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THE NORTH-WESTERN CAUCASUS

Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo- Cherkessia and Adygea

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Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, unlike the geological separation between the northern and southern parts of the Caucasus by the Greater Caucasus mountains, there are no obvious physical barriers within the North Caucasus. Nevertheless, throughout history there have been considerable differences in the cultural, political and ethno-religious developments between its western and eastern parts, even though they have possessed many characteristics common to the North Caucasus and the Caucasus as a whole. The ethno-cultural distinctiveness of the north-western Caucasus has been largely due to its adjacency to the Black Sea. As evidenced by archaeological and paleolinguistic research, the region attracted newcomers and conquerors arriving by sea from present-day Turkey, Greece and Italy as far back as the third millennium BCE (see Chapter 3). In the first millennium BCE the area stretching from the present-day Taman Peninsula and Sochi to the western part of Karachaevo-Cherkessia harboured the so-called 'Koban culture' which presented a fusion of indigenous Caucasian, Hittite and Greek material cultures (Richmond 2008: 10). Between the eighth and third centuries BCE the region was Hellenised by Greeks who founded there a number of *poleis* which acted as major trade centres along the coast of the Black Sea which they called the 'Euxine Sea'. Between the third and sixth centuries CE the north-western Caucasus was culturally dominated by the Byzantines who were responsible for the region's Christianisation. From the eleventh till the fifteenth centuries the region was largely controlled by Christian Genoese, who dominated the Black Sea trade. The Byzantine and Genoese ethno-cultural and religious legacies of the north-western Caucasus notably contrasted with the Iranian and Arab caliphal heritage in the north-eastern and part of the southern Caucasus. Among reminders of those legacies are the regions' Greeks, Armenians and other indigenous Christians.

Subsequently, the Islamisation of the Caucasus' north-west took a different path from that in the north-east. Unlike southern Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan, which were Islamised in the seventh century CE by Prophet Muhammad's companions (see Chapter 5), the Islamisation of the north-western Caucasus started only in the fifteenth century and

continued till the end of nineteenth century. Even then Islam co-existed with paganism, Christianity and Judaism. Importantly, its agents were not Arabs and Arabised Muslims but Muslim Crimean Tatars and Ottoman Turks. From the fifteenth till the eighteenth centuries the region was part of the political, cultural and religious domain of the Crimean Khanate which, following the Russian conquest of the Crimea in 1783, was superseded by the Ottoman Empire. This also accounted for *madhhab* (juridical school) differences between the north-eastern and north-western parts of the Caucasus. While the former is dominated by the Shafi'i *madhhab*, the latter is associated with the Hanafi *madhhab*, the *madhhab* of the Crimean Tatars, Ottomans and many other Turkic peoples. The Turkicised Islamisation of the region also explains the relatively stronger position of Islam among its Turkic peoples – the Karachais, Balkars and Nogais – compared to its Adyghe, or Circassian, peoples who in the first millennium BCE formed four major subgroups: the Abkhaz, the Abazas, the Ubykhs and the Adyghe (Circassians) *per se*. The Abkhazians included the Abkhaz and Tap'anta, who later converged with the Abazas. The Adyghe consisted of the Kabardians, the Abadzakhs, the Natukhais and the Shapseghs (Shapsugs). The Ubykhs and the Natukhais became subsequently practically extinct by being assimilated into other Adyghe groups (see Chapter 3). From the middle ages the central part of the North Caucasus, which was populated by the Adyghe, was referred to as Kabarda¹ (K'eberdei, in Adyghe), or Kassogia. Subsequently, Kabarda's expansion eastwards led to the emergence of another Kabarda, known as 'Lesser Kabarda', which bordered the lands populated by Chechens, Ingush and Ossetians. In the middle of the sixteenth century several Kabardian aristocratic families turned to Russia for protection from raids by the Ottomans and the Crimeans. In 1557 the Russo-Kabardian Treaty marked the forging of special relations between the Russian and Kabardian ruling elites which were cemented in 1561 by the marriage of Ivan the Terrible to the daughter of the Kabardian prince Temryuk Indarko (Richmond 2008: 42; Yemelianova 2005: 54). In the 1920s Soviet ethnologists introduced the ethnonyms 'Cherkess' and 'Adygei' to describe the Adyghe of Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adygea respectively.²

When the Russians advanced into the Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they clashed with the Ottomans over the control of the north-western Caucasus and with Iran's Safavids over parts of the north-eastern and southern Caucasus (see Chapters 6, 21 and 22). Ottoman Turkey retained considerable influence over the region during, and especially in the aftermath of, the Caucasus War of 1817–64. Following the Russian victory, on 21 May 1864 over 1.4 million (90 per cent) of the region's Circassians, Abazas, Abkhaz and Ubykhs were deported to the Ottoman Empire (see Chapter 7). They became widely known as *muhajirs* ('emigrants', in Arabic) while the date of 21 May is marked as 'The Day of Remembrance and Grief' among Circassians across the world. In the Circassian diaspora, as well as among some Adyghe national leaders in the Caucasus, the Adyghe's mass forced eviction from the region by the tsarist authorities is perceived as 'ethnic cleansing' amounting to 'genocide' (Richmond 2008: 1, 21). *Muhajirs*' descendants subsequently formed a powerful and numerically superior Circassian-Abkhaz diaspora in modern Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Iraq, Egypt, the USA (California and New Jersey), Canada and Europe. Currently, their estimated number varies between two and four million with over half of them living in Turkey, Jordan and Syria (Richmond 2008: 5, 8, 172; Stokes 2009: 152). Among other implications of the Russian advance was the settlement in the north-western Caucasus of the Cossacks, followed by ethnic Russians (Yemelianova 2005: 54).

Russian and Soviet rule drastically curtailed Turkey's influence in the region, while introducing its present-day ethno-territorial complexities. Among these were the much larger Cossack and Slav settlements (compared to the north-eastern Caucasus), the

advantageous political and economic positions of the Circassians – the Kabardians and the Cherkess – compared to the Turkic Karachai-Balkars³ and the latter's mass deportations to Kazakhstan and Central Asia during the Second World War. Under the Stalinist nationalities policy, the region, which also included the territory-based Krasnodar and Stavropol' *krais*, acquired the two bi-titular⁴ ethnic polities of Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR) and Karachaevo-Cherkessia (KChR), while denying any form of autonomy to local Nogais, Abazas and Shapseghs (Shapsugs), and the single ethnicity titular polity of Adyghea, in which non-titular Russians constituted an overwhelming majority.

The Kabardino-Balkar Republic

The Kabardino-Balkar Republic (KBR), or Kabardino-Balkaria,⁵ is the most populous of the region's autonomies. It has an ethnically diverse population, over half of which are Kabardians (Circassians), followed by Russians and Cossacks (22 per cent) and Balkars (12 per cent). The other sizable ethnic groups are Turks, Ossetians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Koreans, Jews, Germans and Meskhetian Turks (Perepis' Naseleniia 2010). In its current form, the KBR presents a modification of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous *Oblast'* (KBAO), which was first created in 1922 by the Bolsheviks, who included it in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) within the USSR. In 1936 the Stalinist leadership upgraded its status to that of the Kabardino-Balkar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KB ASSR) and in 1944, following the Balkars' deportation to Central Asia, KB ASSR was transformed into the Kabardian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (KASSR). In 1957, the Khrushchev government rehabilitated the Balkars and reinstated the KB ASSR, albeit within a reduced territory.⁶ On 30 January 1991, in the context of the Gorbachevian perestroika, the KB ASSR leadership under Valery Kokov (in office 1990–2005), who was an ethnic Circassian (Abaza), declared KBR's sovereignty and upgraded its status to that of a 'union' republic of the USSR. During the *coup d'état* in Moscow on 21 August 1991 Kokov, like most Soviet Central Asian leaders, sided with the anti-Gorbachev *putschists* committed to the preservation of the USSR. Despite the *coup's* failure, he managed to retain power by repackaging himself as a unifying leader, becoming the first President of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic of the Russian Federation (RF).

