

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ABKHAZ DIASPORA ON THE TURKISH POLICY FORMATION ON ABKHAZIA

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Abstract

This thesis observes and examines the influence of the Abkhaz diaspora on Turkey's policy formation process towards Abkhazia and reveals that the Abkhaz diaspora does exercise influence and put pressure on Ankara. At the same time, this influence is far from a linear one, thought out the period of the diaspora-Government interaction, there were various levels of influence exercised. The division of the examined period into three sub-periods allowed to crystalize and examine those various levels of the diaspora influence and engagement in the decision-making process.

The findings of the research show that in the current state of international politics, the influence of almost any diaspora in achieving political goals is limited to the host state interests in pursuing those politics. This can be seen in Ankara's slow adjustment of the Abkhaz diaspora interests to the state's policy, in order not to harm the position and interests of the last. However, such a policy, does not undermine the overall importance of the Abkhaz diaspora, as the diaspora continues to be a vital element for the Turkey's policy implementation and legitimation in Abkhazia against any possible objection that might follow from Georgia or any other actors.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgment	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Diaspora Politics	8
1.1 Abkhaz Diaspora in a Historical Perspective	8
1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework	9
1.3 Concept Definitions	11
1.4 Main Theoretical Concepts	14
1.5 Case Study Selection	17
Chapter 2. Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey	21
2.1 The First Period: Diaspora Demands Political Decisions	21
2.2 The Second Period: The New Turkish Leadership and the Old	32
Diaspora Methods	32
2.3 The Third Period: The New Realities	36
Chapter 3. The Interests of the Diaspora or Turkey?	41
3.1 Turkey: Regional Power?	41
3.2 Abkhaz Diaspora and Ankara's Regional Ambitions	44
Conclusion	47
Bibliography	51

Introduction

The movement of people is a very old phenomenon, some moved willingly and voluntary, while others were forced to leave their homeland and settle in a foreign land. On many occasions, entire nations would be relocated and forced to settle somewhere else. This past history created a situation where today there is a very significant number of diasporas spread all over the globe. Every diaspora community is very unique and different from one another, and this diversity flamed a debate in the academic circles on the definition of the term of diaspora. However, one aspect that brings all the scholars together is the growing influence and involvement of what Benedict Anderson's calls "long-distance nationalists"¹ in the developments taking place in the erstwhile homeland.

The dissolution of former federalist states in Europe and the growth of nationalism that to a number of bloody civil and ethnic wars. These conflicts and wars reinforced the diaspora identity's and their sense of solidarity with their original homelands. Easy and cheap means of information spread as well as transportation links boosted the involvement of diasporas in the conflicts in the homeland. Each diaspora group reacted in its own unique way, while some got actively engaged in political lobbying, others provided economic and military supports to the leadership in the respective homeland. These "new" types of wars and conflicts have been described as a process of "deterritorialization". The process of "deterritorialization" studies the role,

¹ B. Anderson. "Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics". *The Wertheim Lecture*. Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies. 1992.

influence and involvement of diaspora groups in the conflicts and wars in their original homelands.²

As noted above all the diasporas are very much different from one another: some are big and influential, such as the Jewish and Armenian, while others are small and relatively new – Albanian and Chechen for example, at the same time all of them have been targeted as case studies in multiple researches and publications.³ However, very little attention has been addressed to the issue of the Abkhaz diaspora. In case there is a publication on Abkhazia, it is usually about the still unresolved conflict with Georgia that will very soon reach its twenty-fifth anniversary. The mentioned conflict is not the only possible area for research on Abkhazia. Today, there are more Abkhaz living outside of the territory of Abkhazia, most of them are spread in the Middle Eastern countries, Western Europe and the USA.⁴ The present day population of Abkhazia is just above 250 thousand people⁵, while Turkey houses the largest Abkhaz diaspora, with the number varying from 500 thousand up to a million.⁶ Moreover, the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey, even though very well-integrated into the Turkish society, still managed to preserve the culture and the language.⁷ The majority of the diaspora still speaks the Abkhaz language

² J. Demmers. “Nationalism from without”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus. Transnationalism and diaspora*, ed. Atabaki, T., Mehendale, S. 2005. p.11.

³ See. M. Koinova. “Four Types of Diaspora Mobilization: Albanian Diaspora Activism for Kosovo Independence in the US and the UK”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-21, 2012.; “Why do conflict-generated diasporas pursue sovereignty-based claims through state-based or transnational channels? Armenian, Albanian and Palestinian diasporas in the UK compared”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2014.; J.J. Mearsheimer, S.M. Walt. “The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, V.8, No.3. 2006.

⁴ V.A. Chirikba. “Abkhaz”, *Languages of the World/Materials* 119. Muenchen: Lincom Europa, 2003.

⁵ The Republic of Abkhazia. *Abkhaz world website*. Retrieved: 15.05.2015. Link: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/abkhazia>

⁶ E. Ozgur. “The North Caucasus and Abkhazian Diasporas; Their Lobbying Activities in Turkey”. Malmö University, November 2008. p.80.; Gültekin-Punsmann, B. Abkhazia For The Integration Of The Black Sea”, *TEPAV*, Decemeber 2009. p.11.

⁷ Interview with Dr. Ozden Oktav. *Yildiz Technical University*, Istanbul, Turkey. April 2015.

and lives in the rural communities and cities between Istanbul and Adapazari (Sakarya province).

However, what is even one million of people in a population of almost eighty million in Turkey today?⁸ Indeed, this is a rather insignificant number, however, the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey is very well connected and is considered to be a part of a greater North Caucasus or Circassian (Cerkess) Diaspora⁹ that shared the similar faith of resettlement from their ancient homeland in the Caucasus. The Circassian Diaspora is considered to be one of the largest ethnic groups living within Turkey, with the numbers as high as five million people.¹⁰ Celikpala describes the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey as one of the most effective and active North Caucasus diasporas in the world.¹¹ This diaspora has always been very influential and well-connected to the Turkish government, and has been even collectively referred as a “Circassian lobby” in Turkey.¹² The Abkhaz diaspora, with the support of the Circassian Diaspora, managed to form a rather influential and vocal group affecting Turkey’s policy formation process.¹³ These two groups have been actively lobbying and pushing for the official recognition of Abkhaz independence, which Ankara has not done yet. At the same time, Turkey, being a very close-trade partner with Tbilisi, member of NATO and an EU candidate state, it has never

⁸ The Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2014. *Turkish Statistical Institute*. Retrieved 15.02.2015. Link: <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/jsp/hata/body/hata.jsp;jsessionid=pnWhJqQh8TMmkfHSkjbMIJhJ6hr51Q3qVylZT7tylRbGZq825pYr!-1997881513#>

⁹ See. G. Hewitt. “Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians”, *Central Asian Survey*, July 2010. “A common synonym for Circassians is Cherkess – in Turkey the term “Cherkess” has the wider sense of “North Caucasus”.

¹⁰ Gafarli, O. “The Role of North Caucasus Diaspora Groups in Turkey-Russia Relations”. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. 2014. p. 176.

¹¹ M. Celikpala. “Influence of the North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*. 17 July 2006. p.426.

¹² L. Kemal. “Turkey’s strong Circassian lobby to limit Ankara’s policies on Georgia war”. *Today’s Zaman*, August 12, 2008. Retrieved 15.05.2014. Link: http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/lale-kemal/turkeys-strong-circassian-lobby-to-limit-ankaras-policies-on-georgia-war_149977.html

¹³ O. Gafarli. p. 178.

favored economic and political blockade of Abkhazia after the end of the Georgian-Abkhaz War in 1993, and has kept a “blind eye” on the direct trade and investment of Turkish businessmen into Abkhaz economy. During the years of economic blockade, trade with Turkey was considered a “lifeline”¹⁴, as all the other links, including that one with Russia have been completely sealed. Even today, a number of Turkish politicians openly support Abkhazia on multiple political occasions, for example, in 2014 a group of Turkish Parliamentarians proposed to recognize Abkhaz passports as travel documents.¹⁵ This Ankara’s policy of keeping a “blind eye” on the issues related to Abkhazia can be even described as a “unique role or position”, considering the position of other international actors on this matter.

The hypothesis of this study is to examine if this so-called “unique position” of Turkey towards Abkhazia is anyhow linked with the Abkhaz diaspora. If that link exists, how vocal and influential is the diaspora in Turkey? Talking about the diaspora influence on the official state position, one has to keep in mind the position of the international community on the issue, as well as to calculate the possible benefits and losses of certain political steps. For that matter, it is important to keep in mind Turkey’s relations with its international partners in Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean. Ankara has also to consider the other active actor in the region of the Black Sea and the Caucasus – the Russian Federation. Currently Moscow is main strategic and political partner of Sukhum¹⁶, moreover Russia took an official political step by recognizing Abkhaz

¹⁴ Interview with a group of diaspora representatives. Istanbul. 22.04.2015.

¹⁵ “Turkish MP Offers To Recognise Abkhazian Passports” AbkhazWorld. Retrieved 15.02.2015. Link: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/current-affairs/1238-turkish-mp-offers-to-recognise-abkhazian-passports>

¹⁶ Only official Abkhaz names are used in this research, such as Sukhum, the Republic of Abkhazia.

independence in August 2008.¹⁷ Since the early 2000s Turkey and Russia have managed to overcome the deep political differences and difficulties, and adopted a new policy of “multidimensional cooperation”, based on the mutual acceptance and cohabitation of both powers in the Greater Black Sea region.¹⁸ Placing the diaspora influence in all of these aspects influencing Turkey’s decision-making process will be main goal of this study.

