

The Society of Circassian Unity and Its Publication: ‘İttihad Gazetesi’ (Cairo, 1899)*

Many countries of the Near and Middle East, that formerly constituted parts of the Ottoman Empire, became a second homeland for hundreds of thousands of Northern Caucasians, who had been compelled to migrate there after the completion of the Russo-Caucasian War, mainly in the 1850s – 1870s. Remaining in ethno-historical respect fractions of the peoples of the North Caucasus, these diaspora groups during the past century and a half have accomplished, however, their own, rather complicated way of cultural, social and political evolution, the objective study and adequate assessment of which require, first of all, involvement of a wide scope of Turkish sources, i.e. archival materials, press, autobiographical literature, etc. Among these sources a special place is occupied (partially due to their relative sparsity) by documents proceeding from the North Caucasians directly – collective and individual petitions of the immigrants, publications and records of the organizations created by them, memoirs of outstanding members of the Circassian¹ community and so on, – which reflect the condition of public attitudes and ideological aspirations amid the diaspora at every particular stage.

During the first decades following the settlement of the North Caucasians in the sultan’s domains, it were usually the representatives of the traditional feudal-patriarchal aristocracy who acted as the mouthpieces of their fellow-countrymen, quite often emphasizing their own narrow-class interests in their appeals to the Porte²; yet, the end of the 19th century witnessed more signs of activity of a new elite that was emerging in the diaspora, viz. the Circassian civil and military intelligentsia, deeply integrated into the respective strata of the Ottoman-Muslim society, but at the same time closely associated by informal ties with their native ethnic background. Thus, in the 1880s and 1890s the Circassian intellectuals attempted taking certain steps that were clearly of national-cultural orientation. In particular, well-known are such facts as publication by the distinguished Ottoman writer and public figure Ahmed Midhat Efendi³ of a number of works on the ‘Caucasian life’ issues and performance of some of them in a metropolitan theatre; establishment on the initiative of Ahmed Midhat Efendi and eminent commanders Fuad Paşa⁴, Gazi Muhammed Paşa⁵ et al. of a special committee with the aim of writing an extensive work on Caucasian history; development by a career bureaucrat Ahmed Cavid Paşa⁶ together with a group of like-minded persons of an Adyghe alphabet based on Arabic characters and its lithographic print in 1897, etc. (Aydemir, 1991, pp. 68-69, 88; Aydemir, 1988, pp. 183-184; Berzeg, 1995, pp. 9-14). All these endeavors, undoubtedly, were indicative of gradual actualization amidst the diaspora’s educated sections of a goal of elaborating some concept of ethno-national development (or

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¹ The term “Circassian”, in line with its traditional usage in the Near and Middle East, has been used in this text principally in its broader sense implying all indigenous ethnic groups of Northern Caucasia, i.e. Adyghes, Ubykhs, Abkhazians, Ossetes, Chechens, Daghestanis, etc.

² For details see our article “Some Aspects of Social Adaptation of the North Caucasian Immigrants in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the XIXth Century (on the Immigrants’ Applications to Authorities)” in forthcoming proceedings of the XVth Turkish Congress of History held in September 2006 in Ankara.

³ Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1913) – a member of the Hagur family of the Adyghes (in the maternal line).

⁴ (Deli) Fuad Paşa (1835-1931) – a member of the Thugo family of the Ubykhs.

⁵ Gazi Muhammed Paşa (1833?-1903) – an Avar, the middle son of Imam Shamil.

⁶ Ahmed Cavid Paşa (1840-1916) – a member of the Therhet family of the Ubykhs.

survival) of their compatriots in the drastically changed conditions of their existence after the immigration.

