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CAUCASIAN NEWSPAPER IN THE LATE-19TH-CENTURY CAIRO: 'İTTİHAD GAZETESİ'

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

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**The term "Circassian", in line with its traditional usage in the Near and Middle East, has been used in this text principally in its broader sense implying all indigenous ethnic groups of the Northern and

the condition of public attitudes and ideological aspirations amid the diaspora at one or another stage.

During the first decades following the settlement of the North Caucasians in the sultan's domains, it were usually the representatives of the traditional feudal-patriarchal nobility who acted as the mouthpieces of their fellow-countrymen, quite often emphasizing their own narrow-class interests in their appeals to the Porte (Chochiev, 2007)*. Yet, the end of the 19th century witnessed more signs of activity of a new elite that was emerging in the diaspora, viz. the Circassian civil and military intelligentsia, deeply integrated into the respective strata of the Ottoman-Muslim society, but at the same time closely associated by informal ties with their native background. Thus, in the 1880s and 1890s the Circassian intellectuals attempted taking certain steps that were clearly of ethnic-cultural orientation. In particular, well-known are facts like publication by the distinguished Ottoman writer and public figure Ahmed Midhat Efendi** of a number of works concerning 'the life in the Caucasus' and performance of some of them in a metropolitan theatre; establishment on the initiative of Ahmed Midhat and eminent commanders Fuad Paşa***, Gazi Muhammed Paşa**** et al. of a special committee with the aim of writing an extensive work on Caucasian history; development by a career bureaucrat Ahmed Cavid Paşa****** together with a group of like-minded persons of an Adyghe alphabet based on Arabic characters, and its lithographic print in 1897 and so on (Aydemir, 1988: 183-184; Aydemir, 1991: 68-69, 88; Berzeg, 1995: 9-14). All these endeavors, undoubtedly, were indicative of gradual actualization amidst the diaspora's educated sections of a goal of elaborating some concept of national development or survival of their compatriots in the drastically changed conditions of their existence after the immigration.

Still, we cannot judge with a sufficient degree of certainty on actual ideological and organizational potential of the arising Circassian intelligentsia at the given stage, since the period of its formation coincided substantially with the epoch of ultimate toughening of the regime of absolutist dictatorship under Abdülhamid II (1876-1909), who never recognized basic personal and political liberties of his subjects and was extremely suspicious of any manifestations of national self-consciousness among the dependent peoples not excepting the Turks themselves. Suffice it to note that the authorities have suppressed all the above-listed efforts on the part of the Circassian enlightenment enthusiasts, exposing some of their initiators to police persecution (Aydemir, 1991: 68; Yıldız, 1977: 79).

Northwestern Caucasia, i.e. Adyghes, Ubykhs, Abkhazians, Abazins, Ossetes, Chechens, Daghestanis, etc.

* For details see: G. Chochiev, "19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Kuzey Kafkas Göçmenlerinin Toplumsal Uyarlanmasına Dair Bazı Görüşler (Göçmenlerin Otoriteye Başvuruları)", *Kebikeç*, 2007, no 23, Ankara.

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

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

**** Gazi Muhammed Paşa (1832-1903) – the middle son of renowned Imam Shamil, Avar.

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

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

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

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

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

** (Mizancı) Mehmed Murad Bey (1854-1917) – an ethnic Dargin (Dargwa) born in the village of Urakhi in Daghestan as Gadji-Murad Amirov (according to Russian registers).

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

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

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

****** In confirmation of this, one can refer to the fact that after the Young Turk revolution of 1908 a whole number of ethnic North Caucasians – former members of illegal groups of the Ottoman constitutionalists – actively joined the organized Circassian cultural and political movement. For example, Mehmed

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

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

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

In an address 'To the Esteemed Readers' signed by Mehmed Emin***, the necessity of establishing of such a society was grounded and events that preceded this were briefly stated. As followed from this narration, Mehmed Emin, who arrived as a child "in the

Murad in 1908 appeared among the constitutors of the 'Circassian Unity and Mutual Assistance Society'; Hüseyin Tosun during 1918-1919 headed the 'Society of Northern Caucasia'; Mehmed Reşid also closely collaborated with these and other diaspora organizations. The list can be significantly enlarged.