The findings show that the Abkhaz diaspora has and exercises its influence on Turkey’s policy-making process when it comes to the issue of Abkhazia. However, due to the fact that any foreign policy related decision or a step taken by a state cannot be done in a full isolation from other policies of that state, one has to understand that the influence of any group in a state is rather limited by its international commitment and position. Taking the case of the Abkhaz diaspora, even though it has not able to exercise the so-called “policy capture”¹⁹ of Ankara’s decision making, which would have been the official recognition of Abkhazia’s independence, it still has managed to influence and lobby certain policies favorable and beneficial for Abkhazia. Throughout time the Abkhaz diaspora exercised diverse and various levels of influence on Ankara’s policy formation process, which is shown in the selected time periods of this work. Another finding of this work is that the diaspora becomes more politically active once there was a military campaign launched against the homeland. The sense of treat unites and mobilizes the diaspora activities to be more coordinated and organized.

¹⁷ The official website of the President of the Russian Federation. Retrieved 28.02.2015. Link: http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/1543_type82912_205752.shtml

¹⁸ “Turkey’s Political Relations With Russian Federation”. The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey. Retrieved: 20.05.2015. Link: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-political-relations-with-russian-federation.en.mfa

¹⁹ J.J. Mearsheimer, S.M. Walt. “The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, V.8, N.3. 2006.

In order to fully examine all of these issues, the current work develops in the following order. The first chapter will focus on the following: Due to a rather scarce scholarly discussion of the Abkhaz diaspora, a brief historical introduction will be beneficial for the further development of this work. The also includes definitions of such concepts as diaspora and the “deterritorization”. In order to observe the role and the influence of the Abkhaz diaspora, it will be helpful to apply the examples of other case studies, such as the Jewish, Armenian, Albanian and Chechen cases. This will provide for conceptual framework that can be applied to the selected case study of the Abkhaz diaspora.

The second chapter will address the selected case study of the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey. In order to study and examine the influence of the Abkhaz diaspora, the author will observe the issue of the diaspora’s institutional structure and its position within the Turkish society, as well as its relations with other diasporas, mainly the Circassian one. The time period of the study is limited to the years and events following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and up to present day. However, this period is split into three sub-periods: the first one from 1992 to early 2000s; second form early 2000s to 2008, and the third from 2008 to present day. Such a structure gives a chance to observe the difference in the diaspora’s involvement and influence in the Ankara’s policy formation on the studied issue. First period covers the years of Georgian-Abkhaz war and the political and economic blockade that followed; the second one is linked with the change in leadership both in Turkey and Russia; and the final one is directly linked with the first international recognition of the Abkhaz independence.

The concluding chapter provides an overview of Turkish foreign relations; focuses on Turkey's bilateral relations with Russia and Georgia. Such an overview gives a chance to conclude that the diaspora does play a role, it might be rather limited, but it still remains a vital element of particular policy justification and legitimation.

This study is aimed at contributing to the existing literature on the role of diaspora in promoting and lobbying the interests of the original homeland in their host-nations, it can also have practical application and policy recommendations in the future.

Chapter 1. Diaspora Politics

1.1 Abkhaz Diaspora in a Historical Perspective

The territory of present Abkhazia and, in fact, the entire region of the Caucasus have always been in a very important strategic position, a bridge between Europe and Asia, a gateway to trade routes to Central Asia, China and India. This region has also been a frontline between the influences of major powers starting from the ancient times. In the middle of the 16th century this area fell under the control of the Ottoman Empire for a period of three hundred years. In the early 19th century Russia was eager to secure control of the southern sea corridor and challenged the position of the Ottoman Empire in the region. After a series of wars, the Russian Empire gained control of the territory, presently known under the name of the North and South Caucasus.

Three centuries under the Ottoman rule had significantly affected the local population of the Caucasus, most of them, especially the elite, had been converted into Islam. The territory of the present Abkhazia was not an exception. And in 1810 Abkhazia became a part of the Russian Empire, which led to dramatic shifts in the demographic map of Abkhazia. As a result of the “*Muhajirun*”²⁰ resettlement” policy applied to all the Muslims, more than a half of the Abkhaz population at that time was resettled to the Ottoman Empire. The continuing opposition and constant clashes between Moscow and Istanbul in the period of the 19th century and the creation of the Soviet Union ceased the very few existing contacts, virtually cutting off any possible connections between the diaspora and the original homeland.²¹

²⁰ *Muhajirun* (Ar. *The emigrants*) refers to the forceful resettlement of Muslim population to the Ottoman Empire.

²¹ G. Hewitt. “Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians”, *Central Asian Survey*, July 2010. pp.466; 473-474.

All the North Caucasus peoples sharing a similar faith of forced migration to what used to be the Ottoman Empire managed to organize themselves into associations already by 1908, the first one was called Circassian Association of Solidarity and Union. Later on, organizations with similar structures were formed: The Caucasian Committee, The Committee of the North Caucasian Immigrants to Turkey and the North Caucasus Association.²² All of these institutions included the Abkhaz diaspora as well, as a part of the larger North Caucasian or Cerkess Diaspora. The representatives of the North Caucasus Diasporas very quickly and actively adopted and joined the Ottoman elite and played a major role in the establishment of the First Republic in Turkey.²³ Moreover the first Prime Minister of the New Turkish Republic – Rauf Orbay was a representative of the Abkhaz Diaspora.²⁴ In the later years the North Caucasian and Abkhaz diaspora organize themselves in political “pressure groups”²⁵ that could push for certain favorable domestic and foreign policies of Ankara. This institutional structuration, the desire and idea to return back to the original homeland eventually shaped the diaspora identity among the North Caucasian immigrants, including the Abkhaz as well.

1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The end the Second World War has dramatically changed the world map and world politics, moreover, wars and violent conflicts have transformed as well. Since 1945, over 75 percent of violent conflicts and disputes have been classified as intra-state

²² M. Celikpala. “Influence of the North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*. 17 July 2006. p.427.

²³ M. Unal. “Kurtuluş Savaşında Çerkeslerin Rolü [The role of Circassians in the War of Independence]”. *Kafkas Derneği Yayınları*, Ankara, 2000.

²⁴ O. Gafarli. The Role of North Caucasus Diaspora Groups in Turkey-Russia Relations. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. 2014. p. 176.

²⁵ M. Celikpala. “Influence of the North Caucasus Diaspora in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies*. 17 July 2006. p.426.

or civil ones.²⁶ At the same time, the intra-state conflict or “conflicts over identity”, as noted by J. Demmers, are not simply fought solely on those territories and by those, who live there. The involvement of the third parties and non-state actors in the “conventional” interstate violent conflicts has been targeted by a growing number of scholars.²⁷ One of the first scholars to address this issue of “deterritorialization” of conflicts was Edward Azar, who called for the revision of the orthodox Clausewitzian ideas of war and conflict. He believed that the identity groups, whichever way they identified themselves, be that cultural, linguistic, ethnic or religious, were the main actors of the present world conflicts. Indeed, the dissolution of the former Communist federal states of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, and the outburst of civil and ethnic wars in the Balkans and the Caucasus in the last decade of the twentieth century gave empirical support for the Azar’s “new wars” concept.²⁸

All of these “new wars” were spurred by the growth of radical nationalism, flamed on the sense of the otherness, historical grievances and injustice, which led to the emergence of the self-determination movements.²⁹ Very few of these conflicts have been resolved. These secessionist movements have been characterized as *frozen conflicts*, *de-facto states*, *patricianly recognized states*, choose any term, depending on where one stands with the position on each of the cases. If one takes the cases of Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh or Abkhazia, apart from the fact that the political status of all three of these

²⁶ The classification is based on the Uppsala Conflict Database. This is internal conflicts and internationalized internal conflicts (types 3 and 4) as a proportion of all conflicts.

²⁷ J. Demmers. “Diaspora and Conflict: Locality, Long-Distance Nationalism, and Delocalization of Conflict Dynamics. *Javnost – The Public: Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*. 2014. Pp. 86-87.

²⁸ J. Demmers. “Nationalism from without”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus. Transnationalism and diaspora*, ed. Atabaki, T., Mehendale, S. 2005. p.11.

²⁹ E.K. Denny, F.B. Walter, “Ethnicity and Civil War”. *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol. 51(2). 2014. p .200.

entities is still disputed, the involvement of third party actors plays a major role in each of the conflict settlement processes. Apart from a varying degree of political support from various international actors, each of the above-mentioned entities receives support from their respective diaspora leaving abroad.

The issue of the role of the diaspora in the “new wars” has been targeted and researched by a number of scholars, especially in the last two decades. Most case studies focus either on the “ideal type” of cases, such as the Jewish or Armenia diasporas, or on the new diaspora – Chechen and Albanian cases. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the two Russian-Chechen wars have brought attention to the Chechen diaspora and its influence. The Albanian diaspora’s influence and its role in Kosovo’s independence struggle have been addressed by such researcher as M. Koinova³⁰, N. Ragaru and A. Dymi.³¹

1.3 Concept Definitions

In order to properly address the issue of diaspora’s involvement in the “new wars” and conflicts, one ought to give a proper definition of the term *diaspora* or answer the question “what is the diaspora and what makes it different from all the other groups or actors?” The word *diaspora* originates from the Greek translation of the Old Testament in reference to the Jewish exile, meaning “dispersion around”. Later on, the concept of diaspora has been solely applied to describe the Jewish communities that were forced to leave their homeland and settle in foreign land. Due to the hardship and devastations that accompanied this resettlement, the concept of *diaspora* received negative meaning and

³⁰ M. Koinova. “Diasporas and secessionist conflicts: the mobilization of the Armenian, Albanian and Chechen diasporas”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34:2. 2011. pp.333-356.