However, Kokov's authority was challenged by the Kabardian, Balkar and Russian ethno-national oppositions who were emboldened by the end of communism and Moscow's political disorientation. These connected with their ethnic counterparts in Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adyghea and, in the case of the Kabardian nationalists, with the large economically and politically influential Circassian diaspora. As elsewhere in the former USSR, the political turmoil in the republic was aggravated by swift economic decline and structural breakdown due to the collapse of the centralised Soviet system and the abrupt reduction in federal subsidies. The paralysis in industrial production, which had previously employed over a third of the local population, triggered mass unemployment, especially among young people (among whom it reached over 25 per cent), the exodus of professionals and qualified technicians and the proliferation of grey and criminalised economic activities (see Chapter 16).

Kabardian nationalism

The Circassians' demographic majority in the KBR compared to the KChR and Adyghea turned it into the regional centre of Circassian nationalism. In the mid-1980s the KBR witnessed the emergence of a number of Kabardian educational and cultural organisations

seeking the revival of the Kabardian language and culture,⁷ the re-evaluation of Circassian history, especially related to the Caucasus War, and the Circassians' deportation to the Ottoman Empire. In the late 1980s the reconnection of these organisations with the Circassian diaspora in Turkey, Jordan and other countries contributed to the politicisation of Circassian national discourse, which also encompassed the repatriation to the Caucasus of the *muhajirs*' descendants, the recognition of their deportation as genocide and of Russia's policy in the Caucasus as colonial rule (Richmond 2008: x). These issues dominated the official agenda of the First Congress of the *Adyghe Khase* ('Adyghe Council') which was convened in the KBR's capital Nal'chik in October 1990. The Congress's unofficial agenda allegedly included the ethno-political consolidation of the Caucasus' Circassians and the creation of Greater Circassia on the territory of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and the Shapsegh-populated parts of Krasnodar *krai*. In February 1991 the Second Congress of the *Adyghe Khase* agreed to use the single term 'Adyghe' in the Caucasus and the term 'Circassians' (or 'Cherkess', in Russian), in communication with the diaspora and international circles (Richmond 2008: 140). The goals of the *Adyghe Khase* were shared by the newly founded Congress of the Kabardian People (CKP). In May 1991, Nal'chik hosted the First World Circassian Congress which established the International Circassian Association (ICA) under the leadership of Yury Kalmykov, a Kabardian politician and USSR Supreme Soviet (Parliament) deputy. The ICA's international dimension was evidenced in its periodicals – the newspaper *Nart* and the journal *Circassian World* ('Cherkesskii Mir', in Russian) – which were simultaneously published in Russian, English and Turkish.

The relations between the KBR's Kabardian-dominated political establishment and Kabardian/Circassian nationalists were ambiguous. Early on, Valery Kokov was sympathetic to the demands of the Kabardian nationalists, viewing them as useful leverage in his dealings with the weakening federal centre. In August 1990 the republic's parliament passed a decree on the official commemoration of the Remembrance Day of 21 May. In October of the same year the authorities organised and funded a conference on the re-evaluation of the Caucasus War and *muhajirs* (*mukhadzhyrstvo*) (see Chapter 7). The conference recognised the Circassians' deportations by the tsarist government as an act of genocide and called for the strengthening of pan-Circassian solidarity and the repatriation of Circassians to their historical homeland. Accordingly, the Kokov government facilitated the repatriation to Kabardino-Balkaria of over 2,000 Circassians from Syria and Kosovo and welcomed the participation of over 1,500 Kabardians in the Abkhaz secessionist movement against Georgia (Yemelianova 2005: 58).

In August 1991 the alliance between the Kokov leadership and the Kabardian nationalists began to falter. The nationalists accused Kokov of siding with *putchists* and giving insufficient support for the Circassian cause. In September 1991, in order to placate the nationalists, Valery Kokov introduced the post of president of the republic as a means to institutionalise Kabardian political dominance. In January 1992, Kokov managed to win the presidential elections, albeit his authority was challenged by Kabardian radicals and Balkar and Russian/Cossack nationalists who sought his resignation and pushed for their respective national agendas. For several months the KBR was on the brink of violent fragmentation along ethnic lines, and it was only in October 1992 that an acute ethno-political crisis was defused as a result of Kokov's political manoeuvring and compromises.

Having restored fragile order, President Kokov took decisive steps towards the neutralisation and de-politicisation of the Kabardian national opposition. This was achieved through co-opting some of its activists into government structures, the marginalisation of radicals and the appropriation of some aspects of the nationalists' programme. In late 1992 the authorities criminalised the CKP and by 2000 they had effectively de-politicised both the ICA and the

Adyghe Khase.⁸ Parallel to the crackdown on Kabardian radicals, the Kokov authorities persisted with a moderate Kabardian national agenda. Thus, Kabardian historians were urged to produce the world Circassian encyclopaedia and to re-write the history of Kabarda, while Kabardian linguists were tasked with generating a unified Adyghe alphabet for the Kabardians, Cherkess and Adygheis.⁹ In 1997 Valery Kokov presided over the establishment of the Inter-Parliament Council (IPC), which united the parliaments of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adyghea along Circassian lines. In 2001 the KBR parliament decreed the legal right of Circassian repatriates from Turkey, Jordan, Syria and other countries to settle in the KBR.

Kokov, like Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, pursued moderate Kabardian nationalism while positioning himself as the leader of all the peoples of the republic and the guarantor of inter-ethnic peace. He reached out to the Balkars, Russians, Cossacks and representatives of other ethnic groups and dealt with some of their ethnic grievances. Kokov's political durability was also ensured by his cautious stance in his relations with the Kremlin. In contrast to the leaders of Chechnya or Tatarstan, who in the early 1990s directly questioned the existing centre-periphery relations, Kokov complied with the federal centre. Nal'chik's special relations with Moscow were solidified following the ascendance in 2000 of President Putin. From then until his death in 2005 Kokov formally attuned his policies and rhetoric to the Kremlin's liking and anticipated goals while building an ethnocratic and patrimonial regime based on his own family and clan and their alliance with some other powerful ethnic clans. This approach has persisted under the presidencies of Arsen Kanokov (in office 2005–2013), Yury Kokov (in office 2014–18), who was unrelated to Valery Kokov, and Kazbek Kokov (in office 2018–present), who was son of Valery Kokov. However, their domestic policies exhibited significant differences.