*The original name of the society in Ottoman Turkish looks like '*Cem'iyyet-i İttihadiyye-i Çerakise*'.

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

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

epoch of the Caucasian migration" to the Ottoman domains and settled with his relatives in the vicinity of İzmid, later on in the capacity of the Circassian irregulars detachment commander (during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878) and gendarmerie officer* traveled around European and Asian provinces of the empire, everywhere "witnessing disastrous state of the Circassian tribes, rather scattered anyhow and anywhere than settled". The hardships and privations of his compatriots conceived him to undertake some actions to help them, but the burden of official functions and the rigidity of the regime had been for a long time preventing him from carrying out these intentions. Still, it looks that his behavior or views arose certain suspicions of the authorities, as in 1892 or 1893 he was transferred to Tripolitania (Trablusgarb) vilayet, which during the rule of Abdülhamid II served as one of the principal exile places for disloyal military and civilian officials. It should be observed, however, that the governmental practice of sending oppositionists to that province and even appointing some of them to rather influential local positions resulted in the second half of the 1890s in a rapid numerical growth of the 'Society of Union and Progress' regional branch, the members of which were actually rather free in propagating their ideas. Also noteworthy is that among the well-known Young Turk officers transferred there during the period under discussion, were several conspicuous Circassians: e.g., the above-mentioned Mehmed Reşid Bey, who became the actual leader of the local organization of the constitutionalists, Hüseyin Tosun Bey, the key person in their underground activities, et al. (Hanioğlu, 1985: 292-294)**. Undoubtedly, in this milieu Mehmed Emin, who later on took up the position of the chief of the Tripoli prison***, obtained the opportunity of more active involvement in the Young Turk movement. As he stressed himself in the referred address, throughout seven years of his stay in Tripolitania "he had applied much efforts to initiate activities that would ensure well-being and rise of the Ottoman nation and ill-fated Circassians". One can suppose that such incidents, as secret publication of two anti-governmental papers by the imprisoned Young Turks, as well as series of their escapes from the jail that forced the central authorities in 1899 to start a special inquiry, might have taken

* These biographical details about Mehmed Emin Bey are confirmed and refined by the family chronicle information kindly provided to us by Ms. Dilek Burak, great granddaughter of Mehmed Emin Bey's brother. According to these data, Mehmed Emin (who had also a Caucasian name of Shumaf) was born in 1855 in the Northwestern Caucasus as a son of the hereditary feudal leader of the Barakay subdivision of Abazins – Burak Hakkı Bey of the Loh family (members of this family at times were recorded, especially in the Russian documents, also as 'Lah', 'Lahov' or 'Lihov'). Following the settlement on the Ottoman territory, Mehmed Emin despite the wishes of his father, who was intending to transmit him the title of the 'tribe' leader, went to Istanbul, where he entered and finished the Naval School (*Mekteb-i Bahriyye*). During the 1877-1878 war, being an officer of the Circassian auxiliary militia forces, Mehmed Emin got seriously wounded and was hence transferred to gendarmerie (source: Loh–Burak Ailesi).

** There is also evidence that Mehmed Emin maintained some kind of contact with Mehmed Murad Bey (source: Loh–Burak Ailesi).

*** According to some data, Mehmed Emin was appointed to this position on the initiative of the Trablusgarb garrison commander Albanian Müşir Receb Paşa (Loh–Burak Ailesi), who had certain relations with the constitutionalists from among his fellow-countrymen (Çelik, 2003: 59).

place not without his connivance (see: Hanioğlu, 1985: 293-294)*. In the same years, Mehmed Emin had apparently attempted to form a narrower, ethnically based (i.e. Circassian) grouping of national-liberal type, as well. However, as in 1899, having faced the increased threat of repression, Mehmed Emin among a number of prominent Tripolitanian oppositionists had to flee to the British-governed Egypt; this activity was to be continued in the new place. There Mehmed Emin Bey and his associates, of whom only Mehmed Fazıl is known to us, originally joined the Cairo branch of the 'Society of Union and Progress', appreciably strengthened by the inflow of new members. However, soon they left this union by reasons not quite clear and legally established in the same year an independent organization – the SCU – with the '*İttihad Gazetesi*' as its official publication (Hanioğlu, 1985: 333, 633). This is the overview of the prehistory of the emergence of both the society and the newspaper according to the report of one of their constitutors as well as available evidences from other sources.