³¹ N. Ragaru, A. Dymi. “The Albanian-American Community in the United States”. *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 2004, p.45-63.

implications.³² Throughout history, the term diaspora has been applied to other cases, in order to describe the people who, for various reasons, had to leave their homeland to live in a different state.

Even today, there is no single definition that clearly answers the question of “what is the diaspora?” There are a number of scholars providing a very broad and general definition of a term diaspora; one of them would be W. Conner, who describes diaspora in the following way “a segment of a people living outside the homeland”.³³ This overtly broad and simplified definition does not provide for any peculiarities of the phenomenon of the concept of diaspora and can create confusion with the labor migration. On the other hand, William Safran provides one of the strictest definitions of the diaspora concept: he defines the group as an expatriate minority community, (1) which is dispersed from the homeland to at least two foreign or more “peripheral” places; (2) maintains a collective memory, myths of the erstwhile homeland; (3) feel partly alienated, as they believe or imagine that they could not be fully integrated or accepted by their new host country; (4) they believe that they or their descendants will eventually return back to the historical homeland; (5) they believe that they should be committed to the maintenance or, in case needed, restoration of the historical homeland; (6) they continue to relate themselves with their erstwhile homeland, via their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity.³⁴ Safran’s list is rather strict, as even the so-called “ideal type” of Jewish diaspora³⁵ would

³² M. Celikpala. “From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. pp.423-424.

³³ W. Connor. “The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas”, in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, ed. Sheffer, G. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1986), p. 16

³⁴ W. Safran. “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return”, in *Diaspora 1:1* (1991), pp.83-84.

³⁵ W. Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies”, p. 84.

not always fulfill all of the Safran's requirements, as the third and fourth elements are not always applicable to Jewish diaspora.

One can say that Conner and Safran are representing the opposite ends of the definition spectrum, providing for the loosest and strictest definitions of the concept. For the purposes of this particular work, I will choose one of the more moderate definitions of the concept that combines all the necessary and crucial aspects of the diaspora phenomenon. The following definition includes all the elements present and relevant for the case selection of the Abkhaz diaspora. Stephan Astourian provides the following definition for diaspora, he calls it:

A segment of a people living outside the homeland in two or more countries that has developed institutions that demarcate it from the host society and connect it in cultural, psychological, political, or economic terms with an existing or envisioned homeland and with other such kindred communities outside that homeland.³⁶

It is important to also note that a number of scholars prefer to separate diaspora from transnationalism, claiming that transnationalism is a "process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement"³⁷ and do not necessarily possess above mentioned elements constituting the definition of diaspora, these are the tragic memory of forced resettlement of a diaspora, political and economic ties and links with the homeland. For the purposes of this particular study such a distinction between the two concepts will be applied and the issue of transnationalism will not be addressed in this research.

³⁶ S. H. Astourian. "State, homeland, and diaspora", in *Central Asia and the Caucasus. Transnationalism and diaspora*. Ed. T. Atabaki and S. Mehende. 2005. p. 81.

³⁷ L. Basch, N. Glick Schiller, C. Szanton-Blanc. "Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects and the Deterritorialized Nation-State", New York: Gordon and Breach, 1994. P. 34.

1.4 Main Theoretical Concepts

As the case study of Abkhaz diaspora is linked with the claims of homeland Abkhazia to be recognized as an independent state, it is worth defining what *secessionism* is. For the purposes of this work, the Horowitz's description of secessionism will be used. Horowitz states that secessionism is "an attempt by an ethnic group claiming homeland to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part".³⁸ Secessionism often happens alongside *irredentism*, when one state demands to be incorporated into the territory of another state, or it is a desire of an ethnic group to get separated from one state in order to join the other.³⁹ The "new war" and conflict examples of Kosovo, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh can be used to show both of these concepts, while Kosovo and Abkhazia seek full secession, Nagorno-Karabakh wishes to secede from Azerbaijan and be united in some form with Armenia.

When talking about the role of diaspora, one can separate all the existing debate in the academic literature related to this topic into three major groups. The first group focuses on the role of the diaspora at the early stages of conflicts in the homeland. The second mainly focuses on the diaspora lobbying capabilities in the host state. And the third group addresses the issue of the "deterritorialization".

A number of scholars have focused on the issue of the role of the diaspora in the homeland conflict development. The majority of authors believe that the diaspora tend to exacerbate the conflicts in the homeland. This can be related to the issues of diaspora fundraising and providing weapons to the radical groups and institutions in the homeland, as these particular groups managed to appeal to the diaspora representatives. These

³⁸ D. Horowitz. "Irredentism and secessions", in N. Chazan (ed), *Irredentism and International Relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp. 10-11.

³⁹ N. Chazan. "Irredentism and International Politics". *Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. 1991.*

homeland groups tend to rely on the diaspora support and for that reason, they are more reluctant to agree with the possible cease-fire agreements and the overall peace process initiatives. Collier, Hoeffler⁴⁰ and Hockenos⁴¹ support this idea, while Shain claims that there are cases when diasporas are interested in the prolongation of the homeland conflict resolution process, as the ongoing conflict reinforces their sense of identity and gives them strength within the state they reside in.⁴² The growing means of cheap transportation and communication via the Internet and mobile phones have elevated the role of diaspora to a level of a fully involved actor in the homeland conflict.

However, according to Bercovitch, diaspora can be a “peace-maker or peace-wrecker”. Even though most empirical case studies suggest that the absolute majority of diasporas are more likely to act radically and distance the sides from the possible conflict resolution, diasporas can act as peace-makers, if their engagement reinforces their identity, coincides with the political line of their homeland, and the stakes for achieving statehood are high”.⁴³

A second group of literature mainly focuses and examines the so-called “ethnic lobbying”⁴⁴ of the homeland interests by diasporas abroad. Ambrosio crystalizes three major target groups that the diasporas tend to influence in order to achieve their goals: (1) framing, (2) information and policy analysis and (3) policy oversight.⁴⁵ However, as noted by Hanye and Vanderbush, the ethnic lobbying can be successful when the

⁴⁰ P. Collier and A. Hoeffler. “Greed and Grievances in Civil War”. *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* 2355. 2000.

⁴¹ P. Hockenos. “Homeland Calling”, *Ithaca: Cornell University Press*. 2003.

⁴² Y. Shain. “The Role of Diasporas in Conflict Perpetuation and Resolution”. *SAIS Review* 22 (2), pp. 115-144.

⁴³ M. Koinova. “Four Types of Diaspora Mobilization: Albanian Diaspora Activism for Kosovo Independence in the US and the UK”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-21, 2012. pp. 3-5.

⁴⁴ M. Koinova.. p. 3.

⁴⁵ T. Ambrosio. Ed. *Ethnic Identity Groups and US Foreign Policy*. Westport: Praeger, 2002.

diaspora promote policies that the government is supporting.⁴⁶ At the same time, there are a number of authors who believe that the host-state can experience the so-called “policy capture” phenomenon, when diasporas successfully promote and defend homeland interests. This might lead not only to a political support, but also to an intervention into a conflict abroad. The Israeli diaspora in the USA can be used as a perfect example of a successful ethnic lobbying and “policy capture”.⁴⁷

One has to keep in mind that all diasporas are very much different from one another, and the means of lobbying are different in each case. Rubenzer in his publication titled “Ethnic Minority Interest Group Attributes and US Foreign Policy Influence” suggests that there are two most important and influential factors in a successful ethnic lobbying and these are the organizational and institutional strength of the diaspora, and the level of political activity and engagement with the host state’s foreign policy.⁴⁸ Rubenzer focuses particularly on the influence of ethnic lobbying on the US foreign policy; however, similar factors can be applicable to the selected case study in this particular research.

Maria Koinova brings to attention a very important aspect, influencing the levels of successful diaspora lobbying, it is important to note whatever the center of “gravity for diaspora lobbying is embedded in diaspora”, that would be case of the Jewish or

⁴⁶ P. Hanye. and W. Vanderbush. “The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in the US Foreign Policy”. *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (2). 1999. pp.341-361.

⁴⁷ J. Mearsheimer, S. Walt. *The Israel Lobby and Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007.

⁴⁸ T. Rubenzer. “Ethnic Minority Interest Group Attributes and US Foreign Policy Influence”. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2008, pp. 179-180.

Armenian examples, or the center is located somewhere abroad, as it is very often the case of secessionist conflicts – such as the case of Abkhazia.⁴⁹

The third and the last group of scholars have addressed the issue of the emerging deterritorialization of the conflicts, measuring the diaspora involvement and influence in the developments in the erstwhile homeland. The fact that the diaspora can live far away from the original homeland does not mean that it would not be involved in the events taking place there, they still have the capacity and ability to influence, moreover, even act on behalf of the homeland. Such territorial spread gives the diaspora a head start, by empowering them both from knowing the peculiarities and internal politics of the kin-state and the state they currently live in.

This theoretical overview is relevant for the selected case study, as it organizes and structures the entire research in accordance with the provided theoretical concepts. Each of the observed time period of the Abkhaz diaspora's engagement with the Turkish officials on the matter of the last's approach to the Abkhaz issue will be compared to the above-mentioned concepts. The issue of Abkhaz ethnic lobbying and "policy capturing" capability is of a particular interest of this research. This structure allows finding out similarities and differences of the Abkhaz diaspora approach to achieve its goals – observe the role and strength of the Abkhaz "ethnic lobbying" in Turkey.

