

## Syrian Circassians in the context of the Syrian refugees' issue: Nature of the problem on the basis of the international community in Turkey and Russia and suggested solutions

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**Syrian Circassians in the context of the Syrian refugees' issue: Nature of the problem on the basis of the international community in Turkey and Russia and suggested solutions.** In the second half of the 19th century, some of the Circassian refugees, expelled after the occupation of the Caucasus by tsarist Russia, were settled by the Ottoman Empire in the region of the Middle East. The problems of the integration of the Circassian minority within the borders of the national states created in the Middle East after the First World War newly emerged in the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011. In this war, Circassians did not support any of the groups. Because of the military actions, Syrian Circassians were forced to leave the country in order not to participate in the violence. The Syrian Circassians, estimated at 10,000 to 15,000 people, fled from Syria, mainly to Turkey and the Russian Federation, as well as in a smaller number to Lebanon, Jordan, the United States, Canada, the EU countries and other countries. The problem of the repatriation of Syrian Circassians to their homeland in the Caucasus, as well as the solution of socio-economic problems in those countries in which they are forced to seek asylum, are the responsibility of international institutions and organizations, especially the UN. These institutions should take the necessary initiatives as soon as possible. The migration of Circassians to the territory of Syria, as well as the process of adaptation of Circassians after migration, have been investigated from a historical point of view. The migration of Circassians outside Syria due to the civil war, which continues from March 2011, was discussed on the basis of Russian-Turkish and international institutions, and ways to solve the problems of Syrian Circassians were presented in the final part of the study.

**Keywords:** Circassian, migration, Syrian crisis

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## **1. Introduction**

In 2010, there was an unexpected political development all over the world, especially in the Arab world. Tariq al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street seller, who attempted to commit suicide, by self-arson, on December 17, 2010, involuntarily launched a process called "the Arab Spring" (Global Britannica 2017b). This process initiated a revolution and turned into a regional, socio-political movement. The action taken by the rebels created a domino effect and spread throughout the Arab world, including Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Iraq (Global Britannica 2017a).

One of the countries affected by the new status quo, created by the Arab Spring, was Syria. Protests that began in March 2011, after the arrest of 15 children aged 9 to 15 years in the city of Deraa in Syria, after the slogan they wrote on the school wall, became massive and turned into a nationwide uprising against Assad (BBC 2005). As a result of increased violence and a loss of hope that the Assad regime will change, the movement attempted to overthrow the regime by holding peaceful demonstrations. It is estimated that 400,000 people were killed as a result of the Assad regime, about 7 million people in the country were forced to seek a new place of residence, and almost 5 million people fled the country (Turkish Foreign Ministry 2017b).

Another important aspect of the civil war in Syria is the ethnic and sectarian division between groups. In the current situation of chaos, Syrian minorities feel insecure. One of the minority groups affected by the Syrian crisis is Syrian Circassians. This nation was subjected to forced expulsion from the Caucasus by tsarist Russia, and since the mid-1860s part of its people were sent to Syria, in accordance with the settlement policy of the Ottoman Empire.

Circassians are the old autochthonous people in the Caucasus and names of these people are mentioned in ancient Greek mythology. They never existed in an institutional sense, but since ancient times they have maintained their existence in the patriarchal society that they created. The Caucasian peoples, who originally lived by pagan beliefs, came under the influence of Christianity in the 6th century and were influenced by Islam in the 7th century. In the 15th century, the Caucasus was under the sphere of influence of the Osmanians through the Crimean Khanate, which was under the Ottoman rule of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror. After that, the Caucasus became the goal of Russian expansionism of the Russian Tsar Ivan IV, who destroyed the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates. Thus, the independent peoples of the Caucasus were forced to leave the Caucasus, which turned into a chessboard for the great powers that wanted to dominate the area, after losing the struggle against ruthless Russian imperialism in the last battle in the Koba valley in 1864 after a 400-year war.

Circassians, who were expelled from their homeland by tsarist Russia, in economic and social collapse found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. According to various estimates, 1-1.5 million Circassians were distributed throughout the empire in accordance with the settlement policy of the Ottoman Empire. The struggle of these people for the survival, which for hundreds of years have fought with tsarist Russia, overcoming the social trauma after the numerous deaths and consequences of geographical displacements, continues today. Syrian Circassians at the first stage of history, in the 17th century, were first settled on the Balkan lands belonging to the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the Ottoman-Russian war of 1877-1878 the Ottoman Empire, under the pressure of Russia and other European states, settled them in the Bilad-i-Sam<sup>2</sup> provinces in accordance with the Berlin Treaty. After the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, under the pressure of Israel, Circassians were forced to leave the region of the Golan Heights, where they lived in large numbers, and had to flee to countries such as the United States, Jordan, as well as to other major cities of Syria. Because of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Circassians for the fourth time in history were forcibly relocated to other countries, including the Republic of Turkey.

According to various estimates, 50, 000-100, 000 Circassians, mainly in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Gumus, lived in war conditions. Circassians who settled in the Syrian territories since the beginning of migration from the Caucasus in the mid-1800s and until the 1920s have become an important part of today's Syrian society. Because of the danger caused by the conflict in Syria, many Syrian Circassians were forced to flee. For this reason, during the migration process, they requested asylum mainly in Turkey and the Russian Federation, as well as in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, the USA, and the EU countries (Orsam 2012).

The study was prepared by centering Syrian Circassians in the migration crisis that arose because of the Syrian civil war. The analysis was prepared by using the method of literature review. The migration of the Circassians to the territory of Syria, as well as the process of adaptation of Circassians after migration, have been investigated from a historical point of view. The migration of Circassians outside Syria due to the civil war, which continues from March 2011, was discussed on the basis of Russian-Turkish and international institutions, and ways to solve the problems of Syrian Circassians were presented in the final part of the study.

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<sup>2</sup> The name of the province of Damascus in Arabic, which existed before the First World War. Today Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are the parts of the Bilad-i-Sam.