Arsen Kanokov, a wealthy Moscow-based Kabardian businessman, used his tenure for personal enrichment by asserting his dominance in the vodka, tourist, hotel and entertainment businesses.¹⁰ It is alleged that he routinely resorted to Islamised criminal gangs known as 'forest brothers' in order to eliminate his business rivals; consequently, his presidency was marked by a sharp rise in Islamised terrorism (see Chapter 17). Kanokov's national policy was overtly pro-Kabardian. He funded the erection in 2004 in Nal'chik of the Monument to Victims of the Caucasus War; in 2008 he backed the establishment of the Circassian national organisation *Peryt* ('Avante-Garde'), which sought to facilitate the repatriation of the *muhajirs'* descendants to the KBR; and he sanctioned an official celebration of the 300-year anniversary of the Kabardian victory over joint Ottoman-Crimean Tatar troops at Kanzhal mountain. This celebration broke the fragile Kabardian-Balkar peace and caused mass protests among Balkars who regarded it as another Kabardian plot to seize their lands in the highlands.¹¹ In February 2012, in the midst of the Syrian civil war, Arsen Kanokov personally met with leaders of the 100,000-strong Circassian community of Syria and endorsed their scheduled repatriation to the KBR (Baranov 2013). In 2012–13 *Peryt*, collaborating with the Russian federal migration services, began issuing invitations to Syria's Circassians to settle in the KBR.¹²

Kabardian nationalism reawakened during the preparation for, and staging of, the 2014 Sochi Olympics for two reasons. One was the timing of the Olympics coinciding with 150 years since the end of the Caucasus War. The other was the Olympic village's location on the land with mass graves of Circassians killed in that war. Kabardian national activists, in coordination with US-based and other diaspora Circassian organisations, formed the Circassian movement 'No Sochi' which campaigned to prevent the Sochi Olympics (Akkieva and Dzamikhov 2017: 197). The rise of Kabardian nationalism inevitably triggered Balkar national mobilisation, but Kabardian-Balkar tensions were diffused by the then head of KBR, Yury Kokov, who reverted to more balanced national and economic policies which

have persisted under his successor, Kazbek Kokov, the son of Valery. As in the 1990s, Kabardian national radicalism subsided, to be largely superseded by a non-political educational and cultural movement. The *Peryt*¹³ was weakened and outplayed by the pro-government Kabardian organisation *Zh'egu* ('Hearth') which has predominantly dealt with employment, language and the cultural adaptation of Circassian repatriates (Akkieva and Dzamikhov 2017: 199). In a similar way the ICA has been integrated into regional and federal political structures. Its long-standing president Khauti Sokhrokov has become a member of the Public Council of the North Caucasian Federal District. The focus of the ICA has been the public commemoration of 21 May, as well as the organisation of other Circassian cultural events.¹⁴

Balkar nationalism

Unlike Kabardian nationalism, which is centred on the nineteenth-century Caucasus War, the main factor in the national mobilisation of the Balkars, as with the Karachais and Chechens, is their deportation between 1943 and 1957 (see Chapter 9). Other related factors include their relatively small number and disadvantaged status compared to the Kabardians (who claim their special relations with Moscow from the time of Ivan the Terrible) (see Chapter 3). Also, contrary to the international dimension of the Circassian national movement, Balkar nationalism has been inter-linked with the Karachais and largely restricted to the north-western Caucasus.

Among the first Balkar national organisations was *Nag'ysh* ('Village Assembly') which was established in 1985 under the leadership of Bagauddin Etezov. Initially, it was concerned with the revival of the Balkar language and culture. However, at the end of 1989, in response to the USSR Supreme Soviet's 'Declaration on the Restoration of the Rights of Repressed Peoples', there emerged several other organisations which formed an umbrella Balkar political organisation – the *Tëre* ('Forum') – calling for Kabardian-Balkar parity in the administrative sphere; the restoration of Chegem and Khulamo-Bezengi *raions*; the full restoration of El'brus and Cherek *raions* in pre-1944 borders; material and financial compensation to Balkar deportees and the Kremlin's official apology for the Cherek massacre.¹⁵ The lack of response from the federal centre and republican authorities radicalised Balkar nationalists. In August 1990 they convened a Balkar national conference which endorsed Balkaria's sovereignty. In March 1991 the First Congress of the Balkar People adopted a programme of Balkar socio-economic and territorial rehabilitation. The Balkar national movement received another boost in April 1991, when the RF parliament adopted a 'Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed People'. In November 1991 Balkar national activists formed the National Council of Balkar People (NCBP) as an independent Balkar political authority; in December of that year the NCBP organised a referendum on the national independence of Balkaria which was supported by 95 per cent of Balkars (Yaz'kova 2000: 47).

However, the Balkar national leadership failed to deliver on their popular mandate, becoming divided over tactics and the relationship with Kokov's government, which was promising considerable concessions to Balkars in exchange for their loyalty. The authorities regained the initiative and annulled the referendum result, at the same time placating the Balkar opposition by co-opting a few of their leaders¹⁶ into the ruling elite and fulfilling some of the Balkars' demands. Between 1995 and 1998 the Kokov government secured payment by the federal centre of compensation to every Balkar family which had endured deportation (Yemelianova 2005: 61). As a result, the Balkar national movement was irreparably weakened. So, when in November 1996 the NCBP attempted to revive the idea of the sovereign Balkar Republic on the territory of El'brus and Cherek *raions*, the bulk of Balkars remained passive. Consequently,

the authorities intensified their crack-down on the NCBP and *Tère*. In 1998 the Kokov leadership instigated the formation of a pro-government Balkar organisation *Malkar Avazy* ('Voice of Balkaria') under the leadership of General Sufyan Beppaev, its agenda limited to Balkar economic, educational and cultural concerns. In 2000, *Malkar Avazy* was merged with its Karachai counterpart to form the Karachai-Balkar organisation *Alan* under the co-leadership of Sufyan Beppaev and Ahmet Katchiev.

The unresolved issue of the full restoration of Chegem and Khulamo-Bezengi *raions* and parts of El'brus and Cherek *raions* has provided the background for continuing Balkar distrust of the Kabardian-dominated KBR authorities. In 2005, with the arrival of pro-business-minded president Kanokov, KBR Nal'chik witnessed a renewed Balkar national mobilisation. It was triggered by the autonomy's administrative reorganisation, as a result of which 80 per cent of the Balkar-populated highland and low hill areas were moved from the authority of Balkar local councils to Nal'chik, while the Balkar villages of Khasania and Belaia Rechka were administratively abolished and their territory included within the administrative borders of the city of Nal'chik. This reorganisation, which sought to transform the Balkar-populated areas into a privately owned and lucrative touristic zone, threatened the very existence of the traditional Balkar lifestyle based on grazing and cattle-breeding.¹⁷ Between 2005 and 2011 the reactivated NCBP, *Alan* and the Council of Balkar Elders campaigned to revoke the 2005 administrative reform and to return to the 1922 delimitation of Kabardino-Balkaria. In 2011, the Kanokov government was forced to accept the KBR parliament's ruling which designated the Balkar-populated areas as being in the public domain. In 2014, Yury Kokov put an end to the privatisation of these areas and reached a consensus with the Balkar national leadership. Since then, as in the Kabardian case, the activities of NCBP and *Alan* have been largely reduced to organising commemorations of the 8th of March, the Balkar deportation date, and the celebration on 28 March of the Day of Balkar national revival. In 2017 the NCBP, as a gesture of its loyalty to the Kremlin, orchestrated a mass Balkar celebration of 190 years of Balkaria's existence within Russia.

Russian/Slavic and Cossack nationalism

Although the Russians, other Slavs and Cossacks together constitute KBR's second largest national group, their ethno-national mobilisation has been significantly weaker than among the Balkars and Kabardians. The main reasons for this were their shock and confusion at the sudden loss of their 'big brother' status and the Balkar and Kabardian ethno-national upsurge with their implicit anti-Russian overtones, as well as the absence among them of clan-based networks which were instrumental in the political mobilisation of the Balkars and Kabardians. Consequently, the national awakening of ethnic Russians and Cossacks was comparatively slow, while their ethno-national political activism lacked its own momentum and largely bore a reactive character.