1.5 Case Study Selection

The Abkhaz diaspora is considered to be one of the exotic and less-known cases in the academia, with most publications written either in Abkhaz or Turkish. Selecting the Abkhaz diaspora as a case study will narrow down the existing information gap

⁴⁹ M. Koinova. "Four Types of Diaspora Mobilization: Albanian Diaspora Activism for Kosovo Independence in the US and the UK", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-21, 2012. pp. 3-5.

observing the role of the diaspora in the context of the unresolved conflict. The Abkhaz diaspora presents us with a classic example of a new type of diaspora with the political center being located in the homeland, and Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in itself can be qualified as Azar's "new type" identity-based conflict. Abkhazia seeks full secession from Georgia and today it is a fully functioning *de-facto state*, the international status of which is yet to be settled. The Georgian-Abkhaz war of 1992-1993 is an example of the deterritorialization of the wars and conflicts. The war in Abkhazia has attracted a significant number of third parties, such as volunteers from the North Caucasus and the diaspora representatives, who fought in the war on the Abkhaz side.⁵⁰ Moreover since the end of the war, the conflict resolution process has been and still is heavily influenced by the "extraterritorial" parties, be those of diaspora or other interested groups.

Turkey as a host nation for Abkhaz diaspora is considered to be one of the interested groups. The disintegration of the Soviet Union opened up new opportunities for Ankara's influence in the so-called Turkic-speaking world spreading from Azerbaijan up to Kyrgyzstan.⁵¹ Apart from the language similarities this area includes the nations sharing common religion and Muslim culture with Turkey. This territory covers an immense area, providing for a very important transport and energy link, opening the way to China, giving a unique chance for the reconstruction of the ancient Silk Road, which once connected China with Europe.⁵² Under the Soviet Union the Caucasus and Central Asia territories were considered the "backyards of Russia". Very soon after the collapse

⁵⁰ O. Gafarli. The Role of North Caucasus Diaspora Groups in Turkey-Russia Relations. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. 2014. p. 178.

⁵¹ General Information. *The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States* website. Retrieved: 24.05.2015. Link: http://turkkon.org/en-US/general_information/299/308

⁵² S. Tiezzi. "China's 'New Silk Road' Vision Revealed" *The Diplomat*. Retrieved: 24.05.2015. Link: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-new-silk-road-vision-revealed/>

of the former power monopoly Turkey has quickly assembled its policy with the new actors in the region by first establishing bilateral relations with each of them. Apart from state actors, Ankara was faced with numerous wars and conflicts in this region, especially the one in the immediate neighborhood of the South Caucasus that connect Turkey with the Caspian and Central Asian regions.

In order to locate the issue of the role of the Abkhaz diaspora, the author conducted interviews with representatives of the diaspora. These interviews included one-on-one question and answer sessions, as well as group discussions. However, understanding that interviews with only the representatives of the diaspora would not draw for a comprehensive picture, interviews were conducted with Turkish journalist and scholars, focusing on the internal ethnic politics within the state, as well it is foreign policies in relations with the European Union, South Caucasus and Russia. This allowed to place the diaspora within the Turkish internal relations and Ankara's policy towards its neighbors in the greater Black Sea region.

To examine the existing lobby interviews were conducted with the Head and the Deputy Head of the Plenipotentiary Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey.⁵³ This was necessary in order to get accurate information on the institutional structure of the diaspora community; evaluation of the existing links and close cooperation between the Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia and the Diaspora institutions. The archival research provided valuable documents, mainly focusing on the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of violence on the territory of Abkhazia. The archive contains numerous letters and

⁵³ The Plenipotentiary Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia operates in Turkey since February 1994, as the official representative structure of Abkhaz government in Turkey. The office is located in Istanbul.

memoranduma sent by the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee on behalf of the diaspora to various international organization, including the UN, OSCE, EU, Council of Europe, and heads of governments of a number of European and Middle-Eastern states.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. Istanbul. Accessed: 20.04.2015.

Chapter 2. Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey

The Abkhaz living on the both sides of the Black Sea had no contact for almost a period of a hundred years, the Iron Curtain separated and prevented any contact between the diaspora and the homeland. The first contacts were made in late 1970s and were limited to linguistic and scientific activities.⁵⁵ The fall of the bipolar world with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Georgian-Abkhaz war that shortly followed renewed and strengthened the links and connection between the Abkhaz living on either sides of the Black Sea. These relations evolved and progressed in various stages and in different pace. The Abkhaz diaspora had and still has influence on policy making in Ankara, however, it was never a sole group pressuring the Turkish government to take certain political steps. In order to place the diaspora among other groups and observe its role, it will be useful to separate the entire work into three different time periods or categories. The first period will focus on the early years of 1990s, the war in Abkhazia and until the early 2000s, when there was a change in leadership in Ankara; the final period will address the politics of the post-2008 recognition of the Abkhaz independence by Russia.

2.1 The First Period: Diaspora Demands Political Decisions

The first observed period shows how much influence the diaspora had on the political leadership in Ankara as well as public opinion in their host country. This includes numerous meetings and consultations with the representatives of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, leaders of the Opposition parties: Republican People's Party (CHP) and M nir Kutluat of Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).⁵⁶ Moreover, the diaspora wanted

⁵⁵ G. Hewitt. "Abkhazia, Georgia and the Circassians", *Central Asian Survey*, July 2010. pp. 473-474.

⁵⁶ "Tbilisi Protests Turkish MPs' Visit to Abkhazia". *Civil.ge*. Retrieved: 20.05.2015. Link: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27334>; "Viacheslav Chirikba: Visit of President of Abkhazia to Turkey, where many thousands of Abkhaz diaspora live, may affect positively the issues of repatriation".

to be invited to the negotiation table of the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict in Geneva, this subsequently led to a launch of the Istanbul Meeting in 1999, where the Abkhaz diaspora was represented as a party in the negotiation process.⁵⁷ This period can be considered as the peak of the diaspora lobbying in Turkey. The dissolution of the Soviet Union was decided by three leaders of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine overnight in December of 1991 in Belavezhszkaya Pushcha. The Belavezha Accords⁵⁸ made the USSR a part of history, however, on the ground the situation was rather different. The legacy and ethnic policies of the former Moscow monopoly left a number of unsolved issues, related to the borders of the newly-independent states. One of the major clashes of these “identities” happened in the region of the South Caucasus. Naturally the events evolving in the homeland had an effect on the overseas diaspora that just managed to regain the lost connection with the homeland. The beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century is a period, when the Caucasian diasporas in Turkey became more structured and politically organized.⁵⁹

This period is also a period of systematic change of Turkey’s approach to the regions that once used to be a part of the Soviet Union, the so-called backyard of Russia.⁶⁰ Ankara realized that it was time for the revision of its former Moscow-centered policy towards former peripheries of the Soviet Union. Turkey had started its new policy

AbkhazWorld. Retrieved: 26.05.2015. Link: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/diaspora/156-chirikba-presidents-visit-to-turkey-may-affect-positively>

⁵⁷ M. Celikpala. “From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. p.434

⁵⁸ Declaration № 142-H of the Soviet of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, formally establishing the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a state and subject of international law. Retrieved 19.05.2015. Link: <http://vedomosti.ssr.su/1991/52/#1561>

⁵⁹ O. Gaffarli. “The Role of the North Caucasus Diaspora Groups in Turkey-Russia Relations”. *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No.1. Spring 2014. p.177.

⁶⁰ M.R. Freire, R.E. Kanet. “Russia and Its Neighbours”. *Palgrave Macmillan*. 2012. p. 269.

by establishing diplomatic relations with the newly-independent states.⁶¹ The South Caucasus was of a particular interests for Ankara, due to its proximity to Turkey, and a gateway to the Turkic-speaking nations of Central Asia. Ankara tried to use the power gap created by the withdrawal of Moscow's monopoly in the area and become a regional power.

However, very soon, Turkey realized that it had the lack of expertise and knowledge of the region to formulate working and effective policies. This led to significant growth of the already ongoing organizational activities of the diasporas in Turkey, the diaspora representatives had all the necessary expertise and immense potential for establishing close ties with the erstwhile homelands. Ankara started supporting and promoting the establishment of closer links between the diasporas and their respective homelands. However, in the short-term, such a policy did not bring expected benefits and immediate support of the Caucasus republics of Turkey, but very soon these links and activities became more structured and more effective,⁶² some of them still exist, especially in the North Caucasus.

One can say that during this period the Abkhaz diaspora together with the Circassian diaspora played a major role in formulating Turkish policy towards the region of North Caucasus and Abkhazia. Even before the beginning of the war in 1992 in Abkhazia, the so-called "Abkhaz issue"⁶³ has been raised in Turkey. Once Turkey established diplomatic relations with the newly independent Georgia, the Prime Minister of Turkey Suleyman Demirel went on an official visit to Tbilisi in May-June 1992. In the

⁶¹ M. Celikpala. "From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey". *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. p.429.

⁶² M. Celikpala. p.429.

⁶³ G. Hewitt. "Abkhazia: A Problem of Identity and Ownership", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No.3. 1993. pp.267-268.

same dates, the leader of Abkhazia – Vladislav Ardzinba – visited Turkey. This activity was organized and sponsored by the diaspora. Ardzinba was able to meet with a number of Turkish politicians, including representatives of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of the opposition parties. Right after the visit to Turkey, the Abkhaz leadership decided to make official and political claims and proceed with its desires for establishing an independent state.⁶⁴

Less than a year since the Soviet Union became a part of history, the Georgia-Abkhaz war broke out in the August of 1992. This war echoed in Turkey, especially among the representatives of the Abkhaz and North Caucasian diasporas. The war for the Abkhaz independence, as it was perceived by the diaspora, gave a chance to materialize previously rather abstract ideas of establishing a state and simultaneous return to the homeland.⁶⁵ Since the very beginning of the war, the Turkish government did not prevent any pro-Abkhaz initiatives and activities in Turkey, which caused certain misunderstandings between Ankara and Tbilisi. At the same time, it should be noted that Turkey's official position was always closer to that one of Georgia – Ankara supported the territorial integrity of the South Caucasus republics. One has to note Ankara's cautiousness in setting a precedent that might jeopardize either the Turkey-Azerbaijani relations over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh or might have sent a wrong message for the Kurds in their claims for self-determination. Answering a question about Abkhazia, the Prime-Minister of Turkey S. Demirel said: "We are saying that territorial integrity should

⁶⁴ M. Celikpala. "From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey". *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. p.431.