## **2. Historical overview: Caucasus and Circassians**

Circassians are autochthonous peoples of the Caucasus. Although they could not create a state mechanism in the institutional sense in history, they have existed since ancient times. In the 16th century, after the Russian Tsar Ivan IV destroyed the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates, the Caucasus became the goal for tsarist Russia. Because of its geopolitical position, the Caucasus was an area in which, throughout history, many different states wanted to dominate. Since the 16th century, dozens of wars have been waged between the Ottoman Empire and Russian tsarism to establish domination in the Caucasus and in the Balkan. These wars led to the domination of the Ottoman Empire in the period up until the 18th century. After the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, which won the Ottoman-Russian War of 1768-1774, strengthened its positions and became more powerful on the Caucasus territory (Beydilli 2008a: 146). Russia fought with other nations to establish dominance in the Caucasus, as well as with the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus.

For four centuries, there was a series of wars between free peoples of the Caucasus and the Russian tsarist troops. The course of these wars developed in parallel with the strengthening of the authority of the Russian Tsar. In the 1850s, Russia was a great power with the largest land army in Europe, and after the conquest of the Caucasus, it was Russia's goal to go to India (Beydilli 2008b: 253-265).

The struggle against the Russians was carried out by local tribes. The autochthonous peoples of the Caucasus used partisan tactics to defend their homeland, in spite of the great power with which they faced. Since the 18th century, the struggle in the eastern part of the Caucasus, which was called the "Sectarian Organization," continued along with the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam (Uludağ 2008: 51). Imam Mansour (1760-1794), Imam Ghazi Mohammed (1828-1832), Imam Khamzat Beck (1832-34), and Imam Shamil (1834-1859) were the religious and military leaders of the regions in which they ruled.

In the west of the Caucasus, there was a struggle which was partially carried out by secular structures. The Western Caucasus named "Adyghe Khase"<sup>3</sup> and organized around the national assembly, defended its homeland in solidarity with the Caucasus in the East.

In 1859, after Russia seized Imam Shamil, the last sheikh of the "Sectarian Organization," and the East Caucasus was completely occupied by Russians. By May 20, 1864, four different tsarist armies were already in the Kbaa Valley in the Western

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<sup>3</sup> The Historical National Assembly of Adyghea: the Assembly consisted of all West Caucasian Tribes. During the Caucasian wars against Russia, the Assembly played a major role in the management of the Circassian tribes.

Caucasus, and on May 21, 1864, after the destruction of the last Circassians who resisted them, Russia ended the "Caucasian wars" and officially occupied the entire Caucasus.

During the entire period of the Caucasian wars, on the throne of the Russian Empire, five different kings were replaced. At the same time, the Russian tsars defeated Napoleon in Europe, invaded Poland and the Crimean Khanate, and in the north, were fighting against the Baltic states. Iran and the Ottoman Empire managed to win in many wars in that period of time. The great warrior of Dagestan, Shamil, was captured. But the Russian tsar, who had spent 1/6 of the empire's income and had used hundreds of thousands of people, could not take control of the Caucasus during this entire period.

Russia's policy aimed at gaining control of the Caucasus region through the struggle and destruction of the inhabitants of the Caucasus have been considering as a great crime against humanity. In these wars, called the Caucasian-Russian war, the Caucasus, which fought against Russian occupation without any help and support from other world states, was at the same time the object of political interests of the Iranian, Ottoman, British and French states.

### **3. The exile of Circassians after the occupation of the Caucasus by Russians and the eviction of Circassians to the Ottoman Empire**

After the Russian invasion of the Caucasus, people living in the region were expelled from the Caucasus. All the exiles were accepted by the Ottoman Empire and settled in its territory. In the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire owned a vast territory stretching to the Balkans, Anatolia and Asia, and settlements were implemented within this big geography.

The first wave of migration from the Caucasus began in 1859 after the suppression of the resistance of the adherents of Muridism, with the movement led by Sheikh Shamil and directed against the Russians. And migration reached its peak after 1862. Although migration from the Caucasus is often referred to as "Circassian migration," in fact it also includes a wide range of different ethnic and linguistic communities (Karpat, 2013: 331).

The Ottomans had many reasons for accepting migrants. The Sultan was the leader of all of the Muslims in the world, and in the Islamic faith the acceptance of the Muhajirs was seen as a necessity. Those who refused to emigrate were killed by Russians. Indisputable is the fact that the Ottoman Empire intended to increase the number of Muslims, by resettling migrants from the Caucasus among Christians. Circassians, who fought for many years against the Russians in the Caucasus, were excellent soldiers and willingly accepted into the ranks of the Ottoman army. It is also a fact that the lands on which Circassian migrants were settled were subsequently processed by them (Karpat 2001: 84; Akbulat 2017: 45-47).

Statistics of mortality of Circassians, which is based on the data available in the archives of tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire, has a significant discrepancy. Russian officials claim that this number ranges from 500,000 to 1 million people. According to the data received in Turkey, this figure is from 1 to 2 million people, and 1 million Caucasians lost their lives during the war and migration (Akbulat 2017: 52-57).

Circassians were settled in five main regions, mainly in Western Thrace, Western Anatolia, Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, and the eastern provinces (Karpac 2013: 171). Settlements were organized in accordance to the plan: in areas where Christians lived, military lines were established, as well as settlements arranged in the border regions of Russia, in the vicinity of the port cities, and major transport routes. The settlements were organized along a line extending from the Ottoman land of Rumelia<sup>4</sup> to the southern provinces. Most of Circassian refugees (more than 300,000 people) settled in the European territories of the Ottoman Empire. At present, Circassian refugees live in the territories where countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Greece, and Kosovo are located.

The main causes of conflicts with local residents in the regions populated by Circassians were territorial disputes. The fact that the lands allocated to migrants by the Sultan, already had been occupied by the local population, put Circassians at a disadvantage (Akbulat 2013: 59).

Circassians, resettled in the Balkans, which were under the control of the Ottoman Empire, formerly for many years fought in the Caucasus with the Russian Orthodox Christians and as a result of this struggle were expelled from their homeland. From the moment of substantiation in the Balkans, Circassians had great disagreements with the Bulgarian neighbors, supported by Russians.

In the period from April to May 1876, because of the provocations of the Bulgarians on the part of Russians, supported by the ideals of pan-Slavism, a great Bulgarian uprising against the Ottomans began. During the suppression of the uprising by the Ottoman Empire, Circassians acted on the side of the Ottoman military units, but the European public sharply reacted to the events that had occurred. Shortly after the suppression of the Bulgarian uprising by the Ottoman troops, Russia unleashed a war with the Ottoman Empire, and the war ended in the defeat of the Ottomans. At the Berlin conference, which took place after the Ottoman War of 1877-1878, under the pressure of European states, an agreement was concluded according to which the eviction of all Circassians from the Balkans began (Akbulat 2017: 73-75).