Still, we cannot judge with a sufficient degree of certainty on actual ideological and organizational potential of the arising Circassian intelligentsia at the given stage, since the period of its formation coincided substantially with the epoch of ultimate toughening of the regime of feudal-absolutist dictatorship under Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), who did not recognize elementary personal and political liberties of his subjects and was extremely suspicious of any manifestations of national self-consciousness among the dependent peoples. Suffice it to note that the authorities have suppressed all the above-listed efforts of the Circassian enlightenment enthusiasts, exposing some of their initiators to police persecution (Aydemir, 1991, p. 68; Yıldız, 1977, p. 79).

Impossibility of carrying out legal ethnically-oriented activities, naturally, could not help facilitating among the patriotically disposed section of the diaspora intellectual elite (just as the case was with the other Ottoman peoples) dissemination of the ideas of the oppositional Young Turk movement, that was advocating restoration of the 1876 Constitution abolished by Abdülhamid II. It is noteworthy that the afore-mentioned Ahmed Midhat Efendi and Ahmed Cavid Paşa maintained close relations with the ideological leader of the Ottoman constitutionalists Namık Kemal Bey and other oppositionists and even have rendered them certain support in their activities (Berzeg, 1995, pp. 10, 12).

On the other hand, it is an indisputable fact that the North Caucasians from among officers, state employees, students, free professionals and sometimes even members of the feudal bureaucracy were actively involved in the ranks of various Young Turk groupings acting both inside the empire and in the emigration. For example, one of the four students of the İstanbul Army Medical School, who in 1889 established the first clandestine cell of the Young Turk Society of Union and Progress, Mehmed Reşid Bey⁷, was a Circassian born in Caucasus (Ramsaur, 1957, p. 15; Shaw & Shaw, 1977, p. 256). Later on representatives of the North Caucasian ethnic milieu such as Mehmed Murad Bey⁸ (in 1896-1897 the leader of the Geneva branch of the Society of Union and Progress and the publisher of one of the major oppositional papers 'Mizan'), Ahmed Saib Bey⁹ (in 1899-1907 the actual leader of the Cairo branch of the Society of Union and Progress and the publisher of the influential Young Turk paper 'Sancak'), Mehmed Sabahaddin Bey¹⁰ (the ideologist and the leader of the 'decentralist' trend within the Young Turk movement), Hüseyin Tosun Bey¹¹ (an expert conspirator, one of the organizers of the anti-government revolt of 1906-1907 in Eastern Anatolia), etc., have also significantly contributed to the anti-absolutist movement (Petrosyan, 1971, pp. 178-183, 192-193, 202-212, 225, 233-236; Berzeg, 1995, pp. 15, 175-176, 184-185, 223, 227-228).

Circassians' participation in the Young Turk movement, indubitably, was preconditioned primarily by the reasons of general political and ideological character and, as a rule, was not attended by making demands for addressing the diaspora's peculiar needs, though one can reasonably assume that a considerable portion of the North Caucasians – activists of the constitutional-liberal organizations of the turn of the century – possessed advanced ethnic consciousness alongside with the state Ottoman (or rather state-communal Ottoman-Muslim) identity and, therefore, certain 'national' motivation for joining the struggle

⁷ Mehmed Reşid Bey (1873-1919) – a member of the Hanahe family of the Adyghes.

⁸ (Mizancı) Mehmed Murad Bey (1854?-1917) – a Dargin born in the village of Urakhi in Daghestan as Gadji-Murad Amirov.

⁹ Ahmed Saib Bey (1859-1920) – a member of the Kaplan family of the Qumyqs.

¹⁰ Mehmed Sabahaddin Bey, better known by the name of Prince Sabahaddin (1877-1948) – a son of high-ranking Ottoman dignitary from the Kozba family of the Abkhazians and sister of Abdülhamid II.

¹¹ Hüseyin Tosun Bey (?-1930) – a member of the Şhapli family of the Ubykhs.

against the dictatorship¹². It is obvious, however, that at this stage the overwhelming majority of the Circassian oppositionists considered liquidation of the feudal-absolutist rule to be the key condition for facilitating their compatriots' ethno-national and social progress, which would base on the principles of equality and fraternity of all peoples of the empire declared by the Young Turks – i.e. the Ottomanism doctrine, which in the whole seemed to be fairly acceptable for the North Caucasian diaspora minority devoid of both historical roots and territorial-political aspirations on the Ottoman soil.