Among the first Russian national organisations was the *Veche* ('Assembly'), a historical and cultural society formed in Nal'chik in the late 1980s. In 1990, the *Veche* produced two splinter groups – the *Rossiiane* ('Rus people'), which claimed to represent the Russians of Nal'chik, and the *Slaviane* ('Slavs'), which claimed to speak on behalf of the Russians, other Slavs and Cossacks of the whole republic. Unlike the *Veche*, both *Rossiiane* and *Slaviane* were also concerned about the creeping political and legal discrimination against Russians, Slavs and Cossacks. In 1992 KBR's Russian activists under the leadership of Viktor Protasov created the *Russkoiazychyi Kongres* (RK, 'The Congress of the Russian-Speakers') aiming to provide a political counter-balance to the Kabardian and Balkar national movements. RK campaigned

for the recognition of Russians as its third titular group while some RK hardliners discussed the possibility of secession by the Russian-dominated Prokhladnyi and Maiskii *raions*, and their incorporation within the neighbouring Stavropol' *krai* (Yemelianova 2005: 63).

Alongside these Russian and Slavic organisations, there emerged several specifically Cossack formations linked to the wider Cossack movement. In 1990, in the town of Prokhladnyi, the KBR's Terek Cossacks under the leadership of their chieftain, or *ataman*, Mikhail Klevtsov established the *Terek-Malkinskii Kazak Okrug* (TMCO, 'Terek-Malkin Cossack District').¹⁸ Its members subscribed to the general Cossack agenda of the revival of the Cossacks' traditional role as defenders of Russia's southern frontiers, and the restoration of the traditional Cossack lifestyle, including the special role among Cossacks of the Russian Orthodox Church. They also campaigned for the comprehensive political and economic rehabilitation of Terek Cossacks, including the reinstatement of their property rights and their official recognition as a sub-ethnic group of the Russian people. Parallel to TMCO, Cossack women established their own organisation *Beregini* ('Caring Sisters'), which was particularly concerned with the revival of Cossack family norms such as discipline, hard work, honesty, respect for elders, Christian Orthodox ethics and the patriotic duty to the motherland. In 1992, at the height of the Kabardian and Balkar national resurgence, TMCO and RK formed an alliance which also attracted Ossetians, Jews, Koreans, Greeks, Germans and representatives of other ethnic groups. In 2006 the TMCO was admitted into the All-Russia Cossack *Reestr* ('Registry') and established links with the Russian Ministry of Defence and Federal Bureau of Security (FSB).

Meskhethian Turks

The fate of Meskhethian Turks (Ahiska Turks),¹⁹ like other stateless peoples, has been dire. In 1921 the bulk of them found themselves within the borders of the Meskhethi region of Soviet Georgia. In 1944, alongside the Karachai-Balkars, Chechens and Ingush, they were deported to Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia. However, unlike other deported peoples, who during the Khrushchev thaw were able to return to their homeland, the repatriation of Meskhethian Turks was obstructed by the Georgian authorities. Instead, they were forced to dispersedly resettle in neighbouring areas of Azerbaijan and the northern Caucasus, including Kabardino-Balkaria. In the aftermath of the 1989 pogroms against Meskhethian Turks in Uzbekistan, the KBR experienced another influx of Meskhethian Turks which notably affected its demographics and ethno-politics. By 2018 KBR's Meskhethian Turks, who number around 140,000, had become largely integrated within the local economy and society while maintaining their ethno-linguistic and cultural distinctiveness (Akkueva 2018). Economically, they have dominated in vegetable cultivation; on the ethno-political level, they have forged links with the Balkars, thus strengthening the Turkic component in this bi-titular polity. Since 2007, the main articulator of the Meskhethian Turks' national concerns has been their organisation *Vatan* ('Homeland')²⁰ under the leadership of Bektash Ampashulin.

The Karachai-Cherkess Republic

The Karachai-Cherkess Republic (KChR), or Karachaevo-Cherkessia,²¹ is the region's most complex polity in terms of its history of administrative delimitation and ethnic composition. Historically, Karachai (K'arachai, meaning 'Black Brook' in Turkic) was the area in the valley of the Upper Kuban River which was the traditional habitat of the Turkic tribes, who also became referred to as the Karachais. Between 1828 (when Russian rule was

established over Karachai) and 1957 the territory of the present-day KChR underwent a series of politico-administrative reorganisations leading to the Karachais' inclusion within the Cossack-dominated Stavropol' *krai*. KChR has existed in its current borders since 1957, when upon the Karachais' return from deportation, the Khrushchev leadership established the Karachai-Cherkess Autonomous Oblast' (KChAO) within the Stavropol' *krai*. In July 1991 KChAO was upgraded to the status of republic. However, as a result of this history, KChR lacks an ethnic group with a decisive numerical majority. The Karachais account for 41 per cent, the Russians/Cossacks for 32 per cent, the Cherkess²² (Kabardians) for 12 per cent, the Abazas for 8 per cent and the Nogais for 3 per cent of the total population. Other sizable ethnic groups include Ossetians, Armenians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Greeks, Azeris and Turks (Perepis' Naseleniia 2010).

The Cherkess, despite their relatively small number, have dominated the political and economic establishment due to the Soviet centre's implicit favouritism towards the Circassians compared to the numerically dominant Karachais, who suffered from their deportation to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1943–57. By comparison, the Russians/Cossacks, who have lacked a 'titular' status, perceive themselves as part of the Russian-dominated Stavropol' *krai*. The KChR's ethno-political dynamic has also been affected by the existence of sizable Abaza and Nogai populations, both of whom have their distinctive histories and pursue their separate political aspirations which transcend the republic's borders. In 1990–91, these ethnic intricacies have accounted for KChR's particularly powerful ethnic and ethno-religious centrifugal trajectories, including campaigns for the establishment of separate republics for Karachais, Cherkess, Abazas, Batalpashinsk Cossacks and Zelenchuk-Urup Cossacks.

Karachai nationalism

A key mobilising factor among the Karachais, as with their Balkar ethnic brethren, was their suffering during the Stalinist deportation of 1943–57 and their demands for justice and a full political, legal, economic and moral rehabilitation. For the first time these demands were articulated by the First Congress of the Karachai People which took place in Karachaevsk in October 1989. The Congress created a Karachai national organisation *Dzhamagat* ('Community') which pursued the dissolution of Karachaevo-Cherkessia, the establishment of the Karachai autonomy and the full disclosure of the Karachais' deportation process and their comprehensive rehabilitation.²³ In June 1990 the Second Congress of the Karachai People proclaimed the Karachai Republic. The adoption in April 1991 of the federal 'Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples', provided further momentum to the Karachai pro-independence movement which peaked in November 1991 when the entire Karachai people took to the streets of Karachaevsk to mark the forty-eighth anniversary of their deportation and demanded the creation of a separate Karachai Republic.