In March 1878, most of Circassians who were evicted from the Balkans, in the number of about 180,000 Muslim immigrants, were sent to Istanbul for settlement, and 50,000 migrants were sent from Istanbul for subsequent resettlement. Until April 16,

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<sup>4</sup> Rumelia: A geographical region, during the Ottoman Empire period included present-day Balkans.

1878, the number of refugees who were sent to Bilad al-Sham from the Rumeli land was more than 25 thousand people, including Circassians (Berzeg 2006: 245,246).

In numerical terms, the number of Circassian refugees who arrived at the various ports of Bilad al-Sham during the period from February to September 1878 is as follows:

**Table 1.** Number of Circassian immigrants who arrived in the various ports of Bilad al-Sham in the period from February to September 1878

February 28, 1878	Beirut	1,000	Sent to Damascus
February 28, 1878	Akka	1,500	Sent to Nablus
February 28, 1878	Trablusşam (Tripoli-Lebanon)	2,000	
March 3, 1878	Latakia	2,500	
March 4, 1878	Hama / Homs	10,000	
March 8, 1878	Latakia	2,500	
March 31, 1878	Tripoli	5,000	Some were referred to Antakya
July 11, 1878	Haifa	482	The survivors of the burned Sfinsk ship
July 17, 1878	Akka	1,200	
August 31, 1878	Beirut	1,200	Sent to Hama and Homs
Total		26,182	

Source: Berzeg (2006: 245-246).

It is difficult to determine the exact number of Circassians who were evacuated from the Balkans in 1878-1880 and settled in Syria. The Ottoman authorities were not able to conduct a population census. Most of the migrants died during the settlement and after the resettlement. According to the Russian consulate, more than 45,000 Circassian migrants were settled in Syria during this period. The total number of Circassians in Syria, together with those who arrived before 1878, increased to 70,000 people (Orsam 2012).

Circassians, who were under the control of the Ottoman Empire, were badly affected by the chaotic atmosphere in the region. From the very beginning of settlement there were many disputes with the residents of the regions, including territorial claims. Circassians were settled on the personal lands of the Ottoman Sultan, that for many years belonged to the Arab and Druze tribes. This fact put Circassians in the position of occupants in the eyes of the current residents. Another serious problem for Circassians was the independent uprisings that began against the Ottoman Empire in the region. Circassians, who were under the protection of the Sultan, took an active part in suppressing these uprisings together with the Ottoman troops (Akbulat 2017: 80-81).

#### **4. New status of Syrian Circassians after the Sykes-Picot Treaty**

According to the Sykes-Picot Treaty (May 1916), which divided the Ottoman lands in the Middle East between France and England, the Ottoman territories of the Middle East were divided into Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and after this agreement, Syria was transferred to French possession (Global Britannica 2017c).

Circassians, who served in the Ottoman troops, during the First World War ensured the safety of roads and bases in Syria. The Arab uprising, initiated by Sherif Hussein in 1916 with the support of Britain, put Circassians in a political impasse. Since Circassians were considered real soldiers of the Ottoman Empire, in this situation they became the object of hostile sentiments of nationalist Arabs (Orsam 2012).

#### **5. Nation-states established in post-Ottoman Middle East and position of Circassians in Post-Ottoman Syria**

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, the former Ottoman lands were divided into national states under the occupation of the Western powers. The following states were created: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Iraq. The French military forces officially invaded Syria on July 25, 1920 (Global Britannica 2017d).

Circassians fought against the Western powers and local Arab rebels as soldiers of the Ottoman army until the end of the First World War. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the war, Circassians supported the Arab governments, which were ruled by England and France. Despite the fact that they had equal living conditions as other inhabitants of the country, Syrian Circassians did not support the uprising in Syria against the French mandate, which began in 1926. Circassians, especially those who lived in the Golan region, maintained good relations with the French mandate government, although they continued to clash with the Druze (Chatty 2015: 225).

#### **6. Position of Circassians in the French Mandate period**

The French mandate administration, established in post-Ottoman Syria, was supported by some Circassians. Many Circassians, who had served the Ottoman government in the past, joined the French Army. In 1920, eight of the Circassian cavalry regiments in the number of 100 to 150 men were created as part of the French troops. Despite the fact that the Circassian regiments were officially under the control of the French officer Philip Zolle, but really the Circassian troops were commanded by Kabardin Osman Abey. These regiments actively participated in many operations in Syria and Lebanon as units of cavalry, as part of the French army (Кушхабиев 2013: 137-149).

In 1927, 1929 and 1933, Amin Samgug have been appealing to the League of Nations to recognize the Syrian Circassians as a minority group for the creation of an autonomous Circassian region in the Quenitre<sup>5</sup> region, but the demands were rejected. In 1938, the repeated requests of Circassians living in the regions of Hama and Homs were again rejected by the League of Nations, but this time, some parts of the requirements related to education and culture issues were approved (Кушхабиев 2013: 137-149).

In the second half of the 1930s, the activities of Circassians, who were supporters of the Arab liberation movement, became more active. The reason for this was discontent with French politics in the region. One of the reasons for the dissatisfaction of Circassians was that the French authorities did not help in establishing Circassian autonomy in Syria (Кушхабиев 2013: 137-149).

During the Second World War, Circassian officers and most of the soldiers acted together with the anti-fascist troops of the coalition. In June 1941, Circassian troops participated in the attacks on allied anti-fascist troops in Damascus. In fact, during the French rule Circassian society in Syria maintained a high social status. Most of the Circassians supported the French authorities. The bulk of the Circassian population in Syria consisted of soldiers and landowners (Кушхабиев 2013: 137-149).

After the First World War, the leadership of the French mandate created 8 Circassian, 6 Druids, and 3 Kurdish units under the name of Special Forces in Syria. These created special military units also included other ethnic minorities in Syria. Especially disciplined and highly mobile Circassian troops, the most elite troops of Special Forces, often had to perform tough operations (Хотко 2017).