Nonetheless, a number of facts indicate that during the period under consideration some part of the North Caucasians, involved in the Young Turk movement, tended towards ethnic-based unification and collaboration. The most demonstrative of it, evidently, is the establishment of the Society of Circassian Unity¹³ (SCU) that presents essentially the subject of this paper.

Our knowledge of the circumstances of the SCU's emergence, its goals and ideology is primarily based on the materials of the eight-page first issue of its press organ, 'İttihad Gazetesi' ('The Unity Newspaper'), which appeared in Cairo on October 15, 1899 (3 *Teşrin-i evvel* 1315 or 9 *Cemazi-el-ahir* 1317)¹⁴. On its title page – under the images of traditional North Caucasian attributes (kalpak hat, mountaineers' weapons and accouterments, standard with two crossed arrows and three five-pointed stars, et al.), topped with Quranic quotations and backgrounded with the sunbeams breaking through black clouds, that probably symbolized the struggle against despotism and ignorance, – it was proclaimed that the newspaper aimed at “serving the rise of Islam through work seeking creation of the conditions for awakening and advancement of the Circassian immigrants and the whole Ottoman nation”. As the general administrator (*müdür-i umumi*) of the publication was recorded the retired police major Barak Bey Zade Mehmed Emin Bey from a noble Loh (لوح)¹⁵ family, and as its editor-in-chief (*ser muharrir*) – Mehmed Fazıl Bey, a son of the former vice-secretary of the Department of the Palace Service (*Mabeyn-i Hümayun*) certain Kudsi Zade Kadri Bey. It was announced that the paper would be published weekly and distributed both in the Ottoman territory and beyond its borders. All materials of the issue were written in a good, sometimes fairly rich and ornate Ottoman Turkish language, the fact indicative of rather high educational level of their authors.

In an address 'To the Esteemed Readers', signed by Mehmed Emin¹⁶, the necessity of establishing of such a society was grounded and events, that preceded this, were briefly stated. As followed from this narration, Mehmed Emin, who arrived as a child “in the epoch of the Caucasian migration” to the Ottoman domains and settled together with his relatives in the vicinity of İzmid, later on, in the capacity of the Circassian irregulars detachment commander (during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878) and police officer, traveled around European and Asian provinces of the empire, everywhere “witnessing disastrous state of the Circassian tribes, rather scattered anyhow and anywhere than settled”. Hardships and

¹² In confirmation of this one can refer to the fact that after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 a whole number of ethnic North Caucasians – former members of illegal groups of the Ottoman constitutionalists –actively joined the organized Circassian socio-cultural and political movement. For example, Mehmed Murad in 1908 appeared among the constitutors of the Circassian Unity and Mutual Assistance Society; Hüseyin Tosun during 1918-1919 headed the Society of Northern Caucasia; Mehmed Reşid also closely collaborated with these and other diaspora organizations. The list can be significantly enlarged.

¹³ The original name of the society in Ottoman Turkish is *Cem'iyet-i İttihadiyye-i Çerakise*.

¹⁴ This publication has long ago become a bibliographic rarity, today being available only in some private collections. We express our gratitude to Mr. Fahri Huvaj of Ankara for kind putting of a copy of the newspaper at our disposal; unfortunately, one page, namely the 5th, is missing. For brief information on the society and the newspaper see also: Berzeg, 1996, pp. 2, 94-95.

¹⁵ One can just suppose that this is a form of the Arabic transcription for the name of renowned Abazin (Abaza) princely family of *Loo* (*Loov* in Russian sources).