Contrary to the ethnocentricity of the Balkar nationalists, the Karachai national movement, from its onset, has had a strong Islamic dimension. Among the reasons for this was the leadership of the charismatic Salafi preacher Muhammad Bidzhiev who chose the name of Muhammad Karachai. In 1990 Muhammad Karachai created the Karachai branch of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) (see Chapter 13). In November 1991, Karachai Islamists supported the *Dzhamagat's* pro-independence stance and called for the creation of the Islamic Republic of Karachai. As the first step, they proclaimed the Karachai Imamate, independent from the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims (Muftiate, est. 1991) of the KChR. Significantly, Muhammad Karachai opposed violence and regarded the gradual and peaceful re-Islamisation of Karachais as the pre-condition for the

establishment of a full-fledged Islamic state. For this purpose he created in 1992 an Islamic educational organisation, *Al-Islamiyya* (Sagramoso and Yemelianova 2010: 132).

However, the Karachai ethno-Islamic project failed due to the Karachais' internal divisions and opposition to it from the Cherkess-dominated political elite and the Cossacks. Consequently, the larger faction of *Dzhamagat*, which retained the original name, dropped the demand for KChR's dissolution and instead focused on achieving increased political participation for the Karachais. The other faction, renamed 'The Democratic Organisation *Dzhamagat*' continued to adhere to the idea of Karachai's independence. By the mid-1990s many of *Dzhamagat*'s members had been co-opted into KChR's political establishment under the leadership of Vladimir Khubiev (in office 1995–99), an ethnic Karachai, while radical nationalists were prosecuted and politically marginalised. Since then all the successive leaders of KChR, including the current president Rashid Temrezov (in office 2011–present) have been ethnic Karachais,²⁴ albeit the Cherkess have retained their dominance in the economic and business spheres. The decline of the Karachai national movement was accompanied by the depoliticisation of moderate Islamists associated with Muhammad Karachai, who was co-opted into the all-Russian Islamic establishment.²⁵ In 2012 several Karachai organisations, including *Dzhamagat*, *Alan*, *K'archa*, *K'arachai Khalk T'ere*, and the National-Cultural Autonomy of Karachai, united into a single national organisation, *K'arachai Alankhalk*, which has been concerned with the preservation of the Karachai language, ethno-cultural traditions and historical heritage.²⁶ The other side of the de-politicisation of the Karachai national movement has been the proliferation among Karachais and other KChR Muslims of supra-national radical Islamism and jihadism, which has occurred in the context of the socio-economic and political impasse and the advance of globalised Salafism (see Chapters 17 and 18).

Cossack and Russian/Slavic nationalism

In KChR the Russian/Cossack national movement was stronger and better organised than its counterpart in the neighbouring KBR. This was due to the greater number of Russians/Slavs and Cossacks in the KChR and their umbilical ties with their ethnic brethren in Stavropol' *krai*. Of particular significance was a large Cossack community consisting of descendants of those Kuban Cossacks who from 1918 and throughout the 1920s were deported to Siberia by Bolsheviks who regarded them as 'counter-revolutionary forces', or '*kulaks*'. In the late 1980s the Russians/Slavs and Cossacks were part of a single organisation – the 'Slavs of Karachaevo-Cherkessia' – which sought a comprehensive rehabilitation of all peoples subjected to Stalinist repressions and was therefore open to alliance with the Karachais. But the alliance was prevented by the decision on 3 July 1991 of the Cherkess-dominated political establishment of Karachaevo-Cherkessia to upgrade it to an autonomous republic within the RF. As a result, the local Slavs and Cossacks were overnight transformed from being part of the overwhelming Russian/Slavic privileged majority into a disadvantaged ethnic minority lacking a 'titular' status. The Cossacks responded by forming their own organisation, *Rus*, which distanced them from *Dzhamagat* and began a campaign for the establishment of Batalpashinsk and Zelenchuk-Urup Cossack Republics on the territory of their respective *raions* and their subsequent integration into Stavropol' *krai*. They clashed with both the Cherkess over their conflicting claims on Cherkessk and the Karachais over ancestral lands. Simultaneously, the Cossack leaders applied pressure on Moscow to recognise their secession from KChR.

In February 1992 the Yeltsin leadership, in the context of its 'grab as much sovereignty as you can manage' policy, proposed to the Russian parliament to divide the republic into separate Karachai, Cherkess and Batalpashinsk regions. But the fragmentation of KChR was

averted by federal Russian and regional MPs who initiated a referendum which interlinked the rehabilitation of Cossacks and Karachais with the preservation of the territorial integrity of the KChR. On 3 March 1992, the referendum's majority²⁷ voted in favour of preservation of KChR. Since then some of the Karachai elite have been admitted into the KChR's political establishment, while leaders of the 3,000-strong local Cossack community have attuned their demands to the agenda of the Kuban Cossacks. Accordingly, KChR Cossacks became involved in the guarding of Russian frontiers and maintenance of public order, as well as being focused on the patriotic upbringing of children and the promotion of the traditional Cossack lifestyle centred on military service and Orthodox Christianity. As elsewhere in the region, the Cossacks' resurgence has been interlinked with that of ethnic Russians and other Slavs. The latter's main organisations have been *Rus'* (est. 2004) and *Soiuz Slavian Karachaevo-Cherkessii* ('The Union of Slavs of the KChR'), which have sought a greater role for Russians and Slavs in the KChR's decision-making, prevention of their emigration and the promotion of Russian national culture, music and dance.

Cherkess nationalism

For the reasons outlined earlier, Cherkess, although a numerical minority, have played the pivotal role in KChR's political and economic life. In 1995, following the election of Vladimir Khubiev, an ethnic Karachai, as President of KChR, the Cherkess were forced to accept the political supremacy of the Karachais, but retained their dominance in the economic and financial spheres. Since the 2000s the Cherkess clans of Viacheslav Derev and Rauf Arashukov (both ex-senators of the Russian parliament from KChR) have controlled most financial and investment flows, as well as the gas and agrarian (pig farming) sectors of the economy.²⁸ Both clans have manipulated the Cherkess national agenda to enhance their popular support. In particular, the Derev clan has been closely linked to the Cherkessk-based *Adyghe Khase* of Young People (est. 2006) while the Arashukov clan has been associated with the Council of Cherkess Elders. By comparison, KChR's Abazas, albeit culturally close to their Cherkess counterparts, have been politically under-represented and have campaigned for their distinctive territorial and socio-economic rights.²⁹

The Nogais

During perestroika Karachaevo-Cherkessia also witnessed the increased national assertiveness of the Nogais (Turkic Kipchak people)³⁰ who also reside in other parts of the northern Caucasus.³¹ Due to the Nogais' lengthy period of politico-territorial fragmentation they formed a number of sub-ethnic groups, members of which are characterised by different Nogai dialects and distinctive cultures and ways of life. Thus, the KChR's Nogais are known as the Kuban Nogais; most Nogais of Dagestan and Chechnya are the Steppe Nogais (the Kara-Nogais), while the Babaiurt and Sulak Nogais reside in Dagestan's Babaiurt *raion* and Sulat village, respectively. The Nogais of the eastern part of Stavropol' *krai* are the Achikulak Nogais, while those of Astrakhan' *oblast'* constitute the Astrakhan' Nogais. Despite these differences all Nogais self-identify themselves as descendants of a once powerful state – the Nogai Horde. It was this perceived common glorious past that provided the framework for Nogai nationalism.