Under the French mandate, Circassians were serving as law enforcement officers in internal security units. During this period Circassian intellectuals, led by Emin Semug, took steps to preserve the Circassian culture. About 40 schools were opened in the Quenitre area. In 1928, the weekly newspaper "Mark" was published in French and Circassian, as well as in Arabic, but the text was written in Latin letters.

The termination of the French mandate in 1936 had bad consequences for the Circassians. Nationalist Arab politicians closed schools, newspapers, aid associations, and demonstrated an anti-Cherkess position accusing Circassians of cooperation with the French invaders. During this period, soldiers serving in French troops and cultural figures were forced to leave Syria (Orsam 2012).

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<sup>5</sup> Quenitre is the city of the Syrian center of Kuneitira. The city is located on the Golan Heights.

## **7. Communities of Circassians in the Post-Ottoman period in the Arab States and obstacles in returning to their historical homeland**

The first attempt of mass organization of the Circassian diaspora was conducted by the Circassians of Syria after the creation of the French government in 1920. In 1922, a delegation representing the Circassians of Syria visited Moscow. Syrian Circassians asked the Soviet leadership to allow them to return to their homeland. Requirements were rejected, but in the same period the Soviet leadership granted 3,000 Armenians from Syria the right to repatriate to the Caucasus (Кушхабиев 2013: 71).

Representatives of the Circassian diaspora, who lived in Turkey and the Arab countries in the period before the Second World War, experienced difficulties not only in returning to their homeland, but even in visiting their historic homeland in the Caucasus. During the Soviet period, the regime of entry and exit was subject to strict supervision. At that time in the North Caucasus and throughout the country Circassian diaspora was recognized as traitors that left their homeland during the Civil War in Russia (1918-1922). In the 20th century, for ideological reasons, contacts of Soviet citizens with foreign North Caucasian immigrants were banned (Кушхабиев 2007: 174-176).

Returning home, to the Caucasus, was one of the most important tasks for the Circassian diaspora until the 1980s. The growing policy of nationalism and assimilation in the countries where the Circassians lived, fueled the idea of repatriation. The rights of Circassians to return to their homeland after the 1990s began to be actively defended by the national movements of the North Caucasian republics. The Circassian public organizations of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia ("АдыгэХасэ" Adige Khasa and others) announced the issue of repatriation of the Circassian diaspora to their historical homeland as one of the most important problems for the Circassians, and they did their best to find ways to return (Кушхабиев 2013: 77).

## **8. Syrian Circassians in the phases of the independent state of Syria (from 1946 to 1970)**

After the declaration of independence in 1946, until 1970, Syria was experiencing a period of instability, which was called a period of impasse. In 1963, the Arab Socialist Baath Party took over the leadership of the country as a result of the coup d'état. Between 1966 and 1970, there were numerous intra-party conflicts. In 1970, Minister of Defense Hafez Assad, as a result of the coup, declared himself prime minister, and after the referendum of 1971, in which he offered himself the only candidate, became president of the country. Hafez Assad alone ruled the country until June 10, 2000 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017b).

Circassians, who had a relatively good relationship with the French mandate, in the period of Syria's independence became the goal of the Arab nationalist movement. During the Arab nationalist regime of Baath, Circassians faced the risk of losing their national culture and language, along with other minorities in the country (Orsam 2012).

In November 1947, when Palestine was divided into two states, conflicts began between the Syrian and Israeli troops. Circassians joined the war in Palestine, having formed voluntary units. During the Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949, Circassians fought on the side of the Arabs, that contributed to the improvement of relations between Arabs and Circassians. After the war of 1948-1949, the Circassian troops, which had high military potential and discipline, played an active role in military coups in Syria (Orsam 2012).

The Arab-Israeli war, which began in June 1967, radically changed the social, economic and political situation of the Syrian Circassian community. Israel occupied the Golan Heights, which belonged to Syria and where most of the Circassians lived. At that time, Quneitra was the cultural center of the Syrian Circassians. Circassians showed great resistance when the Syrian army suffered huge losses in the fight against the Israeli troops. However, on June 9, 1967, Israeli troops invaded Quneitra and completely burned the city and Circassian villages. Circassians were forced to leave the Golan.

During this period, the population of Circassians in Syria was reduced to 38,000 people. At that time, a group of Circassians in the number of 3,000 turned to the Soviet embassy with a request for repatriation to the North Caucasus, but the Soviet Union rejected this request. The situation with Circassians, who were expelled from the Golan, drew the attention of the US authorities. Circassians were given the opportunity to settle in Paterson City, New Jersey, but on condition that they renounce the territory of the Golan. At the first stage, a group of 1,000 people moved to the United States, and this migration continues today. During this period, other refugees migrated to some Arab countries, mainly to Jordan, as well as to Western Europe (Orsam 2012). In 1967, during the occupation of the Golan region, Israel expelled about 25,000 Circassians. The overwhelming majority of them settled in Damascus (Chatty 2015:220).

In the late 1990s, the number of Circassians in Syria was about 100,000, more than half of them residing in Damascus and the suburbs. Circassians also lived in other cities of Syria, such as Aleppo, Homs, and Hama. Circassians in Syria generally consisted of three main sub-ethnic groups; Abzehler, Bjedugs and Kabardians. The share of other Caucasian ethnic groups is smaller. Syria is home to a small number of Dagestanians, Chechens, Abkhazians, Ossetians, and Balkars (Кушхабиев 2013: 53).

By 2011, the armed forces of the country no longer had Circassian generals. Circassians could not occupy any public offices in the administration. The members of Nusayriyya sect were unofficially assigned to all the leading posts of the Syrian armed forces. Some of the Circassians who were excluded from the Syrian political life choose a

field other than military service, and administration. But most of them preferred to immigrate to countries such as America, Canada, Western Europe, the United Arab Emirates (Кушхабиев 2013: 53).

## **9. Arab Spring and Syrian crisis**

The popular uprisings, called the Arab spring, which began in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011, later spread to Syria. Anti-government demonstrations, first launched in Daray in Syria, since March 16, 2011, began to spread throughout the country. Syrian security agencies and paramilitary forces used methods of strength, which led to the spread of violence throughout the country. Attempts to resolve regional and international disputes were rejected by the Syrian regime. Opposition groups were positioned as "terrorists whose goals were the destruction of peace and stability in the country," and all the demands of the opposition were suppressed by violence. The people who took part in the demonstrations against the regime were fired, and the settlements in which the opposition groups lived were bombed using army forces. More than 1,400 people were killed, and more than 5,000 people were injured as a result of an attack by Syrian security forces that repeatedly used chemical weapons. It is estimated that more than 400,000 people died, more than 7 million people left their homes in the country, and about 5 million people were forced to seek asylum in other countries (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017b).