¹⁶ Mehmed Emin, Kari'in-i Kirama (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 1).

privations of the compatriots conceived him to undertake some actions to help them, but the burden of official functions and the rigidity of the political regime had been for a long time preventing him from carrying out these intentions. Still, it looks, that his behavior or views arose certain suspicions of the authorities, as in 1892 or 1893 he was transferred to Tripolitania (Trablusgarb) vilayet, which during the rule of Abdülhamid II served as one of the principal exile places for disloyal military and civilian officials. It should be noted, however, that the governmental practice of sending oppositionists to that province and even appointing some of them to rather influential local positions resulted in the second half of the 1890s in a rapid numerical growth of the Society of Union and Progress regional branch, members of which were actually rather free in propagating their ideas. Also noteworthy is that among the well-known Young Turk officers transferred there during the discussed period, were several conspicuous Circassians, e.g. the above-mentioned Mehmed Reşid Bey, who became the actual leader of the local organization of the constitutionalists, Hüseyin Tosun Bey, the key person in their underground activities, et al. (Hanioglu, [1985,] pp. 292-294). Undoubtedly, in this milieu Mehmed Emin, who later on took up the position of the chief of the Tripoli prison, obtained the opportunity of more active involvement in the Young Turk movement. As he himself stressed in the referred address, throughout seven years of his stay in Tripolitania “he had applied much efforts to initiate activities that would ensure well-being and rise of the Ottoman nation and ill-fated Circassians”. One can suppose that such incidents, as secret publication of two anti-governmental papers by the imprisoned Young Turks, as well as series of their escapes from the jail, that forced the central authorities in 1899 to start a special inquiry, might have taken place not without his connivance (Hanioglu, [1985,] pp. 293-294)¹⁷. In the same years, Mehmed Emin had apparently attempted to form a narrower, ethnically based (i.e. Circassian) grouping of national-liberal type, as well. However, since in 1899, having faced the increased threat of repression, Mehmed Emin, among a whole number of prominent Tripolitanian oppositionists, had to flee to the British-governed Egypt, this activity was continued in the new place. There Mehmed Emin Bey and his associates, of whom only Mehmed Fazıl Bey is known to us, originally joined the Cairo branch of the Society of Union and Progress, appreciably strengthened by the inflow of new members, but soon they left this union by reasons not quite clear and legally established in the same year an independent organization – the Society of Circassian Unity – with the ‘İttihad Gazetesi’ as its official publication (Hanioglu, [1985,] pp. 333, 633). This is the overview of the prehistory of the emergence of both the society and the newspaper, according to the report of one of their constitutors and available evidences from other sources.

Of the rest of the issue’s materials, published without signature, the most interesting is an extensive and, in a sense, program article under an unpretentious title ‘A Couple of Words’¹⁸, in which an attempt has been made to assess the state of the North Caucasians after their defeat in the Russo-Caucasian War and migration to the Ottoman territory. Judging by its content, the leaders of the SCU saw the fundamental reason of the military-political and demographical catastrophe that had befallen their compatriots in the 19th century, in their civilizational lag from the nearest neighbors. It was accentuated that the Circassians, who due to bad accessibility of the Caucasus Mountains, and their own valor had been for many centuries successfully repelling attacks of more numerous enemies, in modern times failed to elude the fate of other societies, which found themselves at the periphery of the world progress, and were subdued by a power standing at a much higher level of socio-political, economical and technical development, i.e. by Russia. In concordance with this conception, the contemporary era was characterized by keen and uncompromising rivalry among countries

¹⁷ Mehmed Emin Bey was spoken with praise at this time by one of the leading Young Turk papers, the ‘Osmanlı’, published in Geneva. See: Hanioglu, [1985], p. 334.

¹⁸ B Kelimeteyn (İttihad Gazetesi, pp. 2-4).

and peoples, analogous to competition in the commercial sphere, education – and material resources and knowledge about the world, resultant from it – being the condition and the fundamental principle of preservation of any nation. Accordingly, lack of all these factors was considered to be the major reason for the final collapse of the mountaineers' resistance and – to a certain extent – for their choice in favor of migrating to the sultan's domains.

