

Renewed Circassian Mobilization in the North Caucasus 20-years after the Fall of the Soviet Union

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The renewed ethnic mobilization among Circassians in the North Caucasus region in Russia that has unfolded since the latter half of the 2000s is illustrated by the establishment of new civil society organizations and a substantially increased number of internet-based initiatives. All of this reflects a new and increased form of agency and unity among the Circassians in which youth activism has played key role. It also illustrates how Circassian civil society actors and cyber-activists have not only been able to establish a counter-public sphere or develop a new space for action, but also increasingly have been able to move key issues from Circassian spheres into the wider public sphere of mainstream Russian media and politics. The upcoming 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, in particular, has functioned as a lever in this process, which has also resulted in increasing support among Circassians for calls for recognition of the nineteenth century forced expulsion of the majority of the Circassians from the Caucasus as an act of genocide. In this manner, a mega-event such as the Sochi Olympics has contributed to generating a more radical or politicized understanding or framing of the Caucasian exodus that, since the fall of the Soviet Union, has generally been known as “our national tragedy”. The million-strong and geographically dispersed Circassian diaspora have undergone a similar civil society and internet-based mobilization since the mid-2000s, which includes increased transnational communication, coordination, and cooperation – and increasingly also includes Circassian actors in the North Caucasus.

Keywords: Circassians, civil society, internet, youth, nationalizing state

In recent years, a new and significant type of unity and coordinated action has appeared among Circassian organizations across the three republics in the North Caucasus where Circassians constitute titular-nationalities: Adygs in Adygea, Kabardinians in Kabardino-Balkaria, and Cherkessians in Karachai-Cherkessia.¹ New Circassian organizations and internet media have been established and have managed to involve many Circassians in their activities – especially since the mid-2000s. The arrival and spread of social media in Web 2.0, such as Facebook, Twitter, and

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YouTube have contributed to the increased involvement and visibility of Circassians in the North Caucasus. The aim of this paper is to discuss the ongoing Circassian mobilization, as represented by the actions of Circassian organizations supplemented by Circassian internet activities, i.e. recent tendencies within the civil society sector of the region that signal a request for or suggest increased democratization (from below). In this process the role of youth and the internet appear to be significant. All these activities represent a new type of unity compared to earlier periods, when the Circassian organizations mainly operated within their own republics and in relation to the local republican power structures. Both the republican and the federal authorities have often reacted with hostility to the organizations and many of their proposals have been rejected, ignored, or have resulted in different forms of harassment including severe beatings and threats against the family.²

In the analytical context of this paper, I will use the term “ethnic mobilization”, as this is a term that has achieved widespread usage, though the militaristic connotations sometimes affiliated with the term “mobilization” can make it challenging for use in a Caucasian context that has become internationally known for violent conflicts. The word “ethnic” has often been affiliated to these conflicts and, when combined with “mobilization”, this could appear self-explanatory – or be misused as such (Dragadze, 1998). The Circassian mobilization is multidimensional; it is not just ethnic, but also, *inter alia*, cultural, indigenous and minority rights-oriented. Some Circassian examples from Turkey will be included as they have been undergoing a significant process of civil society reform starting more than ten years ago and several million Circassians live in Turkey – compared to 700,000 in the North Caucasus – and are in a process of becoming organized also beyond Turkey.

This study of the Circassian civil society mobilization in the North Caucasus is an empirical study based on the recent developments in the region. However, the paper is part of a larger study of the ongoing transnational revival among the Circassians analyzed according to an overall conceptual framework on ethnic and territorial institutionalization over time.³ The two main overall conceptual notions behind this paper are, firstly, post-Soviet civil society development and, secondly, the role of a so-called “nationalizing state” in relation to national or ethnic minorities.

The first theoretical or conceptual approach to the analysis of the Circassian revival consists of a discussion of civil society development as part of a post-communist process of democratization, where “space for action” will be discussed in

relation to the recent Circassian civil society developments. The developments among the Circassian organizations and internet-based initiatives largely unfold within the civil society sector. The analysis in this paper of the new initiatives is an attempt at understanding the character of this apparently new (or enlarged) space for action within civil society in Russia. The actions of the Circassian organizations in Russia at large have mostly been confined to the public spheres of the three Circassian republics but, for instance, the arrival of and increased access to the internet in Russia has contributed to greater visibility and influence beyond the public spheres of these republics as well.⁴ The public spheres in which civil society organizations in Russia operate have been going through phases of both expansion and contraction during the last 20 years of economic and democratic transition. Two different understandings of civil society development outline the discussion in this paper: on the one hand, the understanding of civil society as a battlefield and, on the other hand, a more consensus-oriented understanding of civil society representatives in interaction with the state and the market in the making of democratic societies. The first version seems to be most appropriate in the (semi-)authoritarian context of the Russian Federation, including the role of potential counter-publics.

The second theoretical approach in this paper consists of reflections by Rogers Brubaker on the “relationship nexus” between ethnic minorities, such as the Circassians, and a “nationalizing state”, such as the Russian Federation. Brubaker stresses the importance of the dynamic character of this relationship. The fact that Brubaker has developed the term “nationalizing state” as part of an analysis of the post-communist context renders this term particularly relevant. In this theory, Brubaker operates with a triadic relationship nexus consisting of the nationalizing state, the ethnic minority, and the external homeland. As the latter part is not relevant in the case of the Circassians, I will discuss whether the Circassian diaspora can be said to be in the process of taking on the role of the third element in the relationship nexus, as the transnational contacts are increasing and the agendas set by the Circassian diaspora organizations increasingly penetrate into the general public sphere in Russia. The suggestion of David Smith (2002: 9) to further enlarge Brubaker’s model into a quadratic relationship nexus in order to include the role of international treaties, institutions, and organizations is also relevant to include in relation to the context of the Circassians in the North Caucasus.⁵

1. The “Circassian Question”

The term the Circassian Question has lately managed to enter the wider public sphere of Russian mainstream media, following a number of years of circulation in the transnational sphere of the internet.⁶ Particularly in connection with the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014 that – especially since the end of the Vancouver games in 2010 – has drawn wider attention in the Russian media. In Russia, Sochi is often referred to as the “Summer Capital in the South”, as the president and the prime minister spend several months there every summer and often receive international guests. The area was colonized by the Russian Empire after a prolonged war over many decades in the nineteenth century, which resulted in the exiling of most of the Circassians. Sochi has become a place of significant symbolic value for many Circassians as this was the last place in the historical homeland the Circassians left in 1864 after losing the war (Jaimoukha, 2001: 67). This understanding of Sochi has become widespread in recent years, especially through the internet. The last battle took place by the in a mountain valley in the vicinity of Kbaada village, which is 50 kilometres from today’s Sochi. This is where, on May 21, 1864, the Russian Army performed its victory parade. The location of Kbaada is today known as Krasnaya Polyana, where the alpine skiing events of the 2014 Winter Olympics will take place. The Olympic Games in Sochi will thus encapsulate vital elements of time and space in Circassian mythology or cultural memory—the final loss of the homeland in 1864.⁷ Due to the Sochi Olympics, the Circassian Question has been elevated to a higher level on the international scene – as a parallel to the situation in 1864 when international media followed the war in Circassia.⁸ One of the key achievements of the transnational Circassian movement since the fall of the Soviet Union is the institutionalization of May 21—the date of the Russian victory parade in the Kbaada valley in 1864—as a joint annual day of commemoration.

The Circassian Question was a term that also gained significant international use in the nineteenth century when the media, especially in Europe and North America, followed the lengthy Circassian war against the invading Russian Army (though back then the term mainly referred to the potential survival of Circassia as a homeland of the Circassians). In spite of the widespread use of the term, the Circassian Question is rarely defined. According to one recent definition, the Circassian Question of today consists of three main elements: recognition of the

nineteenth century war and forced exile to the Ottoman Empire as an act of genocide, repatriation from the diaspora to the North Caucasus, and the establishment of a joint Circassian republic.⁹ Some organizations and activists go one step further and declare their ultimate goal as the re-establishment of Circassia as an independent state.¹⁰

During 2010 the Circassian Question received increased international attention following new interest from neighbouring Georgia. This was widely regarded as a reaction to the war with Russia in 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.¹¹ This led to the so-called "war of conferences" in 2010 where two state-sponsored conferences in Tbilisi focussed on the Circassia genocide in particular, supplemented with other claims of genocide of the North Caucasian peoples.¹² As a result of the first conference – called 'Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes' – an appeal was forwarded to the Georgian Parliament with a request for a formal recognition of the Circassian genocide.¹³ The conference and the appeal generated strong reactions from Russian politicians and media.¹⁴ Georgia is staging a politicized revision of its history with and within the Russian Empire, which has parallels to related processes in, for instance, Ukraine in the second part of the 2000s.¹⁵ Another Georgian initiative in 2010 was to establish a visa-free regime for Russian citizens registered as residents of the North Caucasian republic, which was labelled as a provocation by the Russian side.¹⁶