⁶⁵ Interview with the diaspora representative. Istanbul. 22.04.2015.

be protected because if there is any objection to territorial integrity it would be impossible to protect peace in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus”.⁶⁶

Even though the Turkish official position was not supportive of Abkhaz claim, Turkish public opinion has been overwhelmingly on the Abkhaz side in the entire course of the Georgian-Abkhaz war. The Abkhaz diaspora with the support of the larger North Caucasus one started a massive campaign to publicize the ongoing events in Abkhazia targeting various spheres of Turkish society. To formalize and better organize their claims two new organizations were formed: the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee- KADK (Kadkas-Abhazya Dayanisma Komitesi) and the Federation of the Caucasian Associations – KAFFED (Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu). The main goals of these organizations were to provide aid (be that economic or humanitarian); publicize the issue of the war in Abkhazia and claims of the Abkhaz people; provide and collect actual and sound information of the ongoing event in the war-affected Abkhazia.⁶⁷ One of the main aspects of their work was coordination and cooperation of all the activities in order to maximize the limited resources, be that individual or from any organizations willing to help and cooperate.

Providing sound information from the events taking place in Abkhazia and promoting awareness among the Turkish population was one of the main objectives of the Committee’s activities. A number of demonstrations organized by the Committee can be used as an example. Less than a months after the war broke out in Abkhazia, the diaspora organized mass demonstrations in a number of big cities, including Istanbul and

⁶⁶ “Georgia and Turkey agree to strengthen cooperation”. *Turkish daily News*. 16 July 1997. Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. Istanbul. Accessed: 22.04.2015.

⁶⁷ See. Constitutions of the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee and the Federation of the Caucasian Associations. Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. Istanbul. Accessed: 20.04.2015.

Adapazari (Sakarya province) in September 1992. In order to attract attention of the Turkish government a walking demonstration from Istanbul to Ankara was put together by the diaspora. This walking demonstration or a march was routed in such a way that it went through all the areas with predominant Abkhaz and North Caucasian population. Diaspora representatives organized a protest in front of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ankara, the protestors demanded immediate recognition of Abkhazia as an independent state and the change of the Ministry leadership.⁶⁸

This coordinated and organized policy of demonstrations and protests led to a very important meeting of the diaspora leadership and the Prime Minister of Turkey – Suleyman Demirel. The representatives of the diaspora demanded Turkey to get involved in the conflict resolution process by sending representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora to negotiate on behalf of Turkey. The Committee also managed to bring the issue of Abkhazia's political status to a debate in the Turkish National Assembly on the 13th of October 1992.⁶⁹ Throughout the period of Georgian-Abkhaz war the Abkhaz diaspora managed to formulate a favorable public opinion of the Turkish population towards the so-called “Abkhaz question”. The issue of the events taking place in Abkhazia was kept alive and debated due to constant publications in the newspapers. The Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey housed a vast archive, containing publications of the Turkish newspapers about Abkhazia in that period. Apart from print publications, the events in Abkhazia were well-covered by radio and television. This was possible to do due to the fact that through the entire period of fighting in Abkhazia, the

⁶⁸ P. Robins. “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War”. 2003. p. 182.

⁶⁹ M. Celikpala. “From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. p.433.

diaspora representatives were in a constant contact with Abkhaz representatives, becoming a vital information link between Abkhazia and the rest of the world.⁷⁰

The lack of information about the South Caucasus in the West, due to the fact that for seventy years the region had been perceived and seen only through Moscow, created a situation when the Western diplomats and countries did not know how to properly address the situation in the area. One has also to remember the events unfolding simultaneously in the immediate neighborhood of the newly created European Union, the Balkan wars of early 90s attracted most of the attention of the world diplomats and leaders. The Abkhaz diaspora had aimed to create a necessary debate in the West on the issue related to Abkhazia, by providing information to the European, American and International Institutions. A number of appeals and letters were addressed to the leadership of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Moreover direct contacts were established between the representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora and other countries of the greater Black Sea region, which were documented in bilateral correspondence with the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.⁷¹

Apart from lobbying activities the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee and the Federation of the Caucasian Associations provided economic support, they even managed to provide a way of transporting humanitarian aid by the Black Sea to the coast of Abkhazia. Moreover, 37 representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora, holding Turkish

⁷⁰ Group interview in Istanbul with the representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora. 24.04.2015.

⁷¹ Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. 21.04.2015.

citizenship came to Abkhazia to join the Abkhaz military in their fight against the Georgian forces. It is reported that five of them were killed in the war.⁷²

This period can be classified and described as a very effective in the diaspora influencing Turkish policy formation on the evolving events in Abkhazia. Even though Turkey has not made any official statements supporting the claims of the Abkhaz diaspora for the recognition of Abkhaz independence, it has not prevented and even encouraged campaigns carried out by the diaspora institutions. Commenting on the Abkhaz question, Turkish officials have always mentioned the existing ethnic and political issues, which could not be militarily resolved. Ankara supported the war-affected population of Abkhazia by delivering the humanitarian aid through the Turkish Kizilay (Red Crescent).⁷³

The effectiveness and the influence of the Abkhaz and the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey can be proven by the Georgia's attempt to activate and mobilize the Georgian diaspora representatives in Turkey. The Georgian government even specially appointed the Georgian Member of Parliament – Anzor Tavarkiladze, to coordinate and establish Georgian diaspora associations to counter balance the growing influence of the Abkhaz diaspora. A number of associations and foundations were created fully funded and backed by the Georgian government, however, their activities could not counter balance the Abkhaz and Circassian influence. Turkish government only encouraged activities related to culture and business of these associations, fearing that the counter-

⁷² “Turkiyeli Abhazya Sehitleri” [Abkhazia Martyrs from Turkey], Retrieved 20.04.2015. Link: <http://www.cerkes.net/biyografi-ve-soylesi/turkiyeli-abhazya-sehitleri-t2283.html>

⁷³ Interview with the Head of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey, Gitsba Inar. Istanbul 20.04.2015.

balancing of Abkhaz and Georgian diasporas in Turkey might have a spillover effect of the ethnic clashes on to the Turkish territory.⁷⁴

The Georgian-Abkhaz war in Abkhazia finished on the 30th of September, 1993 with Abkhazia becoming a state with no official recognition or a *de-facto* one. The diaspora has not stopped its activities in addressing the issue of Abkhazia with the end of the war, they engaged further in the conflict resolution process, even though they were not present at the negotiation table in the Geneva Talks. The Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia currently houses the archive of the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidary Committee, this archive provides documents that were constantly sent and distributed by the Committee to the world community. There are more than twenty letters addressed to the then Secretary-Generals of the United Nations Organization Mr. Bourtos Bourtos Ghali and Kofi Annan demanding Abkhaz representatives to have a chance to express their position in the United Nations headquarters in New York. A number of letters were sent to various European Union institutions and OSCE. Bilateral connections have been established with various countries. As a result of diaspora lobby, the Jordanian Prince Hassan sent seventeen tons of humanitarian aid to Abkhazia.⁷⁵

A number of Turkish scholars, including M. Celikpala, believe that the unsatisfied position of the Abkhaz and Circassian diaspora in the negotiation process over the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, pressured Ankara to get more involved in the conflict resolution processes and stability in the region of the Black Sea. Turkey hosted a number of meetings between Abkhaz and Georgian, hoping to find a resolution to the conflict and

⁷⁴ M. Celikpala. "From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey". *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. pp.433-434.

⁷⁵ S. Zhemukhov. "Recognition without Independence. Abkhazia's International Context". *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 245. September 2012. p. 2.

the ongoing disputes between the parties. These consultations led to a meeting between Abkhazia and Georgia in Istanbul between the 7th and 9th of June 1999. The meeting was organized and chaired by Turkey, and included experts from the UN and OSCE.⁷⁶ Even though a final resolution of the conflict was not achieved in the course of the Istanbul Process, the diasporas - the so-called extraterritorial actors – tried to get politically engaged and influence the endless negotiation process. Apart from the international and Turkish representatives and the parties to conflict, 10-member Committees representing each the Abkhaz and Georgian diasporas residing in Turkey took part in the meeting.⁷⁷ This can be used as example that the diasporas were trying to influence and even lead the negotiation process in their respective homelands.

The final communiqué of this meeting became a part of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process as an Istanbul Declaration, where the parties agreed to continue their efforts to find future peaceful solution to the conflict. This meeting was an important milestone in the diaspora influence, as it was the first time, the diaspora representatives gained official status at the negotiation table.