Yet, it were the Ottoman authorities primarily, who were blamed for the miseries and sorrows endured by Circassians in the course of the immigration and settlement. Claims, asserted to them, were brought to three items. The official circles were charged, firstly, with extremely inhuman treatment of the North Caucasians during their colonization throughout the empire, viz. with assignment of deliberately unsuitable and unhealthy lands, inadequate supply with means of subsistence, etc. The second, not less grave accusation referred to odious practice of selling Circassian children and women (including purportedly quite a number of members of free and even noble estates) into servitude, the wide spread of which immediately after the immigration was attributed solely to encouragement of this trade by the government employees for mercenary purposes. For all that, it should be noted that remonstrance of the author(s) of the article was directed to the facts of enslavement of freeborn people, as contradicting to the regulations of the Muslim law, but not to the very existence of the patriarchal institutions of slaveholding and slave trade in the Circassian society. At last, thirdly, it was stated, that even after having ultimately settled, the Circassians were still subjected to particularly severe exploitation (when paying taxes, performing state obligations, et al.) by the authorities, who took advantage of their ignorance of the local realities, Turkish language, etc. Grasping and merciless provincial functionaries were claimed in the article to be the main culprits of the immigrants' sufferings, however a considerable part of criticism was addressed also to the Sublime Porte and the sultan's milieu (not excepting the numerous stratum of the Circassian court bureaucracy), although the padishah himself was not mentioned directly. It is noteworthy that, like the majority of the Young Turk groups, the SCU members actively supported their claims against the authorities, referring to the Islamic doctrine. Thus, peculiar indignation was caused by the fact that the Ottoman administration had not duly appreciated the religious zeal of the Circassians, who allegedly had left Caucasus firstly because of their yearning to take refuge "under the canopy of the Holy Caliphate" (and for this sake even had "rejected the favor(!?)... demonstrated by Russia after the conquest"), and hence transgressed the order of the Prophet Mohammed to render every possible assistance to coreligionist refugees and migrants.

Despite the exceptionally (in times exaggeratedly) negative evaluation of the experience of the North Caucasians' residence in the sultan's domains, characterized – at least in respect to the first post-immigration decades – by the term "strange land" (*gurbet*), it was obvious that the article regarded the Ottoman state to be though the secondary and newly-gained, but yet the only real homeland of the Circassian diaspora, on which the hopes of their future development were pinned. Being, indisputably, the bearers of the super-ethnic Ottoman-Muslim patriotism (alongside with the ethnic Circassian), the leaders of the SCU with apparent regret stated insufficient, in their opinion, strive of their compatriots for assertion of their rights and interests, as well as for the struggle for progressive reforms on a countrywide scale, perceiving the reasons of such passivity in a grave moral and psychological condition of Circassians due to the undergone exodus tragedy; in "sentiments of apathy and submission" passing on to them from the local population, exhausted by the centuries-long oppression; in ignorance and benightedness of the bulk of the immigrants; and, likewise, in their unreserved, blind allegiance to the institutions of sultanate and caliphate. Hence, it was declared highly urgent to enlighten the North Caucasians and to restore their "inherent qualities", such as boldness, nobleness, chivalry, readiness to self-sacrifice, etc., in order to get them more visibly involved in activities aimed at liquidation of the despotic

regime, impeding the progress of the peoples of the empire. Naturally, the SCU considered it its duty and privilege to carry out proper agitation and propaganda among the Circassian population.

