in Israel, but which I encountered among Circassians living elsewhere as well (Circassian Israelis use this term as part of a larger trend of adopting an 'Israeli' vocabulary and terminology. It is also important to point out that different speakers in the congresses relate to the Israeli/Jewish experience of re-emigration, especially people from the Caucasus who witnessed the large migration of Jews from the former USSR to Israel since 1989).
- 41 This representation bore additional significance *vis-à-vis* the local administration in the Krasnodar *krai* which as noted hosted the congress, in light of the growing problem of refugees flooding into the district from Abkhazia, in addition to refugees from other parts of the Caucasus.
- 42 Meaning the bodies represented at the congress: the Abkhazian government, which declared its independence in Sukhumi, and the Abaza organisations. These organisations are connected to Abkhaz organisations and communities in Turkey and elsewhere.
- 43 This is the way one of the Kabardian Kh'ase leaders described the situation in the republic during the summer of 1990: 'The Russians wanted to accomplish here what they did in Chechnya. Anti-Russian declarations were disseminated throughout the city . . . among the various peoples . . . The authorities in Moscow wanted to create an anti-Russian movement in order to justify sending troops into the region. The Kh'ase opposed such provocation, and managed to resolve the crisis. We held demonstrations and gatherings in order to prevent tension and clashes between different groups, whereupon the militia [i.e., the police – CB] took the posters [i.e. the anti-Russian propaganda – CB] down. We summoned 20,000 people to a demonstration, and took a stance against ethnic provocations. The media credited Kokov [speaker of the parliament at that time; later became president of the republic – CB] with this achievement.' This version of events was

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- immediately met with reservations on the part of other individuals present who were not members of the Kh'ase. Although the specific unfolding of events here are not the subject of this chapter, the manner in which such things are recounted is nevertheless important, as it reveals the complex stance adopted by the Kh'ase.
- 44 In interviews with activists from Kabardino-Balkaria, I was informed that the government of the republic, under the leadership of Kokov, contributed 40 million rubles to the third congress, held in Cherkessk.
 - 45 For a discussion of the return to the Caucasus and the various organisations and government bodies, see C. Bram, 'Muslim Revivalism and the Emergence of Civic Society – a Case Study of an Israeli-Circassian Community', in A. Sela and I. Zilberman (eds), *The Emergence of Civic Society Among the Israeli Palestinian Citizens* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming), and note 19 (ibid.). For more sources see also note 19 on Colarusso's article (ibid.).
 - 46 I have no information as to whether concrete action has been taken on this agreement; it is clear, though, that ties between the republics have been strengthened. This fact itself constitutes an additional source of tension in Karachai-Cherkesia, where the majority, as noted above, is Karachai. And see 'Report to the IVth Congress of the ICA', *Circassian World*, No. 2 (summer 1998), p. 7.
 - 47 I place particular emphasis on this fact as it applies to the Adyghe. The situation for the Abkhaz–Abaza is quite different, for they have two distinct population centres: Abkhazia itself constitutes a sort of centre for the Abkhaz, with the Abaza located along its periphery.
 - 48 Igor Rotar, 'The Western Republics of the North Caucasus – A Seat of Calm in a Zone of Instability', *Russia and the Muslim World*, No. 8 (74), pp. 18–21 (translation from *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 13 May 1998).
 - 49 The Russians form the majority in the republic.
 - 50 About the conflict in Chechnya and its various phases see F. Splidsobel-Hansen, 'The 1991 Chechen Revolution: The Response of Moscow', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1994), pp. 395–409 and S. E. Cornell, 'A Chechen State?', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1997), pp. 201–15.
 - 51 The Soviets transferred, or 'deported' several north Caucasian nationalities (such as the Karachai, Balkars, Ingush and Chechens) to Central Asia, using the pretext that they cooperated with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. See R. Conquest, *The Nation Killers* (Glasgow: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 9–12, 64–6, 95–111; H. Krag and L. Funch, *The North Caucasus: Minority at a Crossroad* (London: International Minority Rights Group, 1994), pp. 12–13.