## **10. Syrian Civil War and Syrian Circassian diaspora**

The Syrian civil war changed the situation of all religious and ethnic groups in the country. Syrian Circassians also suffered greatly from the negative consequences of the war. Despite the fact that the chairman of the Syrian Circassian Solidarity Association (CCS) said that all Circassian diasporas in the country support the regime of Bashar Assad, Circassians of Syria remained neutral since the beginning of the civil war and did not participate in the violence (Akbulat 2017: 118).

The policy of neutrality of the Circassians, both among the regime forces and in the opposition, aroused discontent. Some groups from the ranks of the free Syrian army threatened that, when they took a place in the government, Circassians would not be able to survive on Syrian territory. Soldiers of the Syrian free army demanded that Circassians join their ranks, threatening that after the opposition came to power, they would undoubtedly destroy them. On the houses of the Circassians began to appear inscriptions with the order to leave Syria. In connection with the ongoing threats, Circassians began to create self-defense units. The situation turned into a battle, under which Circassians were forced to live, and as a result of which many died (Akbulat 2017: 118).

Learning about the intentions of the Syrian Circassians to return to their homeland, the regime's forces and opposition parties in Syria began to harass the Circassians. Supporters of the regime claimed that the Circassians are citizens of Syria and therefore must fight for the protection of the legitimate authorities. If they leave the country, they can be declared traitors. The opposition claimed that the Syrian Circassians would be able to return to their homeland only if they paid their debts to the country, by fighting the enemies (Akbulat 2017: 118).

At present, Circassians of Syria live in such regions as Damascus, Aleppo and Homs, which are seriously affected by the current problems in Syria. Political uncertainty in the country has deprived people of the opportunity to sell their stuff (Eurasia Review 2012). Circassians have faced with such difficulties as the inability to subsequently return their material values left in the country, after they found refuge in another country. The year 2016 was a great tragedy for the Syrian Circassians. In this year, five Circassian villages turned into ruins, 150 Circassians lost their lives (Onkavkaz 2016a).

Thousands of Circassians found themselves in the position of asylum seekers both inside the country and abroad. In December 2016, with the consent of Moscow and Ankara, a ceasefire was declared in Syria. Due to this, the regime's forces and opposition groups in Syria at the meeting, in which Russian diplomats also took part, announced a ceasefire, but despite the ceasefire, 2016 was the year of the most violent conflicts in Syria. For this reason, this year the number of Circassians who wanted to leave the country rose to a very high level (Onkavkaz 2016a).

The number of Syrian Circassians remaining in Syria is not exactly known. However, it is estimated that most of the Circassians are still in Syria, and they mostly live in areas controlled by Damascus and government forces. The overwhelming majority of the Circassians who left the country are in Turkey and Jordan. The number of Syrian Circassians in these countries reaches 10,000 people. This can be explained by the geographic proximity of Turkey and Jordan to Syria (Onkavkaz 2016a).

## **11. Syrian Circassians in the context of Russian-Syrian relations**

Syrian-Russian relations continue from the times of the Soviet Union. Soon after gaining independence by Syria and the beginning of the Baath Party's rule, after the Second World War, especially because of the nature of the relationship between Israel and the United States, the Baath government developed a policy close to the Soviets in the bipolar political conjuncture.

In the post-Soviet period, Russia maintained close military-political relations with Syria. Russia is an important figure involved in this process from the first moments of the Syrian crisis. As for the situation of the Circassians in Syria and their desire to return to the Caucasus, this issue should be viewed from a historical point of view. It must be

taken into account that Syria and the position of the Circassians as a minority of Syria are closely related to Russia.

Circassians of Syria were among the first who called on the Russian government to intervene in the Syrian question in July 2011. Under the current conditions, the political and economic life of the Syrian Circassians became increasingly unstable. On December 25, 2011, 115 Syrian Circassians appealed to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Three days later, another 57 Syrian Circassians appealed to Russian federal and regional leaders with a special desire to settle in the regions of the North Caucasus, Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygeya and Karachaevo-Cherkessia, which historically belonged to Circassians. In March 2012, the conflict in Syria gradually increased. Before the conflict in Syria took a serious turn, the Circassian civil society organizations in Russia and Europe united and made great efforts to get support from the Russian federal government for the repatriation of the Syrian Circassians to their homeland in the Caucasus (Eurasia Review 2012). However, not all initiatives were taken into account by the Russian authorities.

The return of Syrian Circassians to their homeland is hampered by the quota system that exists in Russia with respect to foreign citizens. Russia annually receives a certain number of foreign citizens, and most of the quotas are used by immigrants from China, Vietnam, and other countries.

Based on the policy that the Russian Federation officially holds in Syria, it is obvious that it does not support the return of the Circassians to the Caucasus. Moscow adheres to the "silence" policy on this issue, and the appeals of the Syrian Circassians arriving in the Circassian republics in the north-western Caucasus are not officially processed (Orsam 2012). Although the "Law of the Country," adopted in the Russian parliament in 1999, presented a legal opportunity that would allow hundreds of thousands of Circassians to return to their homeland, the return of Circassians to Russia was prevented by the Russian authorities. This process is controlled by setting an annual quota limit for those who declare their desire to remain resident and obtain citizenship in Russia (Hürriyet Daily News 2013).

The return of the Syrian Circassians to their homeland occurred in parallel with the existing Russian policy of resettlement of groups with historical ties on the territory of Russia, especially in areas where the population was not enough. Many times Russia invited Russian citizens living abroad to their country to increase the population after the numerous losses incurred after the First and Second World Wars. But this policy was applied to ethnic Russians. After the return to the Caucasus of non-violent and semi-assimilated moderate Muslims, the Russian government might have the opportunity to create a strong political base in the North Caucasus. The return of Circassians as a measure to ensure stability in the region can lead to significant policy changes and contribute to the achievement of a consensus between Moscow and the North Caucasus

(Eurasia Review 2012). However, the Russian authorities perceive the return of Syrian Circassians to their homeland as a threat.