In 1989 there emerged an all-Nogai national movement *Birlik* ('Unity'), which campaigned for the Nogais' 'reunification' within the Nogai autonomy inside the historical borders of the Nogai Steppe, which was divided between the Stavropol' *krai*, Checheno-Ingushetia and Dagestan (Dagestan 1996: 266). The Nogai self-determination movement peaked during the 'parade

of sovereignties' in 1991–92 but it was doomed due to the opposition to it from the authorities in Stavropol', Dagestan and Chechnya, as well as Moscow. During the 1990s the all-Nogai movement lost its pan-regional dimension and became focused on the Nogais' ethno-cultural rights within the existing polities. In the KChR, a contributing factor was the constitutional recognition of the Nogais, alongside the Karachais, Cherkess, Abazas and Russians, as a state-forming people of the republic, and the Nogai language as a state language (Konstitutsiia 1996). In 1999, the KChR's Nogais formed their own *Birlik* movement which campaigned for the creation of the designated Nogai *raion* of the KChR. In 2007, with the backing from the Karachai national leadership, the Nogai *raion* was finally established on the territory which had previously been part of the Cherkess-dominated Khabez and Adyghe-Khabl' districts (Adiev 2015: 101). In parallel, in 2011 the KChR's Nogai national activists created their branch of the pan-regional Nogai socio-cultural organisation – *Nogai El* ('Nogai People') – which has been concerned with school provision in the Nogai language, literature and culture, the promotion of Nogai ethnic tourism and the 'Nogai football league'.³²

The Republic of Adygea

The Republic of Adygea, or the Adyghe Republic (AR),³³ is the region's smallest autonomy, landlocked within the Krasnodar *krai*. The AR has existed in its current borders since 1922, when the Bolsheviks established the Adygei Autonomous *Oblast'* (AAO) on the territory of the former Maikop and Ekaterinodar *Otdels* (Regions) of the Kuban-Black Sea *Oblast'* of the Russian Empire. In 1937 AAO was included into the Krasnodar *krai* and in 1991 it acquired the status of an autonomous republic. AR's largest ethnic group are Russians/Cossacks who constitute over 61 per cent, followed by Adygeis (over 24 per cent), Armenians (3.5 per cent), Ukrainians (1.3 per cent), Kurds (over 1 per cent), and Tatars (0.3 per cent). Other sizable minorities are the Roma, Azeris, Greeks and Belorussians (Perepis' Naseleniia 2010). The roots of this striking mismatch between the republic's Adyghe titular name and the Adygeis' quantitative minority go back to the imperial Russian period when the region's indigenous Circassians were forcibly resettled *en masse* to the Ottoman Empire.

Adygei nationalism

Since perestroika and throughout the 1990s the ethno-political discourse in the AR was characterised by radical Adygei (Circassian) nationalism. The first AR president, Aslan Dzhirimov (in office 1991–2002) announced his resolve to achieve the Adygeis' political and numerical supremacy by means of their promotion to key political, economic and educational positions and the repatriation to Adygea of Circassians from abroad. However, given the Adygeis' sub-ethnic and clan fragmentation, 'Adygeisation' became synonymous with advancing the president's clan and his Adyghe sub-ethnic group, the Abadzakhs,³⁴ as well as the political and economic promotion of Adygeis – a situation which caused strong resentment among both Adygeis and representatives of non-Circassian ethnic groups. The new AR constitution, which was adopted in 1995, introduced the ten-year Adygean settlement and Adygei language-proficiency requirements for the post of president and other key political jobs. As a result, ethnic Russians and members of other non-titular ethnic groups were effectively eliminated from decision-making processes. In 1997 the *Khase* ('parliament') adopted the Law on Repatriation aimed at facilitating the settlement in the republic of descendants of Circassian *muhajirs* from Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Kosovo and other parts of the world. The repatriation intensified during the Kosovo War of 1998–99 when over 600

Kosovo Circassians were settled in the specially created *aul* (village) of Mafe'abl' ('Happy', in Adyghe) (Sagramoso and Yemelianova 2010: 138). The next peak occurred during the Syrian civil war of 2012–17, when Adyghea received over a thousand Syrian Circassians. By 2018, over two thousand *muhajirs'* descendants in total were settled in Adyghea (Denisov and Petrov 2018: 199).

Throughout the 1990s, the official 'Adygheisation' was an integral part of the pan-regional and international Circassian movement. Accordingly, in 1992–93 many male Adygheis, as well as Circassians from other parts of the North Caucasus, took part on the side of the Abkhaz in the Abkhaz-Georgian war.³⁵ As in the case of the KBR and KChR, the key pro-government agencies of pan-regional Circassian solidarity were the *Adyghe Khase*, the Cherkess Congress and Adyghea's branch of ICA, which largely consisted of Adyghe historians and literary intelligentsia.³⁶ From early days, these organisations collaborated closely with various Circassian organisations based in the diaspora. Due to the Adygheis' small number in Adyghea, their reconnection with the Circassian diaspora had a particularly radicalising impact on their national agenda and contributed to its evolution towards the 'restoration' of Greater Circassia encompassing most of present-day Adyghea, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and the Black Sea coastal areas around Sochi and Tuapse, as well as towards the demand for Moscow to recognise the imperial Russian policies towards Circassians as genocide (Nefiasheva 2007: 160). The diaspora's influence also explained the primarily Salafi dimension of Adyghea's 'Islamic revival' which, unlike in KBR and KChR, was entirely shaped by more Islamised Circassian repatriates from Kosovo and the Middle East (Sagramoso and Yemelianova 2010: 139).

From the 2000s, in the context of President Putin's policy of Russia's recentralisation and the consequent change in Adyghea's leadership, the process of 'Adygheisation' acquired a more moderate form. Under the Kremlin-imposed legislative realignment, Adyghea's constitution and other legislatures were 'corrected' to match federal laws and regulations. In 2002 Khazret Sovmen (in office 2002–07), a Siberian gold tycoon of Shapsegh origins, was elected as the new president. Initially, Sovmen enjoyed significant public support due to his resolute anti-corruption stance and his adherence, at least at a rhetorical level, to civic, rather than clan and ethnic solidarity-driven political and societal principles. Significantly, in 2003 he initiated the removal from the constitution of the politically divisive requirements of the Adyghe language-proficiency and settlement qualification for the post of president.

However, Sovmen's lack of clan,³⁷ ethnic and territorial base in Adyghea, as well as his acrimonious relations with the *Adyghe Khase* and the Cherkess Congress worked against him and he eventually became politically and regionally isolated (Kazenin 2009: 137). In 2007, Sovmen was succeeded by President Putin's protégé, Aslan Tkhakushinov (in office 2007–17), an ethnic Adyghe and the former rector of Maikop University. Tkhakushinov's strong local base and his Kremlin connections enabled him to secure Adyghea's relative ethno-political stability and economic prosperity. During his term he strengthened his grip on power by bringing his close relatives into the political and economic establishment while also re-engaging with the *Adyghe Khase* and ICA by focusing on the promotion of the Adyghe language, culture and symbols. The election in 2017 of Adyghea's next president, Murat Kumpilov, did not significantly affect the dominant positions of the Tkhakushinov clan³⁸ and ensured the continuity of the policy of soft 'Adygheisation'. Thus, in 2018, Murat Kumpilov established the Language Council charged with the creation of the unified Adyghe language,³⁹ and the promotion of Adyghe ethnic tourism which entailed the creation of 'ethnic' villages in Adygheis' historical habitat.⁴⁰

