

## **The First International Circassian Conference**

*21 – 22 September 2018, Nurmberg, Germany*

*Topic of presentation*

### **How to preserve Circassian nation in the 21st century and resist assimilation**

*Speaker*

Rashid Zafesov, Republic of Adygea

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for inviting me to participate in such an important event and for giving me the opportunity to make a presentation on the theme of preserving the Circassian nation and resisting assimilation.

The issue of survival and preservation of the nation is the concern not only of Circassians, but all the small nations. Many scientific articles have been written on this topic by Circassian intellectuals. Nevertheless, the question remains relevant, it worries us very much, because we assimilate with other nations and disappear as a nation. The iceberg of Circassian Diaspora slowly melts in the ocean of surrounding nations. Today, no one seriously talks about the mass return of Circassians to the Caucasus, as at the end of the last century. We talk more about the preservation of the Circassian nation, about how to find a balance between self-perception as a citizen of the countries in which we live and self-identification as Circassian. Ideally, these two internal self-perceptions should enrich each other and create a symbiosis of two cultures, languages and traditions. Whether we like it or not, symbiosis occurs and we can be identified as Turkish Circassians, Arabic Circassians, Russian Circassians and so on. Unfortunately, in this symbiosis, Turkish, Russian, Arabic becomes more than Circassian.

In the 21st century, in the context of globalization and internetization of the world, to preserve the Circassian nation, it is necessary to meet the requirements of the modern world and use all available opportunities. Today, the Internet has connected all of us, both adults and children. We live, work and communicate in the virtual space in a fantastically high-speed mode. The information instantly reaches the recipients. Business, cultural and other Circassian Internet groups are being created in the messengers and on the websites. These are very effective tools of communication. It is necessary to create children's games and Internet schools in the Circassian language, as well as to expand the Circassian information space. Especially we need 24-hour TV channel in Circassian language, which undoubtedly will help to preserve and to learn the Circassian language. As you

know, representatives of the Turkish Circassian Diaspora are negotiating with the Turkish government about the opening of the Circassian TV channel along with Turkish, Kurdish and Arab TV channels. We hope that mutual understanding will be reached and the Circassian TV channel will be created. If not, modern technologies now allow create a private Circassian TV channel broadcasting to the countries where Circassians live. It is a matter of money, professionals and technology.

One of the important issues, without which it will be difficult for us to survive in the 21st century, is the question of the restoration of our original Circassian surnames. As we know, Circassians in Turkey in 1934 were forced to change their Circassian surnames intentionally to assimilate and make them Turks. But times have changed and now there are no such prohibitions. Our children and grandchildren should not only know their original Circassian surnames, but these original Circassian surnames must be written in their passports. They should be proud of them, carry them like a Circassian flag and pass them on to their next generations. The original Circassian surnames, as well as Adygaghe and Adyge Habze, are powerful roots that hold the tree of the ancient Circassian nation. If these roots will perish and disappear, the tree of our nation will collapse. Think about it! In my opinion, a special program for the restoration of the original Circassian surnames should be prepared as part of a National Strategy for Circassian language, culture and traditions.

It is no accident that this conference is held under the motto “what connect us”. We are connected by one story, one tragedy, one love for our nation and culture, and many other things. This is very important because there should be special staples that unite the people into one single organism, do not allow it to be divided into pro-western, pro-eastern, divided on other grounds. Jews have their own religion - Judaism, which kept them from disappearing. What do Circassians have? We have only our Adyge Habze. Adyge Habze is the soul of the Circassian nation, it is a special Circassian mentality, a special program of behavior and thinking, a set of emotional and cultural characteristics, value orientations and attitudes inherent only to the Circassian nation. Adygaghe is the core of Adyge Habze which in a relatively unchanged form has existed for centuries. It is easy to be born Circassian, but it is very difficult to be Circassian. Being grown up in Adyge Habze, even without knowing the Circassian language, you will still remain Circassian. Circassian language can be learned, if Circassian will have the strong desire and motivation. But how to live in the modern world in the old traditional framework of Adyge Habze? Very difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to pay special attention to Adyge Habze, which must be recreated and adapted to the

modern realities of life, published in printed and Internet form and translated into the main languages spoken by Circassians. Adyge Habze should become an instrument of the biological survival strategy aimed at ensuring the separation of the Circassian genotype from the genotypes of other nations. We can survive in the modern world only if Adygaghe becomes a national ideology. The best Circassian scientists from all over the world should be involved in the process of preparations of Adyge Habze. I believe that a special program for the study and popularization of Adyge Habze should be prepared as part of a National Strategy for Circassian language, culture and traditions.