For Russia, the return of the Circassian community in Syria to the Caucasus implies some ambiguity:

- A) First, the Kremlin approved the provision on the preservation of territorial integrity in Syria. In this regard, the movement of the Syrian ethnic minority group in Russia creates some inconsistency.
- B) Second, these are ethnic and demographic issues. Russia is concerned about the fact that many Circassians, having returned to the Caucasus, will change the demographic data in this region, by increasing the Muslim population.
- C) Third, the decision to hold the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, which was to take place at the site of the historic Circassian settlement, was met with great protest, especially among the Circassian diaspora. It caused serious concern on the part of Russian authorities and the public in Russia.
- D) Fourth, an important moment in the process of repatriation of the Circassians to their homeland is that there is a risk that the political interests of such states as Turkey, the United States, as well as the European Union may be affected.

If the existing regime in Syria collapses, Russia may face a serious problem with Circassians. Taking into account the problems in the Caucasus today, Russia is unlikely to want to add another problem by accepting the Syrian Circassians to the Caucasus. But we should not forget that if the Circassians do not manage to return to their homeland, the Russian antagonism in the North Caucasus will be further increased.

Many activists, as well as the association Adige Khase (Circassian public organization) in 2013, appealed to the Duma (Russian parliament). The statement states that the Russian government should help Circassians living outside the Russian Federation on the basis of humanitarian principles and the federal law on citizens abroad. Duma sent "Adyga-Khasa"'s application to the Department of interethnic relations of the Ministry of Regional Development. Director of Department Alexander Zhuravsky answered and explained the official viewpoint of the Russian government: "Syrian Circassians are descendants of the Adygeyan peoples of the North and West Caucasus who did not accept Russian citizenship and made a voluntary choice - to leave the region after the end of the Caucasian War (1817-1864). Thus, the ancestors of modern Syrian Circassians lived in a territory that was not part of the Russian state before their migration in 1864 to the Ottoman Empire. In accordance with paragraph 3 of article 1 of the Federal Law, they can not be considered as immigrants from the Russian state"(07 KBR 2013).

Despite the fact that a small number of Circassian refugees migrated to Russia from Syria, Moscow is very reluctant to comment on this. The crisis in Syria for Circassian

refugees reached an even greater extent during the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in early 2014. Especially when the Circassians living abroad began to protest against the Sochi Olympics, the Russian authorities adopted a more strict policy regarding applications for asylum to Syrian Circassians (Nbc News 2014). To avoid the risk of growing protests of Circassian activists in the days of the Olympic Games, the Russian authorities complicated the procedure for obtaining visas. The Russian government suppressed small protests that took place on the opening day of the Olympic Games.

Instead of openly banning Circassian refugees from Syria to return to their homeland, the Russian authorities have been applying the practice of visas and quotas. Asylum seekers have not received official assistance from the Russian government.

In 2014, the activities of Circassian organizations, such as the Perit Association, which helped a significant number of refugees, was stopped (Dzutsati 2015a). Only small-scale Circassian groups that are able to help a small number of refugees could continue their work.

Considering the growing interest in the repatriation of the approximately five million Circassians who now live in the Middle East, even a small part of the Syrian Circassians, numbering tens of thousands, after returning to the Caucasus, can change the ethnic balance in the North Caucasus and possibly weaken Russian control there.

For example, the share of ethnic Russians in Karachay-Cherkessia declined from 42 percent in 1989 to 32 percent in 2010. During the same period, the share of ethnic Karachais increased from 31 percent to 41 percent. The number of Circassians in the republic increased from 10 to 12 percent. Given this information, it is unlikely that the Russian political elite will allow the Syrian Circassians to return to the Caucasus (Dzutsati 2015b).

Returning to the region of the Syrian Circassians, the homeland of which is the Caucasus, will change the balance of the population in favor of Muslims. Given that Russia has been in conflict with the separatist peoples of the Caucasus for many years in the region as part of the fight against terrorism, Russia's support for the return of Circassians to the Caucasus can be described as non-political.

Another important factor of the inadmissibility of Circassians by Russia is the support of the Syrian regime. Russia supports the Syrian regime, militarily and politically, from the earliest days of the Syrian civil war, and in such a situation one can not expect support for migration from a country directed against the Syrian regime.

In 2016, officials of Kabardino-Balkaria announced that 1,451 Syrian Circassians were returned to their homeland. In total, 3,000 Syrian Circassians from Syria have been seeking asylum in Russia. By the end of 2016, about 150 Syrian Circassians were killed in the Syrian civil war, and the Syrian Circassian population was between 50 and 100 thousand people. As a result of the war, the Circassian villagers were completely destroyed.

By the end of 2016, about 1,000 of the approximately 3,000 people, who moved to Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygea, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Abkhazia, subsequently left Russia (Onkavkaz 2016b). It is estimated that some of the Syrian Circassians who left the Caucasus preferred to go further to Turkey and Europe, hoping for a better life.

Further migration to Europe had many reasons. Firstly, the Russian authorities did not render any support to the Circassians from Syria, in obtaining legal status, housing, employment, and they did not facilitate the visa regime. The financial situation of the Syrian Circassians was extremely bad. Even the help of Circassian activists and public organizations was not able to improve this situation in the republics of the North Caucasus. Secondly, some European countries and Canada encouraged the entry of Circassians into these countries. Some organizations identified large Circassian families and sent them invitations. They promised them free housing, employment, legal status, social support. Such letters were received by almost all Syrian Circassians who lived in Adygea. In this direction, representatives of Sweden and Canada were particularly active, and many Syrian Circassians accepted such invitations. Even in these conditions in 2013-2014, the Syrian Circassians were not strongly oriented toward Europe. But in Russia, after the economic crisis that took place in 2015, there was an increase in migration. Despite all the difficulties in Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia, migrants learned Russian and received a residence permit. During this period, many marriages between the Circassians of Syria and the local residents have been registered. This helped to ensure faster integration into the local community (Onkavkaz 2016b).

Among Russian political elites, there are beliefs that Western Europe, the United States, and Canada are deliberately calling for Syrian Circassians (Кавполит 2015). Circassians are potential political subjects of the Russian policy of the Caucasus. Some skeptics in Russia have often been saying that the Circassians are inclined to move to other countries so that later on these countries have the opportunity through the Circassians to interfere in Russian domestic policy. This assumption is confirmed by the strict measures taken by Russia regarding the procedure for the return of the Circassians to the Caucasus and the situation of the Circassians in Syria.