The Circassian question was raised further on the international agenda in 2010, when Circassian diaspora organizations lobbied Estonia for recognition of the Circassian genocide. In October 2010 the Estonian member of the European Parliament, Tunne Kelam, declared that he would raise the Circassian Question at the next hearing in the European Parliament on human rights in Russia. Mark Mickelson, Estonian Member of Parliament, further promised to keep the "Circassian problem" on the agenda in general and specifically in relation to the Council of Europe.¹⁷

The Russian parliament deputy, Sergei Markov, reacted by stating that the Circassian problem does not exist and represents "ideological sabotage" from the side of the Russophobe governments of Georgia, Estonia, and Poland, supported by certain strategic centres in Washington.¹⁸ According to Markov, Russia is planning 'a comprehensive programme to counter the plans for recognition of the genocide of the Circassians'.¹⁹ Markov refuses to accept the existence of a Circassian genocide without further argumentation and characterizes it as "anti-Russian politics" in line

with the so-called Ukrainian genocide – “Holodomor”. A different view came from academic circles in Moscow in the form of a conference called ‘the Circassian issue: historical memory, historiographic discourse, political strategies’ in March 2011, at which the hosts stressed that the conference was academic and non-political.²⁰

On May 20, 2011 the Georgian Parliament formally recognized the Circassian genocide and condemned the crimes committed by the Russian Empire during the war from 1763 to 1864 by referring to a number of historical documents.²¹ Circassian representatives took part in the discussions in the Georgian Parliament, which led to strong reactions from Sergei Markov who called the participating Circassians traitors of their people. Weeks later Markov was forced to apologize for his remarks, but by then the Head of the Adyge Hasa organization in the Republic of Adygea, Aramby Khapay, had already responded by comparing this reaction with the words of the Russian Emperor Alexander II, who during a visit in Maykop in 1861 allegedly stated: ‘We need Circassia but we do not need Circassians themselves at all’.²² The official Russian response was holding two official hearings on the Circassian issues in June, where the anti-Circassian rhetoric was significantly reduced.²³ These events led a representative of a Circassian non-governmental organization from Kabardino-Balkaria to conclude that the Circassian question had been elevated to a completely higher level.²⁴

The Georgian recognition of the Circassian genocide was initially met with hesitation from many of the Circassian organizations, as many feared it was being used (or misused) by the Georgian government with the aim of hurting Russia in the aftermath of the 2008 war. Also, the strong Circassian solidarity with the Abkhazians – whom they regard as brothers – in the many years of conflict with Georgia resulted in some reluctance. Still, after some days of consideration, eight Circassian organizations used the occasion of their meeting on another matter – promotion of repatriation from the diaspora to the homeland – to send a formal letter of thanks to the Georgian Parliament.²⁵ Most of the Circassian reactions in Russian-language internet forums were positive towards the Georgian recognition. Already a year later – on May 21, 2012 – a monument to the Circassian genocide was officially revealed in Anaklia by the Georgian Black Sea coast.²⁶

2. Civil society mobilization

Following a decade during which most of the Circassian organizations were relatively passive and largely controlled by the authorities, the mid-2000s was marked by the appearance of new Circassian organizations and by new attempts at cooperation and coordination between the organizations.²⁷ This represents a new form of unity, in which *youth* and the *internet* are key terms in the understanding of the recent developments within the civil society sector.²⁸ Still, it is important to stress that other—and sometimes related—issues such as increased urbanization, increased levels of education, and various global trends also play a role in this process.²⁹

In general, Circassian movements and organizations have been oriented mainly towards the local authorities in their home republics. Since 2009 the level of cooperation among the Circassian organizations within the republics, as well as across the republican borders, has increased. In December 2010, eighteen Circassian organizations from the Russian Federation established a joint Circassian Council in order to present a united Circassian approach to their key issues, such as the Sochi Winter Olympics, recognition of the nineteenth century genocide, etc.³⁰ The idea is to be able to present a united platform for stronger lobbying efforts in relation to the federal authorities. This step was the culmination of a long process that gained momentum in late 2009, with joint protest gatherings by Circassians in Karachai-Circassia and Kabardino-Balkaria, which increasingly involved more and more Circassian organizations, including those from outside the entity where the protests were held.³¹ Jointly, all of these initiatives represent a new level of unity and protest among the Circassian organizations.

The new Circassian Council represents a challenge towards the International Circassian Association (ICA), as seen when the initiators stated that the new council should be seen as a continuation of the congresses held in the early 1990s.³² Criticism of the ICA has long been widespread among the Circassian diaspora organizations and has recently been mounting support among Circassian organizations in Russia. The ICA is regularly accused of suppressing Circassian issues instead of supporting them, and of acting as an instrument of control on behalf of the Kremlin authorities.³³ The ICA was established in 1991 as an international Circassian organization created to promote Circassian issues in general and especially cooperation between the diaspora and the homeland (Jaimoukha, 2001: 86). According to many Circassians,

the Russian authorities during the 1990s managed to control the ICA and the organization was forced into a more defensive or passive role, which has led many to criticize the ICA for becoming a Soviet-type of organization just offering window dressing to the Circassian issues.³⁴ Protesting against the role of the ICA has become one of the key mobilizing points among many of the newer organizations. The youth protests against the ICA congress and elections in October 2009, where they were not allowed to speak or even enter the conference hall, marked a turning point in the re-activation of Circassian activism.³⁵ The 2010 establishment of the International Circassian Council (ICC), initiated by Circassian activists from the Circassian Cultural Institute in the USA with the purpose of performing international lobby-efforts on behalf of Circassian issues, especially promoting recognition of the Circassian genocide, represents another challenge to the ICA.³⁶ Dissatisfaction with the actions of the ICA had become so strong that it functioned as a point of mobilization among many Circassian individuals and organizations.³⁷

The Coordinating Council of Circassian Organizations in Kabardino-Balkaria, which is an umbrella organization of all the Circassian organizations in the republic, is another example of the new type of unity, cooperation, and strategic thinking. Most of the member organizations are, for instance, supporting the idea of creating a joint Circassian republic (by joining the existing Circassian territories of the three existing republics).³⁸ Furthermore, representatives of the Council have initiated the establishment of a so-called “Circassiada”—a pan-Circassian sports event planned to take place in the North Caucasus in 2012.³⁹ This was another attempt at creating an event that potentially could unite the Circassians, but the proposal was met with harsh comments and rejection from substantial parts of the diaspora—arguing that this was a pro-Russian proposal and that it was meant to legitimize the Sochi Olympics in 2014.⁴⁰ At the same time, the proposal was also met with harsh comments in Russia, claiming that the Circassiada was an attempt at smearing and discrediting the Russian arrangement of the Sochi Winter Olympics.⁴¹ In the end, the project had to be shelved.⁴² This illustrates some of the dilemmas and the difficulties the local Circassian organizations and initiatives often face.

The new Circassian initiatives are often met with rejection from the side of the local and federal authorities by referring to their opponents as “nationalists”, “foreign agents”, “agents of the opposition”, etc., often making use of a terminology known from the Cold War period (Pirani, 2010: 123).⁴³ Leading organization members and

activists have been monitored by representatives from the intelligence services, and several Circassian activists and journalists have been forced to leave the North Caucasus following harassment, threats, beatings, etc. Two Circassian (youth) activists were violently attacked in two of the republics in 2010—one was killed and one was seriously injured. Furthermore, two important Circassian public figures were killed in Kabardino-Balkaria late 2010, which shocked many in the Circassian organizations and civil society at large.⁴⁴ As a result of these events, several Circassian civil society representatives decided to be less publically visible and some chose to leave the republic or the country.⁴⁵

The mobilization unfolding through the actions of the Circassian organizations, activists, and internet media operates mainly within the public sphere of civil society, which is an area of key interest in the democratization process unfolding in the Russian Federation since 1991.⁴⁶ The understanding of civil society as a field of conflict and resistance is highly relevant in the Russian context (as well as the Turkish context).⁴⁷ Civil society has become one of the key terms when discussing the democratization process in post-communist Eastern Europe and lately also in Turkey, where a democratization process is changing a former authoritarian state into a semi-authoritarian state under continued transformation. As a part of this process, a number of new Circassian organizations and websites have sprung up since the mid-2000s in Turkey. Compared to this, the Circassian organizations in Russia are still lagging behind, while the Circassian internet activities in Russia appear to have reached the level found in Turkey. As part of the ongoing revival, the Circassian civil society sector in Turkey has undergone politicization and an accompanying polarization between the politically- and culturally-oriented organizations.⁴⁸ However, in the total picture of the significantly increased Circassian/Caucasian civil society sector in Turkey, this also represents a new division of labour, where the newer organizations tend to specialize in more politically- or lobbying-oriented activities, while most of the older organizations tend to prioritize more culturally-oriented activities.