The examined period - starting in 1992 and 2000 - can be classified as a very effective one for the Abkhaz diaspora influence on Turkish policy formation towards Abkhazia. One can say that Ankara officials have never openly supported the Abkhaz claims, but were in favor of the territorial integrity of Georgia, however, due to the coordinated, well-planned cooperation between Abkhaz and the Circassian diaspora, the Abkhaz issue had attracted the so-much needed international attention. The pressure of

⁷⁶ UN Security Council. “Report of the Secretary-General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia”. 20 July 1999. Retrieved 21.05.2015. Link: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6aefd14.html>

⁷⁷ M. Celikpala. “From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. p.434.

the diaspora on the Turkish government was the reason Ankara had to take a cautious position related to this issue. Turkey has never even tried to prevent or challenge any cooperation between the diaspora representatives and Abkhazia.

It is worth observing the role of the Abkhaz diaspora in this period and see how it fits the existing conceptual format of diaspora-related studies. If one observes the first group of scholars describing the diaspora involvement as a radicalization factor, one can see that in the war and post-war period the Abkhaz diaspora was not a “peace-wrecker”. Even though the final goal of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict resolution is not achieved even today, the diaspora tried to play a role in the resolution process, this can be proven by its involvement in the Istanbul meeting with the representatives of the Georgian diaspora. At the same, the number of appeals made to the international organizations and community proves that the diaspora was pursuing a path of legal recognition of the Abkhaz claims.

The observed part provides a classic example of the so-called “ethnic lobbying”⁷⁸ of homeland interests by diaspora in the host state. The diaspora organized itself into Committees and Confederation in order to frame and better utilize their lobbying capabilities. The diaspora managed to bring the attention of the Turkish population to the events taking place on the other side of the Black Sea by providing information for Turkey media outlets. There was no evidence of the so-called “policy capture” by the diaspora of the policy formation of Turkey, however, the diaspora pressured Ankara into accepting a rather cautious and balanced policy in its approach to Abkhazia. This “blind eye” approach of Ankara became vital for Abkhaz population in the years of economic

⁷⁸ M. Koinova, “Four Types of Diaspora Mobilization: Albanian Diaspora Activism for Kosovo Independence in the US and the UK”, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-21, 2012. p.3.

and political blockade imposed by the Commonwealth of Independent States virtually cutting the war-torn Abkhazia from the rest of the world. The diaspora lobbied for the marine connection between the Turkish and Abkhaz shores of the Black Sea, which became the “lifeline” for the population of Abkhazia in the years to come. The involvement of diaspora representative as separate actors in Istanbul meeting of 1999 above all can be considered another factor of the “deterritorization” the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict.

2.2 The Second Period: The New Turkish Leadership and the Old Diaspora Methods

The second period in the influence of the diaspora coincided with the change of millennia. In early 2000s, there were a number of significant changes within the Turkish leadership, as well as its economic cooperation with the neighboring states. The growth of Turkey-Georgian economic relations, talks on possible construction of the future energy transport corridors, worried the representatives of the diaspora. In the post-war period, the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey was considered as the main representative structure of the interests of Abkhazia in Turkey. In order to comply with that, the Abkhaz diaspora representatives targeted a number of decision makers in Turkey on policy formation. One of the best examples of these initiatives is the meeting of the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee leadership with the President of the Turkish Republic prior to a state visit by then the President of Georgia – Eduard Shevarnadze in 2001. The Abkhaz diaspora representatives briefed the Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer on the situation in Abkhazia, specified the devastating effects of the ongoing economic and political isolation of the last. The representatives of the diaspora urged the President to put political pressure on Georgia in order to abandon plans on the military takeover of

Abkhazia. The diaspora representatives recall that the Turkish President promised that Turkey would not abandon Abkhazia and would do whatever falls on her part “for justice and permanent peace”.⁷⁹ These points were covered later on a meeting with Georgian President on the 30th of January 2001.

Apart from various meetings with the Turkish leadership, the diaspora organized various awareness campaigns on the events taking place in Abkhazia. One of such campaigns, was reaction to the Georgian government’s military operation launched on the territory of Abkhazia in the mountainous area of the Kodor Gorge. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York, Tbilisi decided to frame the issue of Abkhazia in the new rhetoric, calling Abkhaz terrorists. The Diaspora response was very fast and well-planned, in early October 2001 they carried out a campaign under the slogan “Stop War in Abkhazia”. Specials brief papers were delivered to the Turkish Leadership, as well as to a number of international organizations, including OSCE, the EU, NATO and the UN. The well-planned and organized media coverage provided for the Turkish public opinion once again siding with the Abkhaz on this matter.⁸⁰

It is important to highlight that the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey decided to transport its experience and policies to other countries with the Abkhaz diaspora presence. As a result of this initiative the representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora in the Netherlands were institutionalized under the organization named Dutch Circassian Cultural Association. The declarations and resolutions produced by this and other similar

⁷⁹ “Kafkas-Abhaz Dayanisma Komitesi Cumhursbaskani Sezer ve Gurcistan Devlet Baskani Shevarnadze ile Gorustu”, Nart: Iki Aylik Dusun ve Sanat Dergisi. No.22. 2001. pp. 41-43.

⁸⁰ *Radikal*. 11 November 2001. Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. Istanbul. Accessed: 22.04.2015.

organizations were condemning Georgia of committing “ethnic and cultural genocide” in Abkhazia.⁸¹

These declarations led to an upheaval of distrust to Turkish government by the representatives of the Abkhaz and North Caucasian diasporas. The Turkish government was accused of supporting the Georgian military rhetoric and plans for forceful overtake of Abkhazia. This campaign culminated into the largest ever mass demonstrations by the North Caucasus diaspora in Turkey. However, this campaign backfired, as the Turkish government considered the accusations to be unfair, as they were pursuing an overall policy favorable and supportive of Abkhazia, even though the official statements sounded to be more supportive of Georgian claims. This event created a visible division line in the connections of the Diaspora and the Turkish leadership.⁸²

This period also coincided with the change in the Turkish government. In 2002 general elections the newly created AKP (Justice and Development Party) won the two-thirds of the seats in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In 2003, once the political ban was lifted from the leader of AKP – Recep Tayyip Erdogan, he was elected as the Prime Minister of Turkey.⁸³ This period has coincided with a shift in Turkey’s foreign policy and its interests in the Black Sea region. One of the major shifts in Ankara’s policy in the neighborhood was the revision of its policies towards Moscow. The launch of the so-called multidimensional cooperation, based on the acceptance of the existing interests of each other in the neighborhood regions have already resulted in an increase of trade

⁸¹ M. Celikpala. “From Immigrants to Diaspora: Influence of the North Caucasian Diaspora in Turkey”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3, May 2006. pp. 435-436.

⁸² Interview with the Abkhaz diaspora representative. Izmit. 23.04.2015.

⁸³ “Turkish PM quits for Erdogan”. *CNN*. Retrieved 21.05.2015. Link: <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/03/11/turkey.elections/>

from 5 billion of US dollar to 32.⁸⁴ Ankara started acting more pragmatic, putting its economic and power structures as the priorities of the Turkish policy formation. The launch of the construction work over the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline started in 2003, economically tied Turkey to Georgia and Azerbaijan.⁸⁵ These factors had significantly limited the influence of the Abkhaz diaspora in Turkey, due to the fact that neither Tbilisi, nor even Moscow for that matter had been interested in the growing influence of Ankara in Abkhazia.

However, the Caucasus-Abkhazia Solidarity Committee remained still active. Prior to one of the first official visits of the newly elected Turkey's Prime Minister R. Erdogan to Georgia, the Committee representatives arranged a meeting with him. The meeting took place few days before his planned visit on the 11th-12th of August 2004 to Georgia. The Abkhaz diaspora provided the Prime Minister with the up-to-date information on the developments taking place in Abkhazia, expressed their concerns with the "harsh and war-mongering statements" of the new President of Georgia – M. Saakashvili.⁸⁶

This period coincided with internal changes within Turkey that led to significant alterations of its policy in the Black Sea region and South Caucasus. The new goal-oriented approach of the new Turkish leadership distanced the diaspora from the decision making process. At the same time, the diaspora has been still very active and visible in their efforts to contribute the negotiation and resolution process of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. The frequent meetings with the representatives of the Turkish leadership prove

⁸⁴ P. J. Saunders. "Russia, Turkey inch toward improved relations". *Al-Monitor*. 2014. Retrieved: 21.05.2015. Link: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/11/russia-turkey-political-ties.html#>

⁸⁵ "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline Inaugurated". *The Jamestown Foundation*. Retrieved 21.05.2015. Link: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30462#.VWSgnc-f7cs

⁸⁶ *Zaman*. Retrieved: 21.05.2015. Link: <http://www.zaman.com.tr/?hn=79687&bl=dishaberler>

that the diaspora was still involved and was consulted prior the decisions were finalized by the leadership.

2.3 The Third Period: The New Realities

The events of the five days of August 2008 had completely changed the status-quo in the region of South Caucasus. Georgian military campaign against the South Ossetia and Russia's eventual recognition of Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence claims created a "no-return situation"⁸⁷. The events taking place in the region of the South Caucasus in the hot days of August 2008 echoed in Turkey. The Abkhaz and the North Caucasus diaspora were allying with Russia on their claims to stop Georgians troops of proceeding into South Ossetia. The major concerns of the diaspora representatives were that the war in South Ossetia might spillover to Abkhazia.⁸⁸

In order to prevent the further escalation in the region, the diaspora organized demonstrations in major Turkish cities in order to win the favorable public support. One of the major criticism against the Turkish government from the diaspora was Turkey's involvement in the training of the Georgian soldiers under the NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Moreover Ankara was accused of providing weapons for the Georgian army and those weapons were used against the "brothers and sisters in the Caucasus". Turkey was the one country to modernize Marneuli military base in Georgia in 2001, which for the first time gave Georgia an advance of flying at night and invisible for Russian satellites.⁸⁹ These accusations materialized into a statement made by the

⁸⁷ A. Rahr. "Abkhazia and South Ossetia will not Return to Georgia". Retrieved 22.05.2015. Link: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/interview/97-alexander-rahr-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-will-not-return-to-georgia>

⁸⁸ O. Gafarli. "The Role of North Caucasus Diaspora Groups in Turkey-Russia Relations". *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. 2014. p. 178.