## **12. Turkey-Syrian relations, refugee problems, Circassian diaspora in Turkey and Syrian Circassians: ethnic solidarity**

Relations between Syria and Turkey, which after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire was transformed into two separate states, have always been strained for various reasons. In 1939, the Turkish Republic annexed the Syrian city of Hatay to its territory. This was the first reason for the destruction of relations between Syria and Turkey (Sahillioğlu 2008: 232). In the period after the Second World War, Turkey was in a

bipolar world political bloc along with the United States, while Syria was in a bloc along with Russia, for this reason, the relations remained tense.

It was expected that after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, relations between Turkey and Syria would improve, but they worsened even more. This happened after Turkey completed the construction of the Ataturk dam in the basins of the Euphrates and The Tigris and lowered the Euphrates stream to fill the dam of Ataturk. In addition, Turkey began construction of the Birechik dam on the Euphrates in 1996. The construction of these dams created a water shortage in Syria and became the main cause of conflicts between Turkey and Syria. In the context of the conflict atmosphere caused by the water dispute, Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad started to support the Armenian terrorist organization - the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), and after, the terrorist organizations Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). This led to the fact that both countries reached the point of military conflict. In 1996, Turkey sent a memorandum to Syria to stop the support of the PKK from the Syrian government. In response, Syria, taking into account the seriousness of the situation and realizing that it is not able to fight with Turkey, signed the "Adana Treaty" in the city of Adana in Turkey on October 20, 1998. Under this agreement, Syria agreed to close the PKK camps and stop logistical support. After the signing of the treaty in Adana, efforts were made to build confidence in relations between the two countries, up to the year 2000.

After the death of Hafiz al-Assad in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad became president of Syria, and relations between Turkey and Syria received a new impulse after Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power in 2002. From that moment even ministers of the two countries moved to the level of joint meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers (The Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2017). In 2011, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu personally visited Bashar Assad in Damascus. The purpose of this visit was to convince the Syrian government to give some concessions to opposition groups and give them some democratic rights. But the Assad's administration did not grant the privileges that the Turkish government expected, and the relations were suspended.

An important question in Syrian-Turkish relations is the Kurdish issue. Turkey's attitude to the existence of the Kurdish state, which the Kurds are trying to establish in the north of Syria, in the context of the entire Kurdish problem that has existed since the 1980s, shows that the relations between Turkey and Syria are not confined to refugee problems alone.

As for Turkey, more than 3 million Syrians who live in the country are a heavy burden for the economy. At the same time, in the domestic policy of the country, especially from the opposition parties, from the first days of the crisis was conducted propaganda, in order to send back the Syrian refugees to their countries. Despite all

these difficulties, the Turkish government continues its positive policy towards Syrian migrants.

Turkey, which is the country with the world's largest Circassian population (2.5 to 5 million people according to various estimates), has an open door policy for Syrian asylum-seekers. As of 2017, 6,000-6,500 Syrian Circassians live in different cities of Turkey. Official authorities of the Turkish Republic officially recognized them as "citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic under temporary protection," and they are supported by representatives of the Caucasian diaspora in Turkey (Akbulat 2017: 202).

The Circassian diaspora in Turkey and non-governmental organizations conducted a series of studies, maintaining contact with the Syrian Circassians from the first days of the Syrian crisis. The work done shows an example of ethnic solidarity in an institutional and individual sense. For those people who were expelled from their homeland in the second half of the 19th century, and then settled in different geographic regions, the crisis in Syria became an opportunity to provide reunification. Assistance received through public organizations was delivered to Syrian Circassians. Syrian Circassians, who found themselves in Turkish territory and turned to Circassian non-governmental organizations of Turkey, were helped to obtain official documents for living in Turkey, were assisted in enrolling children in school, as well as gained support on many other issues. The Circassian diaspora in Turkey provided homes to Syrian Circassians in provincial centers and Circassian villages to meet their housing needs (Akbulat-Sayın 2017).

The Turkish authorities consider all Syrian refugees in the country equally as "citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic within the framework of temporary protection" (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior 2017) and there are no exceptions for Syrian Circassians. Circassian and Caucasian-Circassian public organizations in the Republic of Turkey do all the necessary work for Syrian Circassians. For these people who seek asylum in the country, it is important that assistance is an urgent measure, but this will not solve all their problems definitively.

Syrian Circassians who seek asylum in Turkey still have a number of vital problems, primarily unemployment and housing shortage. At present, it is difficult for the Turkish government to solve all the problems of Syrian refugees, whose number is more than 3 million people.

### **13. Role of the international communities in the migration crisis caused by the Syrian Civil War**

As a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967, Circassians who left the Golan Heights emigrated to the United States. At that time, Syrian citizens had the right to enter the United States freely. Circassians of Syria, who had relatives in the United States, tended

to move there. But in 2015, the US government almost completely closed the entrance to the country (Кавполит 2015). Some of the Syrian Circassians were taken by Canada. But in 2015, the Canadian government closed the border for new refugees as well (TRT Haber 2016).

Most of the Circassian community in Syria also migrated to Europe. In general, they were adopted by Sweden, Norway, and Germany (Кавполит 2015). But in 2015, Europe tried to stop the flow of people, mainly from Syrian citizens, as well as from other crisis regions of the Middle East and Africa, seeking to penetrate European territory through the Aegean Sea and Turkey. By 2015, 350,000 people have reached the European continent by sea. However, on the way, trying to get to the shore by boat, about 2,600 people died (TRT World 2015).

Since the first stage of the Syrian crisis, international public organizations have not been able to take the necessary measures. Institutions that are primarily responsible for resolving the crisis, such as the UN, the League of Arab States, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, have not taken the necessary steps. The EU countries could not make a joint decision and could not cope with the wave of migration from Syria and other Middle Eastern countries; they only tried to mitigate the consequences of the crisis by accepting only a limited number of migrants. The most affected by migration flows are the European Union countries, and especially Turkey. Treaty between the European Union and Turkey, regulating the issue of immigrants, created a new crisis in the relations between Turkey and the EU (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017a). Without taking into account parts of the treaty affecting immigrant problems, a number of issues relating to Turkey's attitude to counter-terrorism methods, human rights violations, and a number of other issues turned into sanctions by the EU. Thus, the treaty was not adopted and was not put into effect by the Turkish authorities.