At the same time, the intention to combine the goals of ideological-political and ethnonational-cultural enlightenment of the North Caucasian diaspora was clearly verbalized. In particular, measures were to be taken in the nearest future “to revitalize the Circassian language”. Of interest in this context is an assertion about the existence of several versions of the “national” Circassian alphabet (developed, namely, for “*Abzah*¹⁹, *Abaza*²⁰, *Ubuh*²¹ and *Kuşha*²² dialects”), which allegedly formed the basis for preparing for print textbooks on grammar, arithmetic and Islamic teachings and history, a collection of the Circassian proverbs and sayings and a “Circassian dictionary”. Most likely this statement referred to the activity of the afore-mentioned group of Ahmed Cavid Paşa, with whom the members of the society probably maintained contact. If the above information reflects the actual and not projected situation, it, indubitably, exacts our knowledge of the level of Circassian enlightenment, achieved by the end of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire²³. In any case, the nature of publications, that were planned by the SCU, but, as far as we know, have not seen the light in the period under consideration, testifies that certain diaspora intellectuals, connected one way or another with the society, had begun in practice a spadework on creation of the foundations of national North Caucasian education.

On the other hand, the article persistently accentuated – probably to prevent an adverse reaction to the announced ethnic peculiarity on the part of the leading groups of the constitutional movement – the SCU’s unwillingness “to undermine in word or deed Islamic and national brotherhood”. On the contrary, it was underlined that the goal of its establishment lay in formation of a “strong alliance” for the sake of ensuring overall justice and liberty, “the noble Ottomans”, on the one hand, and “their brothers Circassians”, on the other, appearing as nearly equal partners in this expected union.

The rest of the articles do not refer directly to the problems of the North Caucasians, although they allow for getting more complete notion of the worldview and political philosophy of the publishers. Thus, in line with the general Young Turk tradition, much attention was paid to substantiation of compatibility of the claims for liberal reforms and educating of the population with regulations and norms of Islam. In the extensive article ‘Islamic Unity’, as well as in other materials, it was noted that, in spite of the widespread “superficial view”, Islam by no means impeded social and cultural progress. High level of development of science and public institutions in the early-medieval Muslim states was adduced as confirmation²⁴. Stressing pre-eminence of the Muslim civilization over the Christian one in terms of morality and humanism, the paper, nonetheless, called for maximal adoption of the material and technical achievements of the West – the result of persistent work and modern knowledge. Pan-Islamist tendencies, though obviously of anti-imperialistic trend, were also characteristic for the society’s views. Rallying of all Muslim countries and peoples was regarded as a condition of their successful counteraction to the Europeans’

¹⁹ *Abzah* (or *Abadzekh*) – one of the main subgroups (tribes) of the Western Adyghe people.

²⁰ *Abaza* – a common designation in Turkish of two closely related peoples: the Abkhazians and the Abazins (Abazas proper).

²¹ *Ubuh* (or *Ubykh*) – a smaller people of the North-West Caucasus, entirely evicted in 1863-1864 to the Ottoman Empire.

²² *Kuşha* – a name of the Ossetes in Adyghe language, occasionally used also in Turkish.

²³ According to the data available at present, the earliest reliable facts of publication of educational or other literature in Adyghe and some other North Caucasian languages in the Ottoman Empire, date from the period following the revolution of 1908 and are connected with the activities of the Circassian Unity and Mutual Assistance Society. See: Aydemir, 1991, passim; Berzeg, 1995, passim; Yıldız, 1977, passim.

²⁴ *İttihad-ı İslam* (*İttihad Gazetesi*, pp. 6-8).

expansion, the independent Ottoman state and its capital İstanbul, the caliph's residence, being considered as the prospective uniting center of the whole Islam world. Yet, it was stipulated that such an idea, "groundless at present", might become a reality only in case of restoration of the constitutional parliamentary regime in the Ottoman Empire.

In a number of reports and commentaries their writers manifested themselves as firm adherents of strengthening of the Ottoman state and maintenance of its territorial integrity. So were, for instance, the articles about Albanian congress in Macedonia²⁵, plans for division of the Yemen vilayet²⁶, Russian strategy in Balkans²⁷, etc.