Russian/Slavic and Cossack nationalism

Inevitably, the policy of 'Adygeisation' triggered Russian/Slavic and Cossack emigration to neighbouring Krasnodar *krai*. At the same time, it provoked their national mobilisation which was considerably stronger than in KBR and KChR due to the Slavs' and Cossacks' numerical superiority in Adygea and their direct and indirect backing by the Krasnodar authorities. Their key organisers were the *Soiuz Slavian Adygei* ('Union of Slavs of Adygea', SSA) and the Maikop Cossack Society, both of which were established in 1991. SSA's main goal was Adygea's reintegration into the Russian-majority Krasnodar *krai*. In 1995, SSA led mass protests against the constitutionally enshrined Adygei language and settlement requirements. Throughout the 2000s, it demanded a referendum on Adygea's existing political status as a legitimate way towards its reunification with the Krasnodar *krai*. Only in the 2010s, under Tkhakushinov governance, did SSA moderate its nationalist vigour. By comparison, the Maikop Cossacks' militaristic activism, which was intertwined with Orthodox Christianity, continued to advance and acquired regional and national dimensions. Thus, in the early 1990s, Maikop Cossacks established the regiment named after General Alexei A. Veliaminov, a hero of the Caucasus War, where young male Cossacks from across the region could acquire Cossack military skills. In the spring of 2014, 170 Maikop Cossacks took part in the turbulent events in the Crimea, referred to as 'the Crimean Spring', by participating in the security arrangements in and around Sevastopol' and the military airport Bel'bek.⁴¹

Conclusion

Since the late 1980s the ethno-political trajectories in the north-western Caucasus have shared notable similarities with those across the wider Caucasus but have also exhibited significant differences due to three major factors. One has been the large concentration in the region of Adyghe people, even constituting a majority in Kabardino-Balkaria. Consequently, in the late 1980s and the first decade of the post-Soviet era the region witnessed the considerable 'ethnisation' of politics and the rise of pan-regional Adyghe (Circassian) as well as pan-regional Turkic (Karachai-Balkar) nationalism, and the merger of Adyghe regional nationalism with Circassian diaspora nationalism. The second distinctive factor relates to the region's large ethnic Russian/Slavic and Cossack population, who constitute one fourth of the population in the KBR, nearly one third in the KChR and the majority in Adygea. Arguably, the Russians/Slavs and Cossacks have provided a counterbalance to conflicting Kabardian-Balkar or Karachai-Cherkess nationalisms, and have served as the ethnic base of the neighbouring Russian-majority Krasnodar and Stavropol' *krais*, as well as the Russian federal centre. The third factor has been the relatively weaker position of Islam, compared to the north-eastern Caucasus, which (except among the Karachais) accounts for its secondary role in popular mobilisation.

These factors have explained why, unlike in the north-eastern and southern Caucasus, the north-western region has withstood centrifugal ethno-national forces which peaked in 1992, and has retained its territorial integrity within the Soviet administrative borders. From the 2000s, under President Putin's state recentralisation drive, the constitutions of the three autonomies have been aligned with the federal legislature and the political role of national organisations and the diaspora has been curtailed, while Adyghe nationalism has been channelled along ethno-cultural lines. At the same time the relative political stability has prevailed against the backdrop of persistent economic, social and ethnic problems, such as the continuing poverty of some areas, the relatively high youth unemployment, the endemic corruption and nepotism, the almost total absence of social mobility and alternative channels

of political expression, and – most importantly – the aforementioned ‘ethnisation’ and ‘clannisation’ of local politics and the formation of ethnocratic regimes, resulting in the continuing emigration of ethnic Russians/Slavs/Cossacks⁴² and other members of non-titular ethnic groups. As well as this ongoing emigration there is evidence of a weakening of social cohesion as well as the spread of supra-ethnic Islamised political radicalism, albeit on a significantly lower level than in the north-eastern Caucasus⁴³ (see Chapter 13).

Notes

- 1 Kabarda is an exonym which has been in use at least since the sixteenth century (Selivanov 1890–1907).
- 2 The Adyghe (Circassian)-Abkhaz peoples are among the most ancient residents of the north-western Caucasus. Currently, the Abkhaz reside in the partially recognised Republic of Abkhazia, while various Adyghe peoples live in the KBR (Kabardians), the KChR (Cherkess, Abazas) and Adyghea (Adygeis). A relatively small number reside in Krasnodar *krai* (Shapseghs) and Abadzakhs. In Turkey the ethnonym ‘Cherkess’ is applied to both Abkhaz and Circassians.
- 3 Both the Karachais and Balkars belong to the same ethno-linguistic group and speak the same Karachai-Balkar (Turkic Qipchaq/Kipchak) language. However, their ethnic origins remain a subject of academic debate as some scholars argue in favour of their Alan (Iranian) ethnic roots (Tenishev 2001: 128).
- 4 In accordance with the Bolshevik state-building project, which combined territorial and ethnonational principles, some administrative-political units were given names of the dominant, or perceived as the dominant, ethnic group, or groups. These groups were termed ‘titular’ groups. Given the historically multi-ethnic composition of Eurasia, the creation of ‘titular’ ethnic groups inadvertently disadvantaged the representatives of ‘non-titular’ ethnic groups.
- 5 KBR is situated in the northern slopes of the Greater Caucasus and the Kabardian flatlands. It occupies territory of around 12,500 square kms, half of which is mountainous. Its population is just under 0.9 million (Perepis’ Naseleniia 2010). In politico-administrative terms, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia are included within the North Caucasus Federal District (NCFD, est. 2010), which also comprises Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania and Stavropol’ *krai*.
- 6 In 1957, the re-established KB ASSR did not include Chegem and Khulamo-Bezengi *raions*, which alongside El’brus and Cherek *raions*, were parts of the republic before 1944. Also, the territory of restored El’brus and Cherek *raions* was significantly reduced.
- 7 On Circassian culture, see Jaimoukha (2010).
- 8 In July 2000, the ICA’s fifth congress under the leadership of Muhamed Khafitse modified its programme by removing any political demands (Yemelianova 2005: 59–60).
- 9 Although the Circassians have an ancient sign-based written tradition, they continue to lack a unified alphabet. The first attempts to create such an alphabet on the basis of Russian or Arabic letters were made in the 1830s. Another attempt to produce an alphabet on the basis of the Russian alphabet with some letters from Latin, Georgian and Greek was made in the 1860s. In 1924, the Latin-based Circassian alphabet was introduced in the Soviet Caucasus, while in 1926 another version of the Latin-based Circassian alphabet was created in Syria. In 1936 the Circassian alphabet was Cyrillicised in the USSR. By the end of the Soviet period there were six Circassian vernacular dialects and two written languages – the Kabardian-Cherkess, based on 59 letters, and the T’emirgoi, based on 64 letters (Borokov 2016). See also this volume’s Chapter 3.
- 10 In 2007 Arsen Kanokov’s assets were estimated at around \$90 million; by 2017 they had increased to \$500 million. Arsen Kanokov, *Forbes*. Available at <www.forbes.ru/profile/arsen-kanokov> (accessed 27 May 2019).
- 11 In particular, the Balkars were suspicious that the route of the Kabardian horsemen column towards the Kanzhal plateau passed through their village of Kendel. A similar Kabardian-Balkar stand-off took place in 2018 during the celebration of 310 years since the Kanzhal battle.
- 12 However, only 400 Syrian Circassians were able to use these invitations due to language barriers (many did not know Russian or even Kabardian) and numerous bureaucratic hurdles requiring them to obtain temporary residence registration within three months. As a result many returning Circassians were forced to go temporarily to Abkhazia and then back to the KBR. By 2016 there were 1,451 Syrian Circassian repatriates in KBR. (Orazaeva 2013; Akkueva and Kotsev 2016: 13).