“Space for action” is a term often used in relation to discussions on civil society, though it is not necessarily defined. According to Alison Van Rooy (1998), space for action constitutes one of the six viewpoints that categorize the concept of civil society.⁴⁹ This has led Hakkainen *et al.* to the following formulation:

Civil society has also been used as a metaphor for the space organisations occupy, usually described as the enabling environment in which they prosper (or fade) rather than the more battle-ridden terrain of Gramsci's writings. Civil society is, together with the state and market one of the three 'spheres' that interface in making of democratic societies. (Outi Hakkarainen *et al.*, 2002: 3).

According to the annual ratings from Freedom House on the development of democracy, Russia has experienced a drop from 4.88 in 2001 to 6.14 in 2010—with 7 as the lowest rating.⁵⁰ The ratings consists of eight different indicators and the rating for civil society has, in the same period, dropped even more from 4.00 to 6.75, while the ratings for independent media has stagnated at 6.25 for the last four years. The low ratings on civil society are mostly due to a number of incidents of violence against activists (often unsolved and unpunished) and persecution from the police and other authorities due to a strict law from 2006 governing their activities.⁵¹ On the positive side, it notes that bloggers have found new ways of mobilizing groups and that a drop in racially-motivated crimes has appeared in 2010 (Orttung, 2010: 437).⁵²

The fact that the ratings on freedom of media has stagnated could hint at the new opportunities for civil society action on the internet, but otherwise the apparent new space for action reflected by the present mobilization among the Circassian organizations appears to be paradoxical. The drastic fall in democracy ratings in Russia has been part of the process of the so-called "managed democracy" model of the period of Putinism during the last decade.⁵³ This has also been labelled as "managed pluralism" by others (Richter, 2008 195). The increased potential of the internet, the new approach of the youth, and international inspiration from the diaspora and from international civil society trends all appear to be key elements of the new space for action.⁵⁴ The Circassian organizations and activists are inspired by prevailing international notions on civil society activism, rights-based lobbyism, freedom of speech, cultural and religious diversity.⁵⁵ Also the rights-based approach of organizations, such as the all-Russian Memorial that has existed for more than two decades, constitute inspiration for civil society pioneers in Russia—and potential partners.⁵⁶ It seems as if the recent Circassian actions increasingly attempt to challenge the managed democracy and centralization of the Russian Federation of the last decade.

The Circassian civil society sector has managed to enlarge their space for action in the battlefield of political life in the Russian Federation. This is a parallel to the politicization experienced by Circassian organizations in Turkey and elsewhere,

which could indicate a new development in the Russian democratization process. The geographic location clearly indicates why the Circassian question in Russia is often framed as a geopolitical issue or as a security issue, rather than an issue of minority rights, which is a situation the Circassians share with many ethnic minorities around the globe.

2.1. Youth mobilization

Circassian youth have in many ways been spearheading a movement to openly challenge the authorities, as well as some of the older Circassian organizations in recent years.⁵⁷ Youth play a key role in the ongoing revival of new Circassian initiatives. Youth groups and activists have managed to put pressure on Circassian organizations and get agendas approved that had originally been rejected, and youth groups have successfully mobilized young people and staged their own protest gatherings and events, as seen on several occasions in Karachai-Cherkessia in November 2008 and again in October 2009.⁵⁸ The actions of youth and youth groups challenged the Circassian/Caucasian traditions for respect of the elders, which earlier had, from time to time, resulted in a marginalization of the young in organizational activities.⁵⁹ Still, many have afterwards accepted and respected the initiative shown by youth and their activist approach. Youth groups have become active and visible, and have managed to bring new ideas and inspiration from the outside, such as through discussions and observations from the internet. In the last couple of years, Circassian youth in Russia have increasingly been involved in discussions of Circassian history, tradition, and identity in general.⁶⁰ The renewed campaign for recognition of the Circassian genocide is but one example.⁶¹ This has played an important role in the newfound mobilization and can be expected to continue to do so in the nearest future.

A significant portion of the young people are internationally oriented in their rights-based approach to civil society action and they have from the outset embraced modern technological tools, such as the internet and mobile telecommunication, where they often are ahead of the older organizations in their working modalities. The cultural globalization appears to have an empowering effect on the Circassian youth that actively look for opportunities to counter some of the negative aspects of globalization, such as the threats of losing the Circassian language (Kirmse, 2010: 5).

Critics of globalization have often suggested that young persons are in a process of alienation from traditional culture due to globalization, but as the Circassian examples show this is not necessarily the case (Kirmse, 2010: 5).

Youth is not just taking part, but often initiating processes of reproduction of Circassian ethnic identity. The Caucasus is a region often presented by various local, as well as international, observers in culturalistic terms as being “clannish” or “feudal”, but the Circassian youth (and others) are countering these perceptions and updating the classical Caucasian understanding of youth with a modern, global, and democratically-oriented dimension.⁶² The importance and the responsibility of the present generation of Circassian youth to take action were affirmed in a statement from three organizations in March 2011, as part of their protests against killings and terror attacks in the region.⁶³

Youth representatives are insisting on their right to argue and lobby for the collective rights of the Circassians as an indigenous ethno-cultural group.⁶⁴ This includes what could be called a campaign for a post-colonial assessment of the two to three hundred years of history within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ This type of discussions are taking place in contemporary Russia, though on a relatively marginalized level compared to many of the neighbouring post-Soviet states, where such discussions are much more central. As these discussions often point at imperial Russia as a colonizing empire, they are often met by rejection or anger by official Russian representatives.⁶⁶ Still, new developments could push such discussions into a more central role in Russia, which is one of the key aims of the Circassian organizations. So-called hidden histories or suppressed memories possess a strong potential for mobilization—as can be witnessed by many of the Circassians in the diaspora and on the internet (Cohen, 1997: 235).

In the post-communist democratization programmes of many of the other post-Soviet countries, western donors have often supported and encouraged the development of youth activism and organizations. In the Russian Federation such programmes are largely met with suspicion from the authorities, and are often labelled as foreign support for the opposition (Richter, 2008: 196). The fear of youth (and others) as civil society agents of change has led to new youth policies and the creation of new so-called patriotic youth movements and policies in Russia to counter these tendencies, for instance the “*Nashi*” movement and the “Young Guards” of the United Russia party (the party of power that also plays a role in relation to *Nashi*).⁶⁷ *Nashi*

and other so-called patriotic youth organizations were established to prevent youth involvement in the type of new agendas and changes brought by the Rose-revolution in Georgia and the Orange-revolution in Ukraine and have received considerable funding for their activities (Blum, 2007: 135). Members of *Nashi* were spotted at the football-related riots in Moscow in December 2010, where Caucasians were violently attacked and the slogan “Russia for the Russian” repeatedly voiced.⁶⁸ In relation to the North Caucasus, an organization such as *Nashi* with its loud othering of the non-Russians of the neighbouring countries often manages to strengthen the production of Caucasian identity as a counter-reaction. This appears to be counter-productive in relation to the aims of the organization, which are to support Russian sovereignty and prevent foreign influence in Russia.⁶⁹ This is a reference to the youth-dominated movements (*Otpor*) that played a key role in ousting Milosevic in Serbia in 2000, the launching of the “colour revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine in the mid-2000s, and the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. The contemporary trend of Circassian youth activism is an attempt to manifest their role in the post-Soviet democratization process—as the first post-Soviet generation.

Olivier Roy has emphasized how the Arab Spring of 2011 is (also) a generational phenomenon, where a new generation is protesting against the stagnating societies and expressing their wish to be part of the global economy and global exchange at large – much in line with the May 1968 events in Paris.⁷⁰ The youth initiatives among the Circassians, with their demands for increased rights for minorities, have some parallels to the Arab Spring, though the national level of the mobilizations in these countries cannot be compared to the Circassian efforts. In Russia, the incidents of the 2011 Arab Spring have led to speculations on a potential tightening of the use of the internet and a new law to facilitate such action has been approved.⁷¹ However, that could risk generating further dissatisfaction among ethnic Russian youth beyond the control of the authorities and the above mentioned pro-Kremlin youth organizations.