If there is something that connects us, then there is something that separates us. The most terrible enemy of our nation at this historical stage is assimilation. Assimilation is a complicated and controversial process. Assimilation can go somewhere faster or slower, somewhere forcibly or voluntarily. But always the final stage of assimilation is the loss of national roots and the loss of national memory. A nation that has lost its past and betrays its present has no future. Despite the actions of Circassian organizations, assimilation is active in every country and in every family where Circassians live. We consider it normal to talk to each other and our children in Turkish, Russian, Arabic, English and other languages. We marry people of other nations and change our Circassian genotype. We feed the beast called "assimilation" with our culture, our traditions, our blood, our national future. It is very difficult for Circassian families to resist assimilation on their own because we and our children are immersed in another (not Circassian) environment all day long.

What are the reasons of assimilation? The main reason, in my opinion, is the quantitative ratio of two or more nations located in one state. As a rule, the titular host nation has a quantitative superiority and is considered to be an assimilating environment for small nations. Circassians in any country of the Diaspora are always in the minority and, of course, are under the Damocles sword of assimilation. The second reason is mixed marriages. Children born in mixed families or in families that do not speak the Circassian language and do not live in the Circassian traditions will not receive Circassian education. This generation will be born with the exit visa from the Circassian nation.

How to resist assimilation? I believe that the best resistance to growing assimilation is Circassian education. Historical education plays a key role in the awakening of national consciousness, Circassian patriotism and social activity of the individual, allows to preserve the millennial national roots, allows to strengthen historical memory and pass it from generation to generation. Historical memory

evokes a sense of pride for the heroic past of our people and creates a huge responsibility for its future, for the fate of the Circassian Diaspora. Much has already been done and is being done by Circassian Khases and Circassian associations. There are several universities, dozens of schools in Adyge Republics that teach the Circassian language. The faculty of Circassian language successfully works in Duzce in Turkey. But this, as you understand, is not enough. We need hundreds of such faculties, schools and kindergartens. This requires huge financial resources. Yes, of course Circassian public organizations are doing very much. But public activity itself is not able to solve the whole complex of problems. We need systemic solutions and a set of programs within the framework of the National Strategy for Circassian language, culture and traditions.

The dream of returning a sufficiently large quantity of Circassians to Adygea, when the quantity turns into quality, did not come true, and remained a dream. There were times when Circassian Diaspora had the opportunity to return to the motherland. The first time after the revolution in Russia in 1917 when Lenin allowed Circassians to return and 80% of Circassians were ready for it. The Head of Turkey ordered to resolve this issue with the Ministry of information of Turkey Hussen Tosun and Rauf Bey (both Circassians), who decided that the Circassians do not want to return. The second time a favorable period for the mass return of Circassians was when Russia in the early 90-ies of the last century opened the doors for Circassians and issued passports to all who wish to return in a light mode. Real estate was very cheap, citizenship was given for several months. We opened at that time the Fund called "Sheehaf", in order to facilitate the return of Circassians to Adyge Republics. But, unfortunately, the Diaspora at that time was not ready for this. There were practically no Adige willing to return, as there are none now. A unique chance was missed by Circassians, the gate to the motherland was quickly closed. But the world is changing and sometimes very rapidly and suddenly. There may be new opportunities and we need to be organized and financially ready.

So what is most needed for this readiness? For me, the answer is obvious: we vitally need an International Circassian Financial Fund to accumulate money and finance programs of preservation and development of the Circassian language, culture and traditions. In order to clearly understand what to do and in what direction to move, it is necessary to develop a National Strategy for Circassian language, culture and traditions.

When we are discussing the preservation of the Circassian language, culture and traditions, thinking how to resist assimilation, we must understand that this is

basically a question of a very large amount of money. No matter how much we talk about these topics on different platforms of communication, the result will not be achieved until the strategic programs for the preservation of language, culture and traditions will not have financial support.

I hope today we will not only discuss the problems related to the survival of our nation, will say "Inshallah" - "Mashallah" and go home, but we will draw certain conclusions and will make concrete decisions. For my part, I propose to elect an initiative group from the participants of this conference, which will be able to formulate conceptual proposals and launch the process of creating a National financial Fund and a National strategy, with the approval and support of all Circassian organizations.

In conclusion, I would like express the hope that the 21st century will be the "Golden Age" of the Circassian nation, the century of the revival of Circassian culture and traditions at a new civilizational level.

Thank you for your attention!