- 13 Since 2017 *Peryt* has been headed by Atila Gusser, a naturalised Circassian repatriate from Turkey.
- 14 These included the running of the summer camp of Circassian children from the diaspora, as well as the celebrations of the Circassian Flag on 25 April, the Circassian Repatriates on 1 August, the National Adyghe Day on 20 September and the National Adyghe Costume Day on 27 September.
- 15 In November 1942, in the Cherek Gorge, the 'execution squads' of Lavrenty Beria executed 1,500 Balkar men, women and children who were accused of collaboration with Nazi Germany (Ustav 1990: 2).
- 16 Among them were, for example, Georgy Cherkessov who served as prime minister in 1992–97; Khuseyn Chechenov who was prime minister in 1997–2004; and Il'ias Bechenov, who headed the chamber of representatives of the KBR parliament in 1997–2001.
- 17 *Gazeta Balkarii*, no 5, 2006.
- 18 The TMCO, which in 2006 numbered around 5,000 men, included the Cossacks of Prokhladnyi and Maiskii *raions* and the *stanitsa* Kotdiarevskaia. On the history and culture of the Cossacks, see O'Rourke (2008).
- 19 Meskhetian Turks speak an Eastern Anatolian dialect of Turkish. At different times and according to particular orientations they were also referred to as Turks, Tatars, Muslim Georgians and Muslim Meskhetians. Since 1921, the ethnonym 'Meskhetian Turks' has prevailed. On Meskhetian Turks, see Trier and Khanzhin (2007); Yemelianova (2015) and Akkueva (2018).
- 20 The *Vatan* is an offspring of the USSR-wide organisation which was established in 1990 in Moscow under the leadership of Yusuf Sarvarov. It subscribes to the Turkic identity of Meskhetian Turks in opposition to their Georgian identity, promoted by the Meskhetian organisation *Khsna* ('Salvation') under the leadership of Khalil Umarov (Gozalishvili).
- 21 The KChR is situated to the west of the KBR. It occupies an area of around 14,100 square kms and has a population of 0.5 million.
- 22 The name 'Cherkess' derives from the Greek name for Circassians (another exonym for the Adyghe) which was later appropriated by Venetian and Genoese merchants, as well as by the Ottomans. By comparison, the term 'Circassians' derives from the Odyssey's seductress, Circe (Kirke). It was also used by the Romans in relation to tribes of the Kerketai region in eastern Anatolia and the western Caucasus (courtesy of John Colarusso; see also Hewitt 1999: 47).
- 23 In particular, *Dzhamagat* called for the exposure of the role of Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931) in scapegoating the Karachais as 'untrustworthy citizens' during his tenure as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Stavropol' *krai* between 1970 and 1974 (Richmond 2008: 125, 135).
- 24 They were Vladimir Semenov (in office 2000–03), Mustafa Batdyev (in office 2003–2008) and Boris Evzeev (in office 2008–11).
- 25 Throughout the 1990s, Muhammad Bidzhiev was a leading figure within the pan-Russian Islamic educational organisation, the 'Islamic Congress of Russia' (1992–2003). In 2004–2007, he was deputy mufti of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the European part of Russia, based in Moscow.
- 26 A central issue has been the 'return' to the Karachais of the ancient Alan cathedrals, which were placed under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church.
- 27 Large sections of population, especially in Karachai *raions*, boycotted the referendum which was approved by 78.5 per cent of voters (Richmond 2008: 136).
- 28 Their zone of business influence has transcended KChR's borders and collided with the zones of other powerful regional clans, including Ramzan Kadyrov. (Stalo izvestno o vrazhde sem'i zaderzhanogo senatora s Kadyrovym. Available at <<https://lenta.ru/news/2019/01/30/ramzan/>> (accessed 21 May 2019)).
- 29 In 2006, the KChR parliament decreed the formation of the Abaza municipal *raion*.
- 30 The Nogais are descendants of the Nogai Horde, an offshoot of the Genghizid Golden Horde, which existed on the territory between the Volga River and the Urals mountains from the mid-fifteenth till the early seventeenth centuries, when the bulk of Nogais migrated to the steppe areas of the northern Caucasus. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a large number of Nogais migrated to Ottoman Turkey. At present sizable Nogai communities exist in Turkey's provinces of Konya, Tokat, Gaziantep and Sivas as well as in Ankara.
- 31 According to the 2010 census, there were 40,407 Nogais in Dagestan, 22,006 in Stavropol' *krai*, 15,654 in Karachaevo-Cherkessia and 3,400 in Chechnya (Perepis' Naseleniia 2010).

- 32 The main Nogai tourist attraction is the historical centre *Azhi-Kala* ('Sacred Fortress') which was opened in 2017. The Nogai football league, which was established the same year, unites Nogai football teams from Russia, Turkey, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Romania and Germany.
- 33 The AR is situated on the left bank of the Kuban River and is surrounded by the Krasnodar *krai*. It occupies an area of around 7,800 square kms and has a population of around 0.4 million (*Perepis' Naseleniia* 2010). Unlike the KBR and the KChR, the AR is part of the Southern Federal District (SFD, est. 2000), which also includes Krasnodar *krai*, Astrakhan, Volgograd and Rostov *oblasts*, the autonomous republic of Kalmykia, and, since 2014, the autonomous republic of Crimea, as well as Sevastopol'.
- 34 Aslan Dzharimov was an Abadzhakh on his maternal side.
- 35 In 2017 the Maikop authorities erected a monument to Adygei fighters killed during the Abkhaz-Georgian war.
- 36 From the late 1990s the dominance in these organisations shifted to businessmen.
- 37 Sovmen, as a Shapsug, failed to gain the loyalty of the Adygei and Abadzhakh elite who regarded Shapsugs as a politically and economically marginal group. He also became unpopular with the powerful governor Alexander Tkachev of Krasnodar *krai* and Dmitry Kozak, the Russian President's Representative for the Southern Federal *Okrug*.
- 38 For example, among Aslan T'khakushinov's relatives are the current head of the presidential administration, the public prosecutor of the important Takhtamukaisk *raion*, the head of the republican Security Council and several members of parliament.
- 39 At present there are two distinct vernacular Adyge dialects, Adygei and Kabardino-Cherkess, while the T'emirgoy dialect is considered a literary language. See Chapter 3.
- 40 In 2019, at Murat Kumpilov's initiative, a renowned Adygei poet Iskhak Mashbash acquired a national profile by being decorated as Hero of Russia by President Putin.
- 41 Zagorul'ko, E. Moshchnyi, sil'nyi, nastoiashchii kazachii otdel. Available at <<http://slavakubani.ru/articles/moshchnyy-silnyy-nastoiashchii-kazachiy-otdel>> (accessed 31 May 2019).
- 42 For example, between 1989 and 2010, the Russian population decreased from 32 to 22 per cent in the KBR, from 42.5 to 31 per cent in the KChR and from 68 to 61 per cent in Adygea (*Perepis' SSSR* 1989; *Perepis' Naseleniia* 2010).
- 43 Thus in 2016, according to official statistics, there were over 200 natives of KBR, over 200 natives of the KChR, around 100 natives of Stavropol' *krai*, and over 20 natives of Adygea among IS jihadists. By comparison, the number of IS Dagestani fighters was over 1,000, while the number of Chechens from Chechnya proper exceeded 600 (Gushchina 2016).

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