Another youth-related issue is about young people leaving for the forests and mountains of the North Caucasus to join the insurgents.⁷² This issue links to contemporary discussions on security and terrorism that have gained significant media coverage in Russia, as well as in the rest of the world through the last decade, and are also widely circulated through the internet. Of the three Circassian republics, the insurgents are mainly found in Kabardino-Balkaria, though in recent years the number

of insurgents in Karachai-Cherkessia has also been increasing.⁷³ The Islamist “movement” appear to be spreading slowly from east to west, which increasingly results in reports on people’s fear of potential terrorist acts directed towards Sochi due to the 2014 Olympics.⁷⁴ It is widely believed that youth are motivated to join the insurgents by unemployment, lack of other options, and, to a lesser degree, religious reasons. The well-known Circassian activist Ibrahim Yaganov stated, after the rejection of topics for the agenda of an ICA-meeting that had been proposed by youth representatives, that youth in Circassian republics are caught in a vacuum for which the dominant Circassian organizations and the ICA are also responsible.⁷⁵ This could lead to increased support for Islamic extremism.⁷⁶

A different example of the new role of youth is the suggestion by a young parliament member from the Republic of Adygea who, at the all-Russian forum of young parliamentarians, managed to achieve support for an appeal to the Russian government and the Russian Olympic Committee for the inclusion of Circassian symbols in the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics programme. The appeal referred to the philosophy and traditions of the Olympics movement for promoting multi-cultural coexistence and tolerance and how the inclusion of one specific popular tale – the so-called *Nart epos* – which connects the themes of multi-cultural coexistence and tolerance to the Caucasian setting.⁷⁷ This is another example of how new voices in Russia can be supportive towards Circassian issues (or at least elements thereof).⁷⁸

The type of civil society agency discussed in this paper is often dependent on the initiative and examples of key individuals. Douglas W. Blum suggests applying the term “cultural entrepreneurs” to such figures, according to a definition from Crawford Young:

a cultural entrepreneur will be understood here as someone who strategically fashions and activates identity; i.e., who “devotes himself to enlarging the symbolic, solidary resources of the community” by mobilizing dormant or unselfconscious cultural beliefs and practices into overt, ideologized symbols of belonging, thus creating a “catechism of identity” (Blum, 2007: 140).

In his study of youth activism in Russia and other post-Soviet states, Blum has identified a new type of Russian youth activism that has blossomed in recent years, though mainly within the sphere of Russian nation-building and largely as the result of a state-managed and state-initiated policy (Blum, 2007: 138). Blum distinguishes between three types of cultural entrepreneurs: state, sub-state, and non-state. In relation to the Circassian mobilization addressed in this paper, the Circassian

entrepreneurs are almost entirely non-state actors, especially related to the role of youth. Circassian cultural entrepreneurs of the three Caucasian republics have tended to constitute cooperation between sub-state and non-state actors with the former in the dominating role, which has often resulted in relatively restrained or representational functions in relation to certain public events. This is the level of activity that Circassian organizations were forced into in the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, which Ruslan Keshev from the Circassian Congress has labelled as “dormant”. And this is what many of the newer and often youth-dominated organizations and initiatives protest against.

Contemporary Circassian youth activism shares some of the tendencies of the Russian youth movements described by Blum and are similar or parallel in terms of the use of indigenous and ethnic identity in their mobilization.⁷⁹ The major difference is role of state and government policies. Recent Circassian youth activism is partly a re-action to official Russian youth policies that, on the one hand, praise tolerance and coexistence as part of an all-Russian federal civic nationalism and, on the other hand, constantly emphasize the role of ethnic “Russianness” and the Orthodox religion in the history of the Russian state (Vodichev and Lamin, 2008: 120). In this way, Circassian youth activism also represents a protest against marginalization as a minority ethnic group that is less privileged than the majority ethnic group. On a general level, Circassian activism benefits from the institutionalization of the Circassian ethno-national identity as it has taken place through many years as a titular-nationality in the republics, which include rights to local language teaching and publishing, local research institutions, local media, etc. Still, much of the contemporary protests by Circassian civil society actors are targeting different forms of discrimination and erosion of cultural rights in terms of language teaching, publications, conditions for repatriation from the diaspora, etc.⁸⁰

3. Internet mobilization

The scale of internet coverage in Russia was limited for a long period of time, and access was controlled and monitored by the authorities. However, since the mid-2000s, increased internet access and the arrival of the new social media of Web 2.0 have resulted in significant Circassian internet activity and many Circassian internet sites can now be found. In relation to contacts with the Circassian diaspora, language

has been a barrier as Russian is the preferred language in Russia, while Turkish is the preferred language in Turkey (or Europe), where the majority of the diaspora is located. Moreover, the Circassian language is sometimes used in Russia with the Cyrillic alphabet, which only a small number among the diaspora can use. English is thus increasingly becoming the language of transnational contacts between Circassians in the diaspora and in the Caucasus. The digital divide appears to be in a process of being bridged, and youth activists play a key role in this process. In Turkey, there have also been delays in bridging the digital divide, though during the last decade ethnic minorities have increasingly been allowed to organize and present their issues in public due to the Turkish democratization process, partly motivated by the rapprochement to the EU. Protests against the Sochi Olympics in 2014, linked to the key Circassian narrative on the forced exile in both time and space, play a facilitating role in this renewed Circassian mobilization.⁸¹ The ongoing internet revival among the Circassians, which for a period appeared to take place in two separate zones defined by the Russian and Turkish languages respectively, now increasingly includes links and the transfer of information.⁸² Many Circassians in the North Caucasus are becoming aware of the mobilization and discussions among the diaspora and the fact that a kind of virtual Circassia or transnational Circassian public sphere has developed from below by a multitude of actors. The internet has built-in potential for multiplication through hyperlinking and cross-mediation, which increases the potential visibility and thereby also the potential for mobilization.⁸³ The dialogue and feedback functions of the social media sites of Web 2.0 also increase involvement and potential mobilization.

For a number of years there has been a significantly wider space for action online than off-line within the civil society sector and the media in Russia.⁸⁴ Within the online sphere there is an awareness of international standards and discussions on issues such as human rights, minority rights, and freedom speech from the beginning, which was enhanced through transnational links and contacts. It is this functioning of the internet as a kind of free-zone in Russian society that has also increasingly affected Circassian visibility and mobilization—especially online. There is no doubt that these activities are also monitored closely by the intelligence services in Russia, and several activists have been contacted and asked why they carry out anti-Russian activities, if they care about the safety of their families, etc.⁸⁵ The *Nart* television

station, which was initiated by representatives from the diaspora in Jordan, has managed to establish an office in the Caucasus and has become another example of media that can unify the Circassians.⁸⁶ Their transmissions mainly focus on culture, traditions, and history, and can use the Circassian language without having to choose an alphabet, which is a challenge to many internet actors.

Internet coverage has risen significantly in Russia and in 2012 almost half of the population has access to the Internet.⁸⁷ This number is generally lower in the North Caucasus, but key actors, such as civil society activists and a substantial proportion of young persons have extensive access. Aihwa Ong has stated that the internet is an information technology that transnational groups wish to use ‘to exercise a new form of power’, thereby hinting at the potential role of the internet in lobby and policy oriented efforts (Ong, 2003).

In the Freedom House report for 2010 on democratic development in Russia, the index ranking for independent media is still very low; small and marginalized websites that are often referred to as belonging to the opposition are allowed to remain, while the more popular media outlets and websites are often censored or bought by the authorities or companies with close links to the authorities (Orttung, 2010: 437).⁸⁸ So far most of the Circassian websites appear to fall in the marginal category and are allowed to continue. New laws in 2012 have increased the options available for authorities to close websites, which has led to a fear of censorship and crackdown on independent internet media and non-governmental organizations by some observers.⁸⁹

The anthropologist Maximilian Forte has developed an analytic model for electronic revival among marginalized minorities or indigenous groups, according to which such groups can achieve visibility, embodiment, recognition, and authenticity through the use of the internet in a manner similar to Hobsbawm’s notions on “invention of tradition” or Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Forte, 2006: 145).⁹⁰ This type of revival contributes to the creation of a collective consciousness of belonging to a joint Circassian community beyond the republican borders of everyday life—and increasingly also across international borders. The daily use of and participation in various Circassian forum discussions and social websites constantly enhances this process in a manner described by Forte as a continually ongoing loop-function. This results in a much wider circulation, outreach, and potential impact than was the case with the so-called electronic capitalism of the 1990s that mainly built on

television and radio.⁹¹ Many of books and articles on Circassian history, traditions, and identity published in the 1990s are now remediated and circulated on the internet. It is clear that much larger target groups can be reached and, through the use of modern media with youth appeal, additional target groups become involved, which includes youth as active participants in discussion forums and in various ways of commenting on texts, photos, films, etc. Informing Circassians about their culture, history, and traditions has often been the first priority of Circassian organizations and internet initiatives, as many Circassians had a limited knowledge about this. This approach to enlightenment has also shown a potential for mobilization. Increased use of the internet has contributed to enlarging the Circassian public sphere in Russia and has offered a space for Circassian actors that are not available off-line.

Thus, a new type of internet-based organization has emerged with the spread of the internet and can function on a low budget, which makes it well-suited for grass-root oriented activism. This also contributes to explaining how virtual community building on a transnational level can – to a certain extent – bypass the authorities or other powerful actors. As stressed by many observers, the virtual world is part of the real world.