⁸⁹ M. Celikpala. "Turkey as a Regional Power and the Caucasus". *Insight Turkey*. Vol. 9. No.2. p. 29.

Turkish Ministry, a balanced one, not justifying the actions of Georgia, but also not allying with Russia's reaction to the event.⁹⁰

The August of 2008 was full of various events starting from the Olympic Games, war and international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia on the 26th of August. These event led to another wave of demonstrations in Turkey demanding international recognition of Abkhazia by Turkey. However, these demands have yet to be materialized.

After the first international recognition, the Abkhaz diaspora became more politicized. The Federation of the Caucasus Associations (KAFFED) twice (September 2008 and January 2009) with the Turkish President Abdullah Gul to discuss the economic and trade links between Turkey and Abkhazia, also they touched upon the need for direct flights connecting the Turkish and Abkhaz cities. The diaspora leadership organized a visit of the then de facto President of Abkhazia Sergey Bagapsh to Turkey, where he had a number of meetings with various politicians, including Onur Oymen, the Deputy Head of the one of the main parties in Turkey CHP (Republican People's Party). As a result of this meeting, CHP presented a proposal to the Parliament on a possibility to establish direct sea transport links and routes between Turkish and Abkhaz ports on the coast of the Black Sea.⁹¹

In December 2009, an Ankara-based Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) published a report "Abkhazia for the Integration of the Black Sea". This reports urges for the establishment of economic links and contacts with Abkhazia,

⁹⁰ L. Kemal. "Turkey's strong Circassian lobby to limit Ankara's policies on Georgia war". *Today's Zaman*, August 12, 2008. Retrieved 15.05.2014. Link: http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/lale-kemal/turkeys-strong-circassian-lobby-to-limit-ankaras-policies-on-georgia-war_149977.html

⁹¹ "Annual Activity Report 2008-2009", *KAFFED*. Retrieved: 23.05.2015. Link: http://kaffed.org/docs/2008_2009_Faaliyet_Raporu_A.pdf

and highlights the potential importance Turkey can play in the conflict resolution and economic development of the region.⁹²

In order to address the new realities after the Russian recognition of the Abkhaz independence, the Abkhaz diaspora established its own separate organization “Federation of Abkhaz Centers in Turkey (ABAZFED). This organization was established on the 5th of February 2010 and united 11 various Abkhaz culture centers spread all over Turkey. The main objectives of the organization are to coordinate all the work, in order to politically promote and lobby the interests and claims of Abkhazia in Turkey and in the neighboring states.⁹³ Since March 11, 2014 ABAZFED works in close cooperation with the Abkhaz Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Creation of a new organization distanced the Abkhaz and the North Caucasus or Circassian diaspora from one another. This was mostly visible when the Circassian Diaspora started a campaign to prevent the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia. The North Caucasus diaspora accuses Russia of committing a genocide of the Circassian people, killing more than 625,000 Circassian.⁹⁴ However, both the Abkhaz government and the Abkhaz diaspora did not make any official claims condemning Russia and urging it to recognize the Circassian genocide. Sochi is located in a close proximity to Abkhazia, and the last benefited from providing construction materials and attracting tourists visiting the Olympic sites.

⁹² B. Gültekin-Punsmann. “Abkhazia For The Integration Of The Black Sea”, *TEPAV*, Decemeber 2009.

⁹³ The constitution of the ABAZFED. Archive of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey. 20.04.2015.

⁹⁴ “145th Anniversary of the Circassian Genocide and the Sochi Olympics Issue”. *Reuters*. 22 May 2009. Retrieved: 23.05.2015. Link: <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS104971+22-May-2009+PRN20090522>

In 2011 the Turkish Ambassador to Georgia visited Abkhazia, while in 2013 the representative of the Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs visited the capital of Abkhazia in 2013. In 2014 Abkhazia was visited by a number of Turkish Members of Parliament and journalists, after the visit the Head of the Committee for Human Rights of the Government of the Turkish Republic Ayhan Sefer Ustun, of ethnic Abkhaz origin, proposed in the Parliament to recognize Abkhazian passports as travel documents.⁹⁵

The Abkhaz diaspora continued its lobbying in Turkey by organizing various cultural events, dance festivals inviting Abkhaz performers, in order to popularize Abkhaz culture in Turkey. The diaspora works in close cooperation with the Plenipotentiary Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia. This gives a chance to maximize the limited existing resources in order to achieve mutual goals. There are a number of occasions, where the diaspora lobbying was very effective in raising the awareness and debate within the Turkish political elite. For example, in 2014 a group of Turkish Parliamentarians proposed to recognize Abkhaz passports as travel documents, and brought up the issue of the need to establish direct transportation links with Abkhazia.⁹⁶ The Abkhaz diaspora, together with the Plenipotentiary Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia are well-covered and represented in the Turkish media, moreover, the publications and television programs use the official titles and topographic names used by the Abkhaz. This naturally, dissatisfies Georgia, however, one has to admit that since 2011, the Abkhaz issue is becoming less of a decisive one in

⁹⁵ "Abkhazia Seeking Turkish Recognition of Independence". *Asbarez Armenian News*. Retrieved: 23.05.2015. Link: <http://asbarez.com/blog/archives/70253>

⁹⁶ "Turkish MP Offers To Recognise Abkhazian Passports" *AbkhazWorld*. Retrieved 15.02.2015. Link: <http://abkhazworld.com/aw/current-affairs/1238-turkish-mp-offers-to-recognise-abkhazian-passports>

the Turkey-Georgia relations.⁹⁷ The already existing and planned trade and energy links between the *trio* of Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan is of a great importance for all three states. At the same time, Tbilisi understands that Ankara has its own interests in Abkhazia and has a blind eye on the ongoing trade and cooperation.

This last period shows the diminishing role of the diaspora on Turkish policy formation, however, at the same time, the diaspora remains a vital linking element able to implement and connect the interested parties. Since 2008 the leadership of the Abkhaz diaspora became more politically aware and started coordinating its activities and campaigns with the Abkhaz government.

⁹⁷ Interview with the Head of the Plenipotentiary Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey, Gitsba Inar. Istanbul 20.04.2015.

Chapter 3. The Interests of the Diaspora or Turkey?

None of the political issues and conflicts in the world evolve and develop in an isolation, there are certain groups and actors with vested interests, pushing for their own vision of the final resolution. These groups are becoming more and more diverse and influential; they vary from state actors to various ethnic communities, organizations or corporations. Diaspora communities are usually perceived as rather influential, the so-called “long-distance nationalists”⁹⁸, the world politics have examples of what Mearsheimer and Walt call “policy capture”⁹⁹, when the host nations accepts and pursues policies damaging for itself, due to the pressure and lobbying activities of the diaspora communities. The findings of this research already show that there was no “policy capture” of the Turkish decision makers by the Abkhaz diaspora, however, there is visible influence of the diaspora, the government has to take to account. In order to fully see the existing level of the diaspora involvement in Ankara’s policy formation, one has to address the issue of Turkish foreign policy in general, its relations with the countries of the South Caucasus, Russia, the European Union and the United States of America.

3.1 Turkey: Regional Power?

In early 1990s Turkey was suddenly exposed to the unknown area of South Caucasus and the conflicts taking place there. Ankara could not stay aside and have “see what happens” approach due to a number of reasons: first, there was an internal pressure coming from the respective diaspora community on Ankara to take a position in the conflict; second, Russian internal issues, such as decentralization, economic decline,

⁹⁸ B. Anderson. “Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics”. *The Wertheim Lecture*. Amsterdam: Centre for Asian Studies. 1992.

⁹⁹ J.J Mearsheimer, S.M.Walt. “The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, V.8, N.3. 2006.

power struggle, gave chance for a power gap in the region. Turkey understood that it had to use this short “momentum” in order to become a regional power. On a state visit to Azerbaijan, a Chairman of the Turkish Parliament – Husmettin Cindoruk – said that if “the Caucasus is Russia’s back garden it is also Turkey’s front garden”¹⁰⁰. This approach caused a number of problems and tensions with Moscow, especially during the Chechen War, when Ankara was accused of supplying weapons to Chechen.

In the South Caucasus, Turkey has established a policy based on the respect and recognition of a principle of the territorial integrity of the newly independent states of the region. There is no surprise that Ankara’s official position was based on this principle, due to the cultural and historical ties with Azerbaijan, which was involved in a war over Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, and the “Kurdish card”¹⁰¹, the issue of which is very much relevant for Turkey even in the present day. At the same time, one has to keep in mind that Turkey is an active member of the Council of Europe and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1949 and 1952 respectively. Both of these organizations supported the principle of territorial integrity over the self-determination principle, used by the de-facto states in the South Caucasus.

However, at the same time, Ankara, being under pressure coming from the diaspora communities provided economic support to Abkhazia in the years of the war and the post-war period. In the post-war period the trade links, which were organized by the diaspora representatives, became the main trade and economic link for the fully isolated and blockaded war-torn Abkhazia. Moreover, the Turkish government had never prevented any diaspora activities supporting Abkhazia, even though they were demanded

¹⁰⁰ P. Robins. “Suits and Uniforms: Turkish Foreign Policy since the Cold War”. 2003. p. 187.