Of the rest of the issue's materials, published without signature, of the greatest interest is an extensive and, in a sense, program article under an unpretentious title 'A Couple of Words'**, where an attempt has been made to assess the state of the North Caucasians after their defeat in the war with Russia and migration to the Ottoman territory. Judging by its content, the leaders of the SCU saw the fundamental reason of the military, political and demographical catastrophe that had befallen their compatriots in the 19th century, in their civilizational lag from the nearest neighbors. It was accentuated that the Circassians, who due to bad accessibility of the Caucasus Mountains and their own valor had been for many centuries successfully repelling attacks of more numerous enemies, in modern times failed to elude the fate of other societies, who proved to be at the periphery of the world progress, and were consequently subdued by a power standing at a much higher level of socio-political, economical and technical development, i.e. by Russia. In concordance with this conception, the contemporary era was characterized by keen and uncompromising rivalry among countries and peoples analogous to competition in the commercial sphere, the education – and material resources and knowledge about the world resultant from it – being the condition and fundamental principle of preservation of any nation. Accordingly, lack of all these factors was considered the major reason for the final collapse of the Caucasus mountaineers' resistance and, to a certain extent, for their choice in favor of migrating to the sultan's domains.

Yet, it were the Ottoman authorities primarily, who were blamed for the miseries and sorrows endured by Circassians in the course of the immigration and settlement. Claims, asserted to them, were brought to three items. The official circles were charged, firstly, with extremely inhuman treatment of the North Caucasians during their colonization throughout the empire, viz. with assignment of deliberately unsuitable and unhealthy lands, inadequate supply with means of subsistence, etc. The second, not less grave accusation referred to odious practice of selling Circassian children and women (including, purportedly, quite a number of members of free and even noble estates) into

* Mehmed Emin Bey was at this time spoken with praise by one of the leading Young Turk papers – '*Osmanlı*', published in Geneva (Hanioğlu, 1985: 334).

** 2 Kelimeteyn (İttihad Gazetesi, pp. 2-4).

servitude, the wide spread of which immediately after the immigration was attributed solely to encouragement of this trade by the government employees for mercenary purposes. For all that, it should be noted that remonstrance of the author(s) of the article was obviously directed to the facts of enslavement of freeborn people, as contradicting to the regulations of the Muslim law, but not to the very existence of the patriarchal institutions of slaveholding and slave trade in the Circassian society. At last, thirdly, it was stated that even after having ultimately settled the Circassians were still subjected to particularly severe exploitation (when paying taxes, performing state obligations, et al.) by the authorities, who took advantage of their ignorance of the local realities, Turkish language, etc. Grasping and merciless provincial functionaries were claimed in the article to be the main culprits of the immigrants' sufferings, however a considerable part of criticism was addressed also to the Sublime Porte and the sultan's milieu (not excepting the numerous Circassian court bureaucracy), although the padishah himself was not mentioned directly.

It is noteworthy that, like the majority of the Young Turk groups, the SCU members actively supported their claims against the authorities with allusions to the Islamic doctrine. For instance, peculiar indignation was expressed with the fact that the Ottoman administration had not duly appreciated the "religious zeal" of the Circassians, who allegedly had left Caucasus firstly because of their yearning to take refuge "under the canopy of the Holy Caliphate" (and for this sake even had "rejected the favor demonstrated by Russia after the conquest"!), thus transgressing the order of the Prophet Mohammed to render every possible assistance to coreligionist refugees and migrants.

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

At the same time, the intention to combine the ideological and political education of the North Caucasian diaspora with its ethno-cultural resurgence was clearly verbalized.