4. Factors enhancing ethnic mobilization

As already mentioned, the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi constitutes a key issue in the ongoing transnational Circassian mobilization, but a number of what could be called structural issues also contribute as mobilizing factors. These include anti-Caucasian xenophobia in Russia, the role of ethnic Russians as the dominant ethnic group in the Russian Federation (in an asymmetrical relationship), the double-titular composition of some of the republics in the North Caucasus, and the general process of ethnic homogenization.

Anti-Caucasian xenophobia and discrimination is widespread in Russia. Between fifty and hundred persons are killed annually by racists in Russia and hundreds are severely injured in violent hate crimes (Orttung, 2010: 443). A significant portion of the victims are Caucasians. These problems have become so widespread during the last ten years that the Circassian and Caucasian organizations in Moscow now spend more energy supporting Caucasians with legal assistance and other forms of support than originally planned. The high number of Circassians and

other Caucasians living in Moscow as students, businessmen, or various types of labourers has contributed to make Caucasians more visible targets of racist groups.⁹²

The type of relationship that exists between the big Russian state that shares its name with a dominant ethnic group, the Russians or so-called “Staatsvolk” (Brubaker, 1996: 172), and the Circassians, as ethnic minorities located in the southern periphery, can only be labelled an asymmetric power-relationship. This relationship is further challenged by the fact that for an extended period both groups have been troubled by questions of identity and identification as part of the transitional uncertainties that also occurred in many other areas of the post-Soviet space.⁹³ In spite of being the “weaker” part in the power-relation – or sometimes also because of it – this situation can generate new support and mobilization behind issues of ethnic character or relevance for peoples such as the Circassians.⁹⁴ This is a type of structural problem in the so-called asymmetrical ethno-federalism of Russia that dates back to the state-formation process that began in 1991 – a federal model with a solid built-in conflict potential (Sakwa, 2006: 618).

Andreas Wimmer distinguishes between inclusivist and exclusivist types of dominant ethnicity, by which he states that the more exclusivist variant delineates a field of political tension and can represent a more contested and conflictive mode of ethno-national dominance (Wimmer, 2004: 47). Wimmer use the term ethno-national dominance to cover both dominant ethnicity and dominant nationhood, which can be useful in relation to the Russian context where the two forms often are mixed and often not defined. Within contemporary Russia there seems to be a tendency to switch between being inclusivist and exclusivist in a manner that has similarities with the earlier periods of the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, when, for instance, periods of “Russification” could shift with periods of “nativization”. Elements of this can also be found in the Circassian areas today, where local languages and history are being taught in schools and published in books, but due to enormous developments in the electronic media, especially in television and on the internet, the Russian language has a strengthened position *vis-a-vis* the local languages. Still, despite significant differences between the three republics, the Russian language continues to play an important role as a *lingua franca* in these ethnically-mixed entities. When the weekly hours of teaching in local languages from 2011 were reduced as a result of a federal decision, it indirectly strengthened the role of the Russian language.⁹⁵

The system of dominating ethnic groups is also found on the secondary level of the republics, which Wimmer has termed as “dominant minorities” (Wimmer, 2004: 47). In Kabardino-Balkaria, Balkars regularly complain about the domination of the Kabardians, as do the Cherkess about the Karachai in Karachai-Cherkessia. In the republic of Adygea, Adygs and Russians are mutually complaining about each other. The closely related Turkish-speaking peoples of Balkars and Karachai are also undergoing a process of mobilization and increased cooperation as found among the Circassians.⁹⁶ These two parallel mobilization processes partly enhance each other, which is a by-product of the double-titular republic structure.

Since the 1960s, a process of ethnic or demographic homogenization has taken place in the North Caucasus, though at a slower speed in the west than in the eastern parts. Ethnic Russians have been steadily leaving the region in a process that began when the Balkars and the Karachai returned from exile in Central Asia in the late 1950s. This is a process that has parallels to the so-called process of “un-mixing of peoples” that took place in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union, which also took place on the level of the non-state units such as the republics in the North Caucasus (Brubaker, 1996: 150). This could also be seen as a counter reaction to the demographic Russification of the Soviet era—enhanced by the North Caucasian re-ethnification processes since 1991. These tendencies increase the legitimacy of the type of self-determination found among the titular-nationalities of the North Caucasian peoples and, in some way, counteracts the Russification or ethnic Russian domination processes mentioned earlier. Internally in the republics, the ethnic homogenization processes are to some extent countered by the on-going process of urbanization, by which many villages have lost half of their population since the fall of the Soviet Union.⁹⁷

Conclusion

At first sight, the space for action within the civil society sector in Russia for an ethnic minority located in the periphery close to the Georgian border – an area widely perceived as being of strategic importance to Russia – appears reduced. This seems to be in line with the conclusions of reports by Freedom House and Transparency International in their annual assessments of the democratic developments in the Russian Federation. Still, by observing the activity level of the Circassian

organizations, as well as their increasing numbers and the significantly rise in Circassian activity level on the internet, it becomes clear that the space for action of the Circassians within the wider public sphere of the Russian Federation has actually been enlarged. The Circassian youth in particular has taken a lead role in this new process of enlarging the space for action of the Circassians, even though a significant part of this space is in cyberspace, which is also a part of reality and does not constitute a separate or artificial world. This role of Circassian cyberspace reflects similar tendencies in other parts of Russian society, where a larger space for action is generally found on the internet than in the printed and electronic media.

The fact that a number of killings and acts of violence have affected Circassian activists and cultural personalities at the same time – and the perpetrators are rarely arrested and convicted – indicates that this type of civil society mobilization can be dangerous. Still, many activists state that they have gone beyond the “point of no return” and will continue their activities within the democratic framework of Russian law.

The strengthened ethnic mobilization and the tendency towards increased unity among the Circassian organizations in the North Caucasus represent a new platform for future action. The level of exchange and cooperation with the diaspora organizations is generally rising, as seen in relation to the campaign for recognition of the Circassian genocide. This new Circassian platform for civil society action could in the coming years be further strengthened through cooperation with other actors such as human rights organizations and academic institutions, from the centre of the federation as a type of strategic partner. When environmental organizations or anti-corruption bloggers have also protested against the Sochi Olympics, such parallel action has occurred. Another example was the statements from the Russian Academy of Science in 2010, when they acknowledged the Circassian claim of constituting one joint Circassian people – and not the four different peoples presently outlined based on divisions from the Stalin era. The Circassian mobilization on the internet continues to widen, which increasingly includes cooperation with non-Circassian actors.

The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, as a high-profile international mega-event, has stimulated renewed mobilization among the Circassian diaspora, and little by little the same is happening among the Circassians in the North Caucasus. The timing of the event plays a double role in the mobilization as “Sochi” embodies both the time

and space of their final eviction in 1864. In the renewed mobilization process since the mid-2000s, it has increasingly become popular to rephrase the “national tragedy” into an “act of genocide”. It appears evident that in the years remaining until the 150 years anniversary in 2014, the process of Circassian mobilization will continue to grow.

The combined role of youth and the internet has, in the case of the Circassians, shown potential for the promotion of a democratization process in line with international trends. As such, many of the internet-based actions of young Circassians constitute attempts at countering some of the autocratic tendencies in Russia during the latter decade. Both the Circassian youth and Web 2.0 efforts illustrate the shift towards a new generation, where representatives from this second post-Soviet generation of youth are inspired by international trends on rights-based activism, while Web 2.0 represents the second generation internet that is both qualitatively and quantitatively different than Web 1.0. So far, most youth representatives have – in spite of internal differences and calls for increased ethno-centrism – managed to demonstrate that ethno-cultural revival can be performed while simultaneously being modern and globally-oriented.

The increased functionalities of the internet in Web 2.0 have clearly contributed to strengthening the Circassian mobilization and have resulted in steadily increasing involvement of Circassians. In terms of the form and tools applied in the internet mediation process, the community-building element of Web 2.0, as used by Circassian actors, is quite different from the processes described by Benedict Anderson (1991) and Arjun Appadurai (2001) as print-capitalism and electronic-capitalism, respectively. The “digital-capitalism” of today’s Web 2.0 is more sprawling, grass-roots, and dialogue-oriented and is a less post-Soviet phenomenon, where the level of popular involvement is significantly larger than the more elite-oriented processes of the above mentioned earlier periods.

The Circassian mobilization is not just ethnic, but is also cultural, indigenous, and minority rights related. The framing of the Circassian mobilization as “ethnic” regularly results in allegations of nationalism from local and federal opponents, as well as from academic specialists in Russia. This often results in a dilemma where the rights of the Circassians as an indigenous minority are questioned and presented as a threat towards political stability.⁹⁸ This is obviously an awkward situation for an

ethno-cultural minority group in a country like Russia, where the ongoing ethno-cultural revival of the ethnic Russians, as the dominating group in a nationalizing state, is widely regarded as more legitimate than similar processes among ethnic minorities in the North Caucasus. One North Caucasian observer has referred to this type of ethnic Russian dominance as “ethnocratization”.⁹⁹ This type of imbalance in the long run seems to enhance and fuel the Circassian mobilization. The 2014 Sochi Olympics has contributed to generating an international platform from which Circassian activists and organizations have launched an encounter with biased Russian history writing and other elements of discrimination on a much larger scale than before. This is just one example of how the Circassian organizations and cyber-activists increasingly challenge the authorities on local and federal level in Russia.