 - 52 The conflict surfaced just when this chapter was in the final stages of writing: as these lines are being penned, violent clashes are taking place, fuelled by the contest between Cherkes and Karachai candidates over the presidency of the republic. The Cherkes candidate is Stanislav Dereb, a businessman who is currently serving as the mayor of Cherkessk; Vladimir Semianov is the Karachai candidate. The Cherkes claim that the results of the elections in July 1999, which brought Semianov to power, were fraudulent. This sparked Cherkes demonstrations in protest, which, by September, had developed into violent clashes – which necessitated a major Russian intervention aimed at calming the state of affairs in the republic. This subject merits separate study, including a more precise analysis of the situation in Karachai-Cherkesia.
 - 53 About the various forms which the preoccupation with identity has taken in the diaspora, see both Shami's works quoted above and her 'Displacement, Historical Memory and Identity: The Circassians in Jordan', in S. K. Shami (ed.), *Mobility, Modernity and Misery: Population Displacement and Resettlement in*

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- See also Bram, 'Muslim Revivalism'.
- 54 Shami, 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity . . .', pp. 89–91.
 - 55 The congress is a fascinating arena for the intersection of numerous languages, and would be a good subject for a more comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis.
 - 56 C. Bram, *Hakhhinukh b'Qerev HaCherkessim b'Yisrael [Education Among the Circassians in Israel]* (Report presented to the Ministry of Education) (Jerusalem: The School for Educational Leadership, 1994).
 - 57 For a broader discussion of this topic see Bram, 'Muslim Revivalism', and 'Circassian Re-Emigration', pp. 210–22.
 - 58 See Chapter 7 in this volume.
 - 59 It is interesting to examine the influence of religion on the current conflict in Karachai-Cherkesia, for the Karachai and Balkars are also experiencing a religious revival; within a short span of years, mosques have been built in most Karachai and Balkar villages. Mosques have also been constructed in most Circassian/Adyghe villages – although it is fairly obvious that in Karachai-Cherkesia the religious revival is occurring within an ethno-national context.
 - 60 Cf. Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', pp. 83, 95.
 - 61 Shami, 'Displacement', p. 83.
 - 62 For a fuller discussion of this issue see J. Colarusso, 'Circassian repatriation', *The World and I* (November 1991), pp. 656–69; Shami, 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity', pp. 84, 87–95; Bram, 'Circassian Re-Emigration', pp. 205–22; Bram, 'Shivat Kavkaz', pp. 127–36.
 - 63 Colarusso, 'Abkhazia', p. 81.
 - 64 The utility of learning from Israel's experiences in this field has been pointed out at the ICA's congresses.
 - 65 Other activists have resided in the Caucasus for a few years, or have transferred some of their activities to the region. For example, A. Lavai, a Circassian leader from Israel who taught Islam at the University in Maikop, and who is currently serving as Imam in a Circassian village in Galilee; or Batiray Özbek, a scholar who recently published an important bibliography on the Circassians, *Bibliographie der Tscherkessen, Ethnographie der Tscherkessen 5* (Ankara: [n. publ.], 1997) – and who has conducted much of his work in the Caucasus.
 - 66 While state of 'dispersion' or 'exile' is understood as a consequence of war, transfer and other outside factors, and therefore is a destiny, in the state of diaspora the individual and communities choose to stay outside the homeland. Although it is not a clear-cut bi-polar/black-and-white division ('the choice' is influenced by various historical and political factors) it helps in pointing out a sociological and psychological change.
 - 67 Shami 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity', p. 92.
 - 68 Ibid., p. 92.
 - 69 Smeets, 'Circassia', p. 107.
 - 70 Shami, 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity', pp. 79–82.
 - 71 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) (originally published in 1983).
 - 72 A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); 'Ethnic Election and Cultural Identity', *Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 10 (1993), pp. 9–25.
 - 73 Shami, 'Disjuncture in Ethnicity', p. 93.