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

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

The rest of the paper's articles do not refer directly to the problems of the North Caucasians, although they allow for getting more complete notion of the worldview and political philosophy of the publishers. Thus, in line with the general Young Turk tradition, much attention was paid to substantiation of compatibility of the claims for liberal reforms and educating of the population with the regulations and norms of Islam. In the extensive article 'Islamic Unity', as well as in other materials, it was noted that in spite of the "widespread superficial view", Islam by no means impeded social and cultural progress, and high level of development of science and public institutions in the early-medieval Muslim states was adduced as confirmation of this***.

Stressing pre-eminence of the Muslim civilization over the Christian one in terms of morality and humanism, the paper, nonetheless, called for maximal adoption of the material and technical achievements of the West assessed as the result of persistent work and modern knowledge. Pan-Islamist tendencies, though obviously of anti-imperialistic

* *Abzah*s (or Abadzekhs) – one of the principle subdivisions ('tribes') of the Western Adyghe people; *Abaza* – a common designation in Turkish of two closely related peoples: the Abkhazians and the Abazins (the Abazas proper); *Ubuh*s (or Ubykhs) – a smaller people of the Northwest Caucasus, entirely evicted in 1863-1864 to the Ottoman Empire; *Kuşha* – a name of the Ossetes in Adyghe language, occasionally used also in Turkish.

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

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

fashion, were also characteristic for the society's views. Rallying of all Muslim countries and peoples was regarded as a condition of their successful counteraction to the Europeans' expansion, the independent Ottoman state and its capital Istanbul, the caliph's residence, being considered as the prospective uniting center of the entire Islam world. Yet, it was stipulated that such an idea, "groundless at present", might become a reality only in case of restoration of the constitutional parliamentary regime in the Ottoman Empire.

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

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

The ideological and practical-political principles of the SCU, described above, quite distinctly testify that its strategic purpose consisted in mobilization and organizational unification of the emerging diaspora intelligentsia, coming mainly from the commons, with the view of subsequent articulation and assertion of the specific interests of the Near

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

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

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

**** Cem'iyyet-i İttihadiyye-i Çerakisenin İ'lanı Lazımgelen "A'za-i Harice" Nizamnamesi (İttihad Gazetesi, p. 6).

***** Absence of more radical methods of struggle in the functional armory of the SCU is in no way surprising; in the period under review practical activities of the Young Turk organizations, as a rule, did not exceed the limits of the movement of political protest against the existing regime, the main form of this struggle being print propaganda (Petrosyan, 1971: 215).

and Middle Eastern Circassians in a statewide, though initially oppositional, format. In doing so the society, most likely, was expecting to secure for itself a special ethnic niche within the Ottoman constitutional movement or even to act as a partner of the Young Turks in the struggle against the Abdülhamidian autocracy, in order to assure the most favorable conditions for ethno-national (in the first place social and cultural) activities of the Circassian elite after liberalization of the political regime. In this connection one cannot but notice the fact that the SCU has shaped immediately after a proposal was put forward in September 1899 by the Cairo branch of the 'Society of Union and Progress' to summon the uniting congress of all organizations and groups, resisting the absolutist rule; this can be indicative of the Circassian oppositionists' aspiration for being by all means represented as an independent and consolidated force at the projected forum, which, however, did not take place at that stage (Petrosyan, 1971: 198-199; Karal, 1995: 520).

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

*On October 19, 1899, that is in four days after the first issue of the '*İttihad Gazetesi*' appeared in Cairo, the competent Ottoman services were instructed to track and suppress attempts of its transporting through the state's boarders (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, no 2258/65, 13 Cemazi-el-ahir 1317 (reference kindly provided by Dr. Hilmi Bayraktar from Selçuk University)).

One may suppose with a high degree of confidence that soon after its establishment the SCU ceased to exist in practice. Lack of any real evidences of further publication of the '*İttihad Gazetesi*' is also indicative of this assumption*.

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

As for the known founders of the SCU – Mehmed Emin Bey and Mehmed Fazıl Bey, – we have no reliable information on their further fate. At least, they never appeared among more or less noticeable figures of the Ottoman political parties and groups or the Circassian civic associations neither before, nor after 1908**.