The transnational cooperation and linking between the Circassians minorities in Russia and the Circassian diaspora could be said to approach a level described by Rogers Brubaker as a triadic relationship—where Russia, in the role of the nationalizing state, is no longer just met with resistance from national minorities within the country, but is also faced with new transnational diaspora groups.

Notes

1. Adygeans constitute 25% of the population in Adygea, Cherkessians 11% in Karachai-Cherkessia, and Kabardians 55% in Kabardino-Balkaria (2002). A fourth group of Circassians are the Shapsugs, who live by the Black Sea coast in Krasnodar Krai. “Adige” is the Circassians own term for “Circassian”, while “Cherkess” comes from Turkish and is used in many countries including Russia, Denmark, and Germany (Amjad Jaimoukha, 2001: 11; Krag and Funch, 1994: 19). One historical representation of the Circassians is the flag with 12 stars representing the 12 tribes or provinces of the Circassians that was designed in the 1830s as part of the resistance against Imperial Russian colonization (Jaimoukha, 2001: 71). Linguistically, ‘Circassian is one of the three divisions of the North-Western group of Caucasian languages’ and is divided into two groups: a Western and an Eastern (Jaimoukha, 2001: 245). In relation to the population census in the Russian Federation in 2010, Circassian activists carried out a campaign to use “Circassian” instead of the existing four Circassian sub-groups mentioned above (two of which are purely Soviet-era inventions) (“Adyg” and “Cherkes”—both simply mean “Circassian”) (Funch and Krag, 1995: 19; *Elot.ru*: ‘Perepis 2010’).
2. According to the news agency *Natpress*, nine cases of attacks against Circassian leaders, including killings, were recorded between October 2009 and May 2010 (*Natpress.net*, May 13, 2010).
3. This paper is, partly, an extension of the book chapter ‘Frontier Zones of Diaspora-Making: Circassian Organisations in Turkey’ on the development of new civil society organizations and internet initiatives among the Circassian diaspora in Turkey (and partly in other parts of the world) (In *A Comparative Ethnography of Alternative Spaces*, eds. Jens Dahl and Esther Fihl. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 – forthcoming.)

4. The use of the term “public sphere” is inspired by, among others, the writings of Jürgen Habermas (Flyvbjerg, 1998) and the subsequent discussions and criticism of his use of the term, including the term “counter publics” that is relevant to the Circassian context.
5. The discussion on the nationalizing state by Rogers Brubaker can be supplemented by considerations on “ethno-national dominance” (Andreas Wimmer), “asymmetric power-relationship” (Ralf Rönquist) and “asymmetric ethno-federalism” (Richard Sakwa).
6. The term the “Circassian Question” is sometimes referred to as the “Circassian Issue” or the “Circassian Problem”.
7. One element of the renewed Circassian Question is the renaming of the war in the nineteenth century into the Russian-Circassian War (1817-1864) instead of the Caucasian Wars as is the term used in Russia (including a shorter period).
8. Articles on the Circassian Question include, for instance, ‘Virtual Circassia’ by Denis Polandov, Prague Watchdog. http://www.watchdog.cz/?top_from=36&lang=1. Retrieved on: Jan 6, 2010. Political scientist Sergey Markedonov stressed the role of the Sochi Olympics in 2014 as a reason for the rise of the Circassian Question (‘Parliament of Georgia asked to Recognize Circassians’ Genocide in Russian Empire’, *Caucasian Knot*, Mar 22, 2010, available at: <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/12871>). According to Hasan Dumanov, acting head of a division within the Kabardino-Balkarian Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Science, there is no Circassian problem in Russia – ‘it is all imposed on us’ (‘Dumanov: there is no Circassian problem in Russia’ (in Russian), *Caucasian Knot*. Nov 18, 2010); The ‘Circassian Question’ has become a separate entry at the top of the list of content at the Circassian web site *Elot.ru* called ‘Why the Circassian Question became special’ (*Kommersant.ru*, January 18, 2011). See also *Elot.ru*, Mar 25, 2011 for a Russian conference on the Circassian Question.
9. Sufian Zhemukhov and Alexander Bekshokov, ‘The authors of "Circassiad 2012" are against the decision on land in the KBR’ (in Russian). *Natpress.net*, Nov 6, 2009. Zhemukhov refers to these three issues as the strategic goals of the Circassian movement (Zhemukhov, 2012: 505). According to an analysis of Zhemukhov, five main strands of the contemporary Circassian movement can be identified with nationalists at one end of the spectrum, proceeding to sovereigntists, centrists, culturalists, and ending with accomodationists at the other end (Zhemukhov, 2012: 511).
10. ‘Online conference with the chairman of the Circassian Congress in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, Ruslan Kesh’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, Aug 16, 2011.
11. The Georgian reorientation towards the North Caucasus—or towards a united Caucasus approach as it is sometimes called – has been noted on many occasions since 2010, for instance, by (then) President Mikheil Saakashvili in a speech at United Nations General Assembly in the fall of 2010 and at the opening of the PIK Russian language television station broadcasting from Tbilisi in February 2011. (‘Georgians build ties with Russian Caucasus’, *Geotimes.ge*, Feb 14, 2011).
12. Sufian Zhemukhov, ‘Ponars’, *Eurasia Policy Memo* 118 (October, 2010).
13. *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7 (58), *Jamestown.org*, March 25, 2010. The conference has its own Wikipedia-entry under ‘Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes conference’, Wikipedia. Retrieved on: Nov 25, 2012.
14. When an academic conference on the Circassian Question was held in Moscow in March 2011 it was automatically presented by mass media as a Russian input to the war of conferences, though the organizers rejected this. The conference was arranged by the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. (‘Circassian issue: history against politics’, Georgiatimes.info, Mar 29, 2011. Zhemukhov (see note 12, *supra*) lists further Russian reactions, including linking Circassian activism to potential terror threats against the Sochi Olympics.
15. A large-scale international Circassian conference was planned to take place in Amman, Jordan in 2010, which was intended to follow-up on the issues discussed in the Tbilisi conference, was cancelled, allegedly due to pressure from Russia towards the Jordanian

authorities according several representatives from Circassian/Caucasian organizations in Jordan.

16. 'Georgia eases visa rules for North Caucasus residents', *Cacianalyst.org*, Oct 27, 2010, available at: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5438>. U.S. President Barack Obama and representatives of the American administration expressed displeasure with the Georgian interest in the Circassian genocide and demanded that president Mikheil Saakashvili leave the North Caucasus alone ('Saakashvili playing with Circassian fire'. *GeorgiaTimes.info*. Feb 16, 2011).
17. Fatima Tlisova, 'Voice of America', *Elot.ru*, Oct 14, 2010, available at: http://elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2075&itemid=1.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Also President Arsen Kanokov of Kabardino-Balkaria has rejected the existence of Circassian Question ('Interview with Arsen Kanokov' (in Russian). *Elot.ru*, Jan 28, 2011). He referred to the issue as an "imaginary subject", which led to a number of angry comments on the internet.
20. Polandov, Denis. 'Virtual Circassia'. *Prague Watchdog*. http://www.watchdog.cz/?top_from=36&lang=1. Retrieved on: Jan 6, 2010
21. Some of these documents are found in the archives in Tbilisi. Tbilisi was the regional centre of the Russian Empire in most of the nineteenth century.
22. 'Sergey Markov apologized to Circassians'. *Natpress.net*, Jun 26, 2011.
23. Only selected Circassian organizations were invited to these events: representatives of the ICA from Kaffed, Turkey and others widely regarded as pro-Russian and not promoting a "genocide understanding". Still, some of the participants managed to surprise the representatives of the Russian authorities by insisting on a proper treatment of the Circassian Question, including the so-called Circassian genocide. This is exemplified, for instance, by the statement and speech of the representative of the Circassian Association of California, Cicek Chek ('Address to the Russian Duma'. *Circassianworld.com*, (undated). available at: <http://www.circassianworld.com/new/component/content/article/1563.html>. Members of the ICA board have tried since then to distance themselves from the statements of Cicek Chek ('Open Letter to Asker Sokht', *Circassianculturalinstitute.org*, Oct 31, 2011).
24. *North Caucasus Analysis* 12(12), *Jamestown.org*, June 6, 2011.
25. 'Who will be next?', *Natpress.net*, June 21, 2011, available at: <http://www.natpress.net/index.php?newsid=6848>. The meeting was held in Maikop on May 29, 2011 by the Coordination Council of Circassian organizations. Repatriation has been a priority of Circassian organizations since the fall of the Soviet Union, but still less than 2,000 have actually returned. The required Russian language skills together with the level of bureaucracy and corruption in Russia are generally not considered attractive by Circassians in the diaspora. This has led to support for the proposals of creating a single Circassian republic in Russia or even an independent Circassian state (Conference in Anaklia, Georgia, May 21, 2012).
26. 'In Georgia they began to commemorate the victims of the Caucasian War'. *Kavkaz-uzel.ru*, May 22, 2012, available at: <http://www.Kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/206940>.
27. The organization "Circassian Congress" played a leading role as initiator of the request to the Russian Parliament for recognition of the so-called Circassian genocide in 2005.
28. 'Our unity is our force' – stated by activists of the Circassian web portal *eLot.ru* ('The united appeal of the activists of the independent Circassian web-portal *eLot.Ru*', *Natpress.net*, Jan 27, 2011) as part of their appeal for unity in protest against violence between Circassians and the use of violence in general.
29. The level of urbanization according to the 2010 census: Kardino-Balkaria – 55%; Adygea – 51%; Karachai-Cherkessia – 45%. Available at: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/perepis_itogi1612.htm. Many villages have lost population to the larger cities. A number of young Circassian students

have travelled to larger cities in Russia for education – it is unknown how many have returned afterwards.