As a result of the fact that no agreement was reached between the EU and Turkey, thousands of refugees died drowning in the Aegean Sea, hoping to get to Europe. According to some estimates, Syrian Circassians in the number of 1,000 to 2,000 people entered Europe via illegal routes.

## **14. Conclusion**

Syrian Circassians since 2011 have been forced to migrate both within the country and abroad as a result of the ongoing civil war. For this reason, it is difficult to accurately determine the regions of residence and the population of the Syrian Circassians. The number of Circassian population living in Syria, estimated at 100,000 people, is not based on official data.

Russia is an actor who participates in the first degree in the Syrian crisis, and the Circassians, who were expelled from the Caucasus in the second half of the 19th century,

once again faced Russia in the Syrian issue. The Syrian Circassians, from the first days of the crisis, wanted to return to their historical homeland in the Caucasus. But the federal government of the Russian Federation did not allow changing the balance of the population in the Caucasus in favor of Muslims, implementing a policy that prevented the return of Circassians to the Caucasus.

Caucasus is the most problematic territory of Russia in the ethnic sense and even a small percentage of Syrian Circassians, whose number is about 100,000 people, in case of return to the Caucasus, can change the balance of the Russian population. Given the political situation, Russia's security policy can not allow such a change in the population in the Caucasus.

The Syrian Civil War once again showed that the Circassians of Syria have a desire to return to the Caucasus. It should not be forgotten that the return of Circassians to their homeland is their historical right, and its denial is a violation of human rights.

The measures that must be taken to overcome obstacles to the return of Circassians to their homeland can be summarized as follows:

- A) The quota imposed by the Federal Russian authorities on the Syrian Circassians who want to return to the Caucasus should be abolished.
- B) The civil rights of Circassians returning to the Caucasus should be restored.
- C) In Russia, the work of non-governmental organizations that carry out activities to assist Syrian Circassians must be renewed.
- D) International organizations should provide social and economic assistance to accelerate the process of adapting to the new life of Syrian Circassians returning to the Caucasus.

In the framework of these statements, international organizations should make the necessary warnings to the Russian authorities, and for greater effectiveness, pressure tools should be used.

If the necessary legal measures are taken, most likely, the process of returning the Circassians living in Syria and other countries of the world to their homeland will accelerate. International institutions and organizations that failed to cope with the situation at all stages of the Syrian crisis should take steps to facilitate the return of the Syrian Circassians to their homeland.

According to the representatives of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey, from 6,000 to 6,500 Syrian Circassians live within the Turkish Republic. The official authorities of the Republic of Turkey support the Syrian Circassians who are in the country, not separating them from other citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic and in this situation, Syrian Circassians do not have any special support and assistance. Almost all the work to assist the Syrian Circassians is organized by the Circassians, who are citizens of the Turkish Republic. It is very important that for Syrian Circassians who seek asylum in the

country, assistance is an urgent measure, but this is not the final solution to the problem in the future. Circassians of Syria are struggling with unemployment and other problems, especially with the problem of lack of housing.

Turkey, which adopted more than three million Syrian refugees, is trying to solve the crisis in the migration issue that arose as a result of the civil war in Syria, at the international level. Turkey is one of the participants in the Syrian crisis. The attitude towards the formation of a possible Kurdish state in the north of Syria, in the context of the entire Kurdish issue, the attitude towards the Syrian regime and the fact that the migration wave is going to Turkey due to the Syrian civil war, all this shows the difficulties Turkey is experiencing. But Turkey is not a strong actor who can solve the migration crisis caused by instability in Syria and the region. The problem can be solved only with the participation of the international community.

The agreement between the European Union and Turkey, discussed after the Syrian crisis and aimed at preventing the flow of immigration to Europe, was not implemented in practice. Despite the fact that the EU countries have an agreement on the problem of refugees with Turkey, the Turkish authorities have rejected additional obligations related to other areas, such as combating terrorism, human rights violations, and the treaty has not been enforced. The resolution of the migration crisis was largely influenced by the negative atmosphere of the recent relations between Turkey and the EU. It should not be forgotten that the countries most affected by the migration crisis from Syria and other African and Middle Eastern countries are mainly Turkey and the countries of the European Union. To solve the problem in the relations between Turkey and the EU, it is necessary to come to a general agreement as soon as possible.

The European Union did not take the initiative during the Arab spring and could not cope with the problem during the migration crisis. The League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation had no function from the very beginning of the process. Apparently, the problem between the parties can not be solved, but nevertheless, interference in the migration crisis as an urgent measure will be a big step forward. But the fact that no steps are taken to solve the problem further complicates the process.

Today, according to various estimates number from 10, 000 to 15, 000 Syrian Circassians fled the conflict and left Syria and remained without homeland as in the second half of the 19th century. At present, they do not return to Syria, because if they return, they will be recognized as traitors who left the regime and the opposition forces. Return to their homeland in the Caucasus is constrained by federal Russian authorities. For these reasons, they are forced to migrate to different countries of the world, mainly to Turkey. But they have to deal with many important problems, such as housing shortage and unemployment. The problems that the Syrian Circassians must solve are the responsibility of international institutions and organizations, especially the UN.

To the list of problems of the Syrian Circassians and their proposals for solving these problems the following points can be added:

- A) The homeland of the Circassians is the Caucasus, and the anti-democratic practices of the Federal Russian government, which prevents them from returning to their homeland, must end.
- B) The civil rights of Circassians, after repatriation to their homeland, must be returned, and they should be given the opportunity to continue their life as equal citizens.
- C) Syrian Circassians, who seek asylum in other countries of the world, should live in accordance with the norms of human rights and dignity. In coordination with the governments of the countries in which they live, it is necessary to take the necessary decisions, especially regarding issues related to the lack of housing and unemployment.
- D) Circassians who want to return to Syria should be granted the right to return to the country without threats.

The cause of the migration crisis is the Syrian civil war. With the decision to stop the civil war in Syria, the international community was late. But in the future, without losing more time, it is necessary to resolve the issue and ensure the stability of Syria.

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