In conclusion it is indispensable to touch upon an important SCU program document, published in the edition under review – the statute of its external members (*a'za-i harice*)²⁸, i.e. the persons, who were on voluntary basis involved by the leaders of the organization in reinforcement of its positions inside the empire. As the paragraph 1 of this statute ran, the society set itself as an object "to serve progress and prosperity of the Circassians and thereby of the whole population of Anatolia, Rumelia and other Ottoman lands through providing them with access to the fruits of enlightenment and truth and to take necessary measures to ensure observation of their rights and prevention of oppression". The twofold essence of ideological and political guidelines of the society was reaffirmed in the paragraph 2, which proclaimed its intention to act for the benefit of "the whole Ottoman and Muslim nation (*millet*)" and to get support from all its members alongside with protecting "the nationality (*kavmiyyet*) of the Circassians". Accordingly, the paragraph 3 allowed of admittance of persons of all nationalities to the SCU, but the same paragraph provided for their organizational separation into different ethnic – i.e. "Circassian" and "non-Circassian" – branches, that can be explained by the objective dissimilarity of national-cultural and general political tasks of the society. The remaining paragraphs (4 to 7) regulated, though not accurately enough, the rights and responsibilities of various categories of "external members", who, judging by the set of their functions, were obliged primarily to carry out clandestine propaganda and explain the society's views to the population of the Ottoman provinces²⁹.

The ideological and practical-political principles of the SCU, described above, quite distinctly testify that its strategic purpose consisted in mobilization and organizational unification of the emerging diaspora intelligentsia, coming mainly from the commons, with the view of subsequent articulation and assertion of the specific interests of the Near and Middle Eastern Circassians in a statewide, though initially oppositional, format. In doing so the society, most likely, was expecting to secure for itself a special ethnic niche within the Ottoman constitutional movement or even to act as a partner of the Young Turks in the struggle against the Abdülhamidian despotism, in order to assure the most favorable conditions for ethno-nationally – in the first place socially and culturally – oriented activities of the Circassian elite after liberalization of the political regime. In this connection one cannot but notice the fact, that the SCU has shaped immediately after a proposal was put forward in September 1899 by the Cairo branch of the Society of Union and Progress to summon the uniting congress of all organizations and groups, resisting the absolutist rule; this can be indicative of the Circassian oppositionists' aspiration for being by all means represented as an independent and consolidated force at the projected forum, which, however, did not take place at that stage (Petrosyan, 1971, pp. 198-199; Karal, 1995, p. 520).

²⁵ Makale-i Mahsusa (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 4).

²⁶ Yemen Vilayetinin Taksimi: İsrâf mı? Tasarruf mu? (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 6).

²⁷ Düşmen Kimdir? (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 8).

²⁸ Cem'iyet-i İttihadiyye-i Çerakisenin İ'lamı Lazımgelen "A'za-i Harice" Nizamnamesi (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 6).

²⁹ Absence of more radical methods of struggle in the functional armory of the SCU is not surprising; in the period under review practical activities of the Young Turk organizations, as a rule, did not exceed the limits of the movement of political protest against the existing regime, the main form of this struggle being print propaganda (Petrosyan, 1971, p. 215).