30. ‘The creation of the Council of Circassian organizations – the first step towards a unified organization in Russia’ (in Russian). *Elot.ru*. Jan 21, 2011. Available at: http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2213&Itemid=1

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. For instance, ‘To the President of the Russian "International Circassian Association" (ICA)’. Justicefornorthcaucasus.com, May 11, 2010 and ‘Virtual Circassia’. *Prague Watchdog*, Jan 6, 2010.

34. Amjad Jaimoukha refers to this as a neutralizing of the Circassian national movement. Also, the local media was “forced” to shy away from certain issues and some Circassian media outlets were closed. (‘The story of a bronze idol’. jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/StatueOfMaria.pdf). Undated, available at: jaimoukha.synthasite.com/resources/StatueOfMaria.pdf).

35. Haci Bayram Polat, Conference Presentation on the Role of the ICA, William Paterson University, New Jersey, USA, April 13, 2008. Available on *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com*; see also ‘ICA Presidential elections passed with rough infringements’, *Natpress.net*, Oct 13, 2009; see note 33 (May 11, 2010).

36. See note 33. In a surprising statement the Vice President of ICA, Mukhamed Khafitse (May 2011), in relation to a meeting of carefully selected and invited Circassian representatives with members of the Russian Parliament, asserted the following: ‘We expect concrete decision from the Duma, and we think that the recognition of genocide in 1863 and 1864 would be a positive move’ (‘As Tbilisi Beckons, Circassians Find Ear in Moscow’. *Moscow Times*, May 17, 2011).

37. See, for example, http://www.justicefornorthcaucasus.com/jfnc_message_boards/Circassia_adiga.php?entry_id=1289349161; http://www.circassiapassport.com/2011/10/06/stop_the_ica_campaign; and http://www.circassianation.org/circassianation_046.htm.

38. ‘Circassia’. *UNPO*. Mar 25, 2008, available at: <http://www.unpo.org/article/7869>; ‘Window on Eurasia’, *Jamestown.org*, Jan 25, 2010.

39. See www.circassiada.org. A support site has been established in the USA, see www.circassiada.com.

40. ‘Interviews with diaspora representatives’, *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com*, Nov 1, 2009.

41. ‘Farce “Circassiad” reveals itself’ (in Russian), *Justicefornorthcaucasus.com*, Feb 6, 2010.

42. According to the initiators, this is not just because of the resistance from different sides, but also due to legal challenges.

43. ‘Interview with Arsen Kanokov’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, Jan 28, 2011. Another stereotypical way of reacting to the Circassian mobilization was reflected in a conference on the Circassian Question (Moscow, March 2011) by Denis Sololov (Center for Social and Economic Research). Sololov stated: ‘Any social movement in the Caucasus, one way or another serve the interests of the local elites, focused primarily on the struggle for access to the federal budget resources’. (‘The Circassian issue was discussed in Moscow’ (in Russian), *REGNUM via elot.ru*, Mar 25, 2011).

44. One was a well-known ethnographer specializing in Circassian history and folklore and the other was the *mufti* of Kabardino-Balkaria. Insurgents have taken responsibility for both killings, though their motives are challenged by different observers. Russian intelligence services have been accused of being involved (*North Caucasus Analysis* 12(1), *Jamestown.org*, Jan 3, 2011).

45. Information obtained from several sources – mostly informally – for instance at conferences in Brussels (June, 2012), Anaklia, Georgia (May, 2012), Istanbul (May, 2012), New York (April, 2011) and during visits to Maikop (October, 2011).

46. Much criticism on the use of the term civil society can be found, including for instance the tendency to idealize civil society as actors of democratic change (see for example

Grugel and Uhlin, 2009). Lately the term has also been applied to discussions on cultural diversity and social cohesion (Murray, 2002: 2).

47. According to Vaclav Havel (1993) ‘a strong civil society is a crucial condition of a strong democracy. Empowering civil society is a central concern for the project of democracy’ (Flyvbjerg, 1998: 210). According to the definition of David Lewis – inspired by Antonio Gramsci – ‘civil society is the arena, separate from state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contained a wide range of organisations which both challenged and upheld the existing order’ (Lewis, 2001: 2).
48. Lars Funch Hansen, *Frontier Zones of Diaspora-Making: Circassian Organisations in Turkey* (2013-forthcoming).
49. The other five are value, collective noun, historical moment, anti-hegemony, and antidote to state (Hakkarainen, *et al.*, 2002: 2).
50. On the Corruption Perception Index 2011 from Transparency International, Russia is placed as no. 143 of 183 countries and Turkey as no. 61 (Available at: <http://www.transparency.org/country>).
51. ‘Russia’, *Freedom House*. (Report 2011), available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/russia>.
52. The Russian ratings on democracy are similar to many of the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, which has resulted in speculations that Russia could be affected by demonstrations similar to the 2011 Arab Spring in the near future.
53. Centralized government and an authoritarian so-called managed democracy are key features of “Putinism”.
54. According to the 2012 Freedom House ‘Freedom on the Internet’ report, for Russia ‘Internet Freedom Status’ is labelled as ‘Partly Free’ while ‘Press Freedom Status’ is generally noted as ‘Not Free’. Available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2012/Russia>. Retrieved on: Dec 1, 2012.
55. Civil society activism of today is also based on earlier movements, such as the civil rights movements of the 1960s, the decolonization movements, the movements for rights of indigenous peoples, etc.
56. Memorial is perhaps the internationally most well-known Russian human rights organization. Memorial was started in the late 1980s, before the fall of the Soviet Union, when members began to document and inform about human rights violations during the Soviet period. Memorial played a leading role in defining how civil society organizations could operate under the new circumstances of the *Perestroika* period (more information available at www.memo.ru).
57. The category “youth” is rarely defined but generally refer to persons between 16 and 29, most of whom are students and live mostly in larger towns.
58. Fatima Tlisova, ‘Circassian Congress calls for unification of Circassian Republics in North Caucasus’, *North Caucasus Analysis* 9, 45. www.jamestown.org, Nov 26, 2008; ‘In Georgia, the conference on “Circassian issue” demanded boycott the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi’ (in Russian), *kavkaz-uzel.ru*, Nov 23, 2010; ‘Window on Eurasia’, *CircassianWorld.com*, Oct 5, 2009.
59. A statement from some of the organizers of the ICA-conference in Maikop: ‘young people have no reason to be here and their opinions are irrelevant’. (‘Window on Eurasia’, *CircassianWorld.com*, Oct 5, 2009).
60. As note 30 (Jan 21, 2011). Also confirmed in individual conversations in the North Caucasus in 2009 and 2011, as well as during conferences in 2012.
61. ‘Employees of Kabardino-Balkaria deny the charges of illegal detention by lawyer Dorogova’, *kavkaz-uzel.ru*, Nov 18, 2010.
62. A similar tendency can be observed in relation to gender issues.
63. What is Circassian nationalism?”, *Natpress.net*. Mar 17, 2011.
64. *North Caucasus Analysis* 10(15), *Jamestown.org*, April 17, 2009.

65. ‘Russia is formally a federation, but it has kept a number of imperial features and is still a multiethnic empire with potential territorial instability looming round the next corner’ (Hedetoft and Blum, 2008: 21).

66. ‘Dumanov: There is not Circassian problem in Russia’. Statement by Hasan Dumanov, historian and acting head of Division of Social and Political Studies at the Kabardino-Balkarians Scientific Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. *Kavkaz-uzel.ru*, Nov 18, 2010. Maksim Shevchenko (Head of Center for Strategic Research on Religion and Policy): ‘Simply absurd’ and ‘political pressure against Moscow’ (*MoscowTimes*, Mar 3, 2001, online edition).