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

**According to a document available in the archives of the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, in December 1908 a certain "Noh (possibly Loh?) Zade Mehmed Bey Bin Burak, from Circassians," submitted an application to the Police Department of Istanbul, asking for the permission to publish a newspaper "on behalf of the oppressed of the Caucasus" (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Dahiliye Nezareti, İdare, no 124.1/61, 26 Zi-l-kade 1326), which, however, never saw the light. Considering a certain likeness of this name – in sense and form – to the name of one of the founders of SCU (recorded in full as "Loh Burak Bey Zade Mehmed Emin Bey"), we can concede with caution that in both cases one and the same person is concerned.

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Özet

ÇERKEZ BİRLİĞİ VE ONUN YAYIN ORGANI "İTTİHAD GAZETESİ" (KAHİRE)

Ekim 1899'da İngiliz işgali altındaki Mısır'da II. Abdülhamid'in mutlakiyetçi rejimine muhalif bir gurup aydın tarafından kurulan 'Cemiyet-i İttihadiye-i Çerakise', bir yandan Osmanlı meşrutiyetçi ve hürriyetçi (Jön Türk) hareketinin düşüncelerini Yakın va Orta Doğu'daki Kuzey Kafkas asıllı (Çerkes) diaspora ahalisi arasında yaymayı, diğer yandan da soydaşlarını etnik ve kültürel açılardan aydınlatmak yoluyla onların ulusal bilinçlerini pekiştirmeyi kendine amaç edinmiştir. Cemiyetin yayın organı olan '*İttihad Gazetesi*', dikkatini esas itibarıyla Babıali'nin Kuzey Kafkasyalı göçmenlere yönelik politikalarının

eleştirilmesi ve onların Osmanlı sınırları içerisinde 'milli' gelişmelerinin perspektiflerinin değerlendirilmesi üstüne yoğunlaştırmıştır. Gerek cemiyetin ve gerekse gazetenin faaliyet sürelerinin çok kısa olmasına karşın, her ikisi de diasporada oluşmuş ve Yakın ve Orta Doğu Çerkeslerinin özgül çıkarlarını Osmanlılık doktrini çerçevesinde dile getirmeye çalışan yeni etnik aydın kesiminin belirli bir olgunluk düzeyini belgelemişlerdir. Makalede ayrıca, 1899'da Kahire'de oluşturulan ve Orta Doğu'da Kuzey Kafkas diasporasının ilk yasal örgütü olan 'Cemiyet-i İttihadiye-i Çerakise'nin kuruluş koşulları, ideolojik görüşleri ve başlıca faaliyetleri incelenmekte, program hedeflerinin gerçekleştirilmesi sürecinde uğradığı başarısızlığın nedenleri ortaya çıkarılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Kuzey Kafkas diasporası, Jön Türk hareketi, Çerkes cemiyetleri.

Abstract

CAUCASIAN NEWSPAPER IN THE LATE-19TH-CENTURY CAIRO: 'İTTİHAD GAZETESİ'

The 'Society of the Circassian Unity' established in October 1899 in British-occupied Egypt by a group of antagonists of the Abdülhamid II's absolutist regime, set itself as an object, on the one hand, spreading the ideas of Ottoman constitutional-liberal (Young Turk) movement among the North Caucasian (Circassian) diaspora population of the Middle East, and, on the other hand, consolidating the national identity of its fellow-countrymen through their ethno-cultural enlightenment. The society's periodical – '*İttihad Gazetesi*' – focused its attention on criticism of the Porte's policies regarding the North Caucasian immigrants and on appraisal of perspectives of their 'national' advance in the Ottoman domains. Despite very short duration of the period of activities of both the society and the newspaper, they witnessed certain level of maturity of new ethnic intelligentsia formed in diaspora that was seeking to articulate the specific interests of Middle Eastern Circassians within the framework of the doctrine of Ottomanism. The article examines the conditions of formation, ideological attitudes and major activities of the first legal association of the North Caucasian diaspora in the Middle East – the 'Society of the Circassian Unity', established in Cairo in 1899. The reasons of its failure to implement its program objectives are analyzed.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, North Caucasian diaspora, Young Turk movement, Circassian organizations.