However, the actual political situation was not conducive to realization of the society's plans. Even laying aside purely practical difficulties caused by the regular preventative measures of the authorities³⁰, one should consider that the leading Young Turk groups, who, in accordance with the doctrine of Ottomanism, had advanced the slogans of unity, equality and brotherhood of all peoples of the empire, regarded as acceptable only their joint struggle against the regime and sharply condemned any steps taken in this direction on behalf of particular nationalities (Petrosyan, 1971, p. 171). Hence, this separate initiative, despite numerous and probably quite sincere declarations in the 'İttihad Gazetesi' about the devotion to "the common Ottoman homeland", was not met with understanding by other participants of the constitutional movement, some of whom openly branded the foundation of the SCU as a "scandalous" act (Hanioğlu, [1985,] pp. 334, 633). No less serious was the problem of the SCU's failure to integrate around its program representatives of the social stratum, to which it principally appealed, i.e. the new educated (predominantly military and bureaucratic) elite of the North Caucasian diaspora. It is obvious that the overwhelming majority of the members of this milieu, who were opposed to the existing authority, preferred, as they used to before, to act in the framework of various factions of the Society of Union and Progress and other Ottoman emigrant organizations, probably considering it inopportune to bring into the foreground the questions of their compatriots' ethno-national development. Thus, having failed to create in Cairo an efficient center of the organization, its leaders, naturally, could not count for successful involvement of supporters and activists within the Ottoman borders, to say nothing of implementation of ethno-cultural and educational projects. As a result, the SCU failed to carry out either of its two closely interconnected tactical tasks: neither to occupy any appreciable place within the constitutional-liberal (Young Turk) movement, nor to give rise to the ethnic Circassian movement in the country. One may suppose with a high degree of confidence that soon after its establishment the SCU ceased to exist in practice. Lack of any real evidences of further publication of the 'İttihad Gazetesi' is also indicative of this assumption³¹.

Though it has not left any significant trace in the history of the Ottoman political and ideological trends of the period under scrutiny, the SCU and its press organ, however, appear to be a rather important and actually the earliest documented testimony of a certain maturity of the forming Circassian intelligentsia, reflecting a process of origination of ethno-national consciousness among the North Caucasian groups under the complex circumstances of the diaspora existence. At the same time, despite all the incidentalness of their presence on the political scene, both the society and its paper proved to be successful enough in marking the guidelines (predominantly in the sphere of enlightenment), that became the priority in the activities of more mass Circassian organizations, established in the Ottoman Empire after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 and the consequent restoration of the constitutional order.

As for the known founders of the SCU – Mehmed Emin Bey and Mehmed Fazıl Bey, – we, unfortunately, have no reliable information on their further fate. At least, they never

³⁰ On October 19, 1899, that is in 4 days after the 1st issue of the 'İttihad Gazetesi' appeared in Cairo, the competent Ottoman services were instructed to track and suppress attempts of its transporting through the state's borders. See: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, no 2258/65, 13 Cemazi-el-ahir 1317 (information on this document kindly provided by Dr. Hilmi Bayraktar, Selçuk University, Konya).

³¹ For comparison it can be stated that similar efforts on the part of the intellectuals of some other Muslim peoples of the empire (not to mention the non-Muslims), by which the founders of the SCU possibly were partially inspired, proved to be more productive. In particular, before 1908 in emigration were being issued several periodicals in Arabic, Albanian and Kurdish languages, which, alongside with criticism against the Abdülhamidian despotism, upheld the interests of respective ethnic groups, some of them even claiming the national autonomy. See: Karal, 1995, p. 513.

appeared among more or less noticeable figures of the Ottoman political parties and groups or the Circassian civic associations neither before, nor after 1908³².

³² According to a document available in the archives of the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, in December 1908 a certain “Noh (possibly Loh?) Zade Mehmed Bey Bin Barak, from Circassians,” submitted an application to the Police Department of İstanbul, asking for the permission to publish a newspaper ‘Kafkasya Mazlumlari’ (‘The Oppressed of the Caucasus’) (see: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Dahiliye Nezareti, İdare, no 124.1/61, 26 Zi-l-ka’de 1326), which, however, never saw the light by reasons that are unknown to us. Considering a certain likeness of this name – in sense and form – to the name of one of the founders of the SCU (recorded in full as “Loh Barak Bey Zade Mehmed Emin Bey”), we can concede with caution that in both cases one and the same person is concerned.

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Circassian World

Circassian World is an independent non-profit web site dedicated to create an informational resource for Circassians and non-Circassians who wish to learn more about the heritage, culture, and history of the Adyghe-Abkhaz people. For more information regarding Circassian World, please contact info@circassianworld.com