67. Young Guards have been active in the Circassian republics for a longer period, while Nashi only in 2011 has taken steps to open branches in the North Caucasus.

68. ‘Russia: Kremlin Struggling to Keep Lid on Pandora’s Box of Nationalism’, *eurasianet.org*. Dec 20, 2012.

69. Nashi has often been referred to as a Komsomol-like organization (Lucas, 2008:79) or called Putin-Jugend (‘A beating on my beat’, *New York Times*. Dec 11, 2010.). The Sova-Centre has stated the following on the aim of Nashi: ‘to distract Russian society from a mood of social protest and to discredit the political opposition in the lead-up to elections’ (‘The Phantom of Manezhnaya Square: Radical Nationalism and Efforts to Counteract It in 2010’, *sova-center.ru*. May 5, 2011). For further information on the role of Nashi in relation to xenophobia and nationalism in Russia see Mark Ames and Alexander Zaitchik, ‘Skinhead violence raising in Russia’, *Thenation.com*, Sep 10, 2007).

70. ‘Olivier Roy on Middle East social movements’, *Sargasso.nl*, Feb 23, 2011.

71. The Arab Spring that began in 2011 led to speculations of a Russian Spring or a Russian Facebook Revolution, especially in relation to the many protests raised against election fraud in the parliamentary elections of December 2011.

72. It should be noted that parts of what is referred to as “insurgents” consists of criminal gangs earning an income through means such as extortion and kidnapping. The high rates of youth unemployment are regarded as a key reason for successful attraction of people to both of these types of “insurgency”.

73. *North Caucasus Analyst* 13(13), *Jamestown.org*, June 21, 2012.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Another issue frequently referred to is that law enforcement responses to conflicts often can be labelled as “crude” and characterized by impunity. As noted in a 2012 report from Amnesty International this has ‘led to a situation in which civilians in the region [the North Caucasus] fear the law enforcement agencies and the armed insurgents equally’ (*North Caucasus Analysis* 13(13), *Jamestown.org*, June 25, 2012).

76. ‘Window of Eurasia’, *Circassianworld.com*, Oct 5, 2009, available at: <http://www.circassianworld.com/new/analysis/1388-moscow-gives-circassian-young-people.html>. Circassians generally practice moderate Islam and the attraction of radical Muslim groups is believed to be higher among the Balkars and Karachais in the two above mentioned republics than among their Circassian counterparts (Bram, 2008: 44–45).

77. ‘Young Russian parliamentarians supported the use of Circassian symbolism in the Sochi Winter Olympics’. *Elot.ru*. Oct 28, 2009.

78. Another example is the formal acknowledgement of the Circassians as “one people” by the Russian Academy of Science as stated in a letter of May 25, 2010 in a formal answer to the ICA (‘The conclusion of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology: this is a single Circassian people’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, Jun 15, 2010, available at: http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1819&Itemid=1.) This was confirmed by the ICA February 19, 2011 (‘About the self-name and a single exonym of the Circassian people’, *International Circassian Association*, Feb 19, 2011, available at: http://www.mcha.kbsu.ru/English/m_ispolkom29E.htm). The two conferences on different aspects of the Circassian Question were held in Moscow in March 2011 are another example (“The Circassian Question” is not threatened by the

Sochi Olympics according to expert' (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, Mar 18, 2011, available at: http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2300&Itemid=1;

'Neflyasheva: Russia should oppose inter-ethnic strife' (in Russian), *Kavkaz-uzel.ru*, Mar 25, 2011, available at: kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/182789.

79. Cultivation of patriotism has according to Blum become 'a cornerstone of youth policy, and of Russian national identity as a whole' (Blum, 2007: 121). As such, it is hardly surprising that similar tendencies can be found among different ethnic groups in the Caucasus.

80. The contemporary youth activism differs from the former generation of Circassian civil society action from the late 1980s and early 1990s, where the key actors tended to be cultural and academic elites. These still play a role today, but in a more subdued way, though many, for instance, contribute to the generation of knowledge on Circassian issues by writing articles, analyses and blogs for the Circassian web sites, as well as publishing books and participating in other forms of electronic media production.

81. For instance, 'NoSochi2014.org' (in English/ Turkish/Russian/Arabic/Hebrew) is an international Circassian site (its predecessor *olympicgenocide.info* can still be accessed), 'antisochi.org' is Caucasian/Circassian (in Russian) and 'BoycottSochi.eu' (in English) is international and operates under the slogan "No Democracy–No Olympic Games".

82. Also English and Arabic language spheres have been important. The English language sphere has especially contributed to increase the transnational awareness among Circassian activists and has increased the international attention of Circassian issues towards a non-Circassian audience.

83. Lars Funch Hansen, 'iCircassia'. Paper presented at ASN Convention, Columbia University, New York, April 2009.

84. Reporters without Borders, 'Russia' (updated July 2011): 'Censorship of the Internet, like censorship of the media, is nowadays largely decentralised. But although strong leadership from the top in all areas of society is not a guiding principle for the authorities, admonishments about cyber-censorship have been strangely slow in coming'. Available at: <http://www.en.rsf.org/surveillance-russia,39766.html>. Still, in this report it is also stated that though the internet is 'a space where independent voices still find expression', the authorities are increasingly developing technological solutions in order to increase options for online filtering and surveillance.

85. *North Caucasus Analysis* 10(15), *Jamestown.org*, April 17, 2009.

86. See www.narttv.com; www.facebook.com/pages/NART-National-Adiga-Radio-Television.

87. 'Russia is now an internet society', *Da Russophile*, Sep 3, 2012 available at darussophile.com/2012/09/03/russia-is-now-an-internet-society/.

88. See note 56, *supra*.

89. The Russian ability to wage so-called cyberwar was illustrated in actions against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008—a type of action that in the future could also include attacks on, for instance, social media networks (Thomas Rid, 'Think again: Cyberwar', *Foreign Policy*, Feb 27, 2012, online edition, available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/02/27cyberwar?page=full>; 'Russia's internet 'blacklist' law sparks free-speech fears'. Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty. Nov 1, 2012, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/Russia-internet-blacklist-free-speech/24758022.html>; 'Internet restriction law comes online', *Moscow Times*, Nov 1, 2012, online edition, available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/internet-restriction-law-comes-online/470892.html>).

90. These tendencies are part of what have been labelled "digital diaspora" where homeland relations can be virtually redefined and create or recreate links that had disappeared (Brinkerhoff, 2009).

91. Electronic capitalism is a term pointed at by Arjun Appadurai (1996:161) based on the term print capitalism developed by Benedict Anderson (1991) to describe how (new)

media had an impact on the production of nationalism and national identity in his famous book *Imagined Communities*. The period after 1990 in the North Caucasus was marked by a revival of both print and electronic capitalism.

92. The violent riots in the centre of Moscow in December 2010 illustrated how anti-Caucasian sentiments and violence erupted after a young ethnic Russian football fan was killed by a young Circassian. Several Caucasians were randomly beaten and the slogan “Russia for Russians” was used repeatedly. Circassians in the North Caucasus, including from the authorities, and the diaspora protested, while much of the coverage of the Russian mainstream media focussed on the young ethnic Russian as a victim of violence (‘Moscow’s race riots: Are Caucasians white?’, *The Examiner*, Jan 6, 2011).
93. Also Khazanov (2006: 45) has written on contemporary Russia as a nationalizing state in quest of identity (identity politics).
94. The widespread anti-Caucasian xenophobia and the tendency of the Russian media to constantly link the North Caucasus to issues such as Islamists, terror, and violence to many Circassians end up stressing the point made by Andreas Wimmer on ethno-national dominance as performed by various elite actors in Russia, and how this can function as a mobilizing factor among ethno-cultural minorities.
95. ‘Wikipedia has opened a Circassian language site (eastern dialect)’ (in Russian), *Elot.ru*, Mar 25, 2011, available at: http://www.elot.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2318&Itemid=1..
96. ‘In Kabardino-Balkaria, the public organization "Alan" conducted a public meeting Balkar’ (in Russian) and ‘Leaders of Karachai organisations in Karachai-Cherkessia prepare congress of repressed people in the North Caucasus’ (in Russian), *Caucasian Knot*, Jan 25, 2011.
97. A new programme encouraging ethnic Russians to move to the North Caucasus was presented in 2010 but has not yet materialized. This could mark a return of the demographic policies of the imperial and communist era.
98. Three Circassian organizations in the North Caucasus issued a statement in March 2011 protesting against what they called propaganda against nationalism as equal to chauvinism or xenophobia, while insisting on their rights to lobby for the rights and interests of the Circassians (‘What is Circassian nationalism?’, *Natpress.net*, Mar 17, 2011).
99. Israpil Sampiev, *Development Factors in the North Caucasus*. Tbilisi: GFSIS, 2008.

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