¹⁰¹ M. Celikpala. “Turkey as a Regional Power and the Caucasus”. *Insight Turkey*. Vol. 9. No.2. p. 26.

to do so by the Tbilisi administration. In the period prior to the 2000s the role of the Abkhaz and North Caucasian diaspora was the most effective and influential, and was basically forming the Turkish policy decisions towards their erstwhile homeland. Even though, Ankara managed to abstain from political recognition of Abkhazia, demanded by the diaspora, the diaspora still created a favorable climate for the so much needed information and economic support. It has to be noted that Turkey established informal relations with various groups involved in the conflicts in the South Caucasus. However, in this period, the lack of proper expertise and financial resources, prevented Turkey from becoming a prominent external actor involved in the region's conflict resolution processes.¹⁰²

With the similar stance Turkey has entered the third millennium. The leadership change of the early 2000s, economic growth, rather gloomy perspectives on the possible European Union membership, required certain alteration of the Turkish approach in her foreign policy. The economic growth and modernization became a priority for the AKP leadership, this brought change to the relations with Russia – a rather traditional power rival in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus to a level of mutual understanding and acceptance. Under Erdogan and Putin-Medvedev leadership the Turkey-Russia relations achieved unprecedented level of growth and depth, the energy supply pipelines became a very stable ground for acceleration of the “multidimensional relations” between these two actors. At the same time, Turkey managed to become one of the main economic “giants” in the region of the three fully recognized states of the South Caucasus, Ankara played a major role in the development taking place in Azerbaijan and Georgia. The completion of the second-longest pipeline on the post-Soviet territory in 2005 – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan -

¹⁰² M. Celikpala. “Turkey as a Regional Power and the Caucasus”. *Insight Turkey*. Vol. 9. No.2. p. 26.

cemented the economic ties between these three countries. Since 2006, Turkey became the number one partner and investor for Georgia. Georgia has a 114 km long with Turkey and provides the easiest route to the region of South Caucasus, most importantly to Azerbaijan and Central Asia. A number of other projects, including the construction of the Deriner Hydroelectric Dam, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad¹⁰³, expected to be completed by the end of 2015. These and future projects will irreversibly tie the three countries.

3.2 Abkhaz Diaspora and Ankara's Regional Ambitions

Taking all of these factors into consideration, it is not of a great surprise that the role and influence of diaspora on Turkey policy formation has slightly diminished. The events of the 2008 had put the spotlight back on diaspora, which became more politically oriented and organized, as it started to cooperate its actions directly with Abkhaz leadership. The diaspora lobbying led to a number of important and relevant political discussions within the Turkish government, including the debates and discussions on the necessity of establishing direct trade and transport links with Abkhazia. Moreover, since 2008 Turkey has been always abstaining and never voted in favor of the Georgia-proposed Resolution Recognizing Right of Return by Refugees to Abkhazia¹⁰⁴, reminding all the sides to be fully committed to the peaceful means of conflict resolution and has never recognized the Georgian Law on the Occupied Territories, restricting free movement and any economic activities on the territory of Abkhazia.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ "The first test train ran on the Georgian section of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line". Retrieved: 25.05.2015. Link: <http://www.mkrailway.ge/main.php?page=35&lan=eng&newsId=75>

¹⁰⁴ "General Assembly Adopts Resolution Recognizing Right Of Return By Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons To Abkhazia, Georgia". *United Nations*. 15.05.2008. Retrieved: 25.05.2015. Link: <http://www.un.org/press/en/2008/ga10708.doc.htm>

¹⁰⁵ "The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories". The government of Georgia. 23.10.2008.

Moreover today, Turkey is the second largest trade partner of Abkhazia¹⁰⁶, second only to Russia that has recognized Abkhazia in 2008. It is rather hard to provide accurate figures, due to the fact that the major part of actual trade does not happen on the paper. This means that the papers and documents show that the ships and vessels are heading to Russian Black Sea ports, where in reality they continue their routes to Abkhaz ports. Another aspect, which creates a number of difficulties with calculations of the Turkish-Abkhaz trade is the fact that any Turkish citizens of the Abkhaz origin is eligible to obtain the Abkhaz citizenship. Once the citizenship is received, any business registered under the name of this person is not considered as foreign, and is not added to the final figures. The visa-free regime between Russia and Turkey introduced in 2011¹⁰⁷ has immensely simplified the process of visiting Abkhazia by the representatives of the Abkhaz diaspora.

However, the growing economic and trade relations between Ankara and Sukhum displeases Tbilisi. The Turkish government has diplomatically addressed all the Georgian concerns, stating that the government has nothing to do with the trade and they are private entrepreneurs. However, the Georgian government is still not satisfied with this loose approach of Turkey to the issue of trade with Abkhazia. In 2012 Georgia went as far as to detain two Turkish ships heading to the Abkhaz coast. The issue was soon resolved, and it has been noticed that the number of ship detentions had significantly decreased after the 2013 visit of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to

¹⁰⁶ N. Tpuridze. "Роль Турции в грузино-абхазском конфликте" [The Role of Turkey in Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict]. Regional Dialogue. Retrieved: 25.05.2015. Link: <http://regional-dialogue.com/en/%D0%B3%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE-%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F/role-of-turkey/>

¹⁰⁷ "Russia and Turkey agree on visa-free travel" *Russia Today*. Retrieved: 25.05.2015. Link: <http://rt.com/politics/russia-turkey-visa-regime>

Georgia.¹⁰⁸ Tbilisi understands the importance and the value of its partnership with Ankara, and would not go as far as to jeopardize it over the issue of Abkhazia. On the other hand, Turkey perfectly understands that the hands of Georgia are tied on this matter and that it does not have any chances on imposing sanctions against Turkey's activities in Abkhazia. Moreover, and where the diaspora becomes very important, is that official Ankara has always distanced itself from any favorable activities and policies towards Abkhazia, stating that those were carried out by the Abkhaz diaspora and have nothing to do with the state.

This very important role of the justifying factor of the Turkish "unique position" in Abkhazia is played by the Abkhaz diaspora. The diaspora is a vital link connecting and implementing Ankara's long-term strategic goals in the region. And this gives Turkey a chance to be present in Abkhazia, while officially being very far from there. Ankara would definitely want to have influence in Abkhazia once the final resolution of the conflict comes, be that the energy potential of Abkhazia, transportation links and infrastructure. Turkey understands that the exclusion and isolation of Abkhazia would never allow for a full incorporation and construction of any successful, be that political, economic or energy, project in the region.

¹⁰⁸ E.R. Eissler. "Can Turkey De-isolate Abkhazia?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*. Vol. 12, No. 3. Fall 2013. P. 130.

Conclusion

The main question of this research is to examine and find if there is any influence of the Abkhaz diaspora in the Turkish policy formation towards Abkhazia. The study shows that there is influence and there is a link between the Turkish policy on Abkhazia. However, the level and value of that influence and pressure is rather diverse and variable, for that matter, the separation of the study into three periods was necessary. Such a structure gave a chance to observe the diaspora generated pressure and the Turkish leadership response and approach.

The first period, starting with the period of the USSR dismemberment and continuing up to the curve of the millennium, shows that the diaspora was very important and influential, first of all it is linked with the lack of necessary expertise and experience of the Turkish foreign policy on how to approach the new region in the neighborhood, a rather unstable region with its numerous conflicts. The study provides example on how the diaspora was cooperating and coordinating its efforts in order to target various public groups within the Turkish society, starting from the general public and continuing with the decision-maker and lead politicians. This is a classic example of what is called ethnic lobbying, as the diaspora maximized all of its knowledge on the internal Turkish structure, put pressure on the politicians through its connections with the party leaders and influential representatives of other diasporas, such as the Circassian one. Moreover, the diaspora positioned itself as a provider of sound and true information on the developments in the war-affected territory. This expert base image gave the Abkhaz diaspora a chance to brief and advise the Turkish government on the matter of the

Abkhaz question for year to come: multiple briefings prior to official meetings with the Georgian government.

The shift of Turkish foreign policy priorities in the mid-2000s and Russia's recognition of Abkhaz state had diverted the role of diaspora, Turkey has been gradually integrating the interests and demands of the diaspora into its foreign policy. However, this policy was never aimed at exercising any political statement, related to the status of Abkhazia. Turkey is very much interested in economic and trade cooperation with Abkhazia that will eventually lead to de-isolation of the last.

After the 2008's recognition by Russia of Abkhazian independence, Turkey has increased its contacts by sending diplomatic envoys to Abkhazia. Turkey has a potential for becoming an important actor in the conflict resolution process in the region, and in case it is fully realized¹⁰⁹, the diaspora will be a vital link of that policy. The diaspora representatives and institutions are closely cooperating and coordinating their work with the Plenipotentiary Representative Office of the Republic of Abkhazia in Turkey – a legal representative body of the Abkhaz state. At the same time, the diaspora is well-connected with the Turkish state itself, many of the representatives of the diaspora work for the Turkish government.

In all the three observed and studied periods one can notice that the mobilization of the diaspora community activities is directly linked with the events taking place in the homeland. The Abkhaz and Circassian diaspora became more politically engaged and active in the period of threat of violent clashes in the homeland: the Georgian-Abkhaz

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Nigâr Göksel, Editor-in-chief, Turkish Policy Quarterly. Istanbul. 24.04.2015.

war broke out in 1992, the military campaign of Georgian in early 2000s and the war in South Ossetia in the August of 2008.

In the current state of world politics and the “new kind of wars and conflicts”, any decision taken is linked to the other actors and players involved. The same applies to the diaspora communities, the Jewish diaspora can be considered as an outlier or an exception, other diasporas that are usually studied in the academia, be that Armenian, Albanian or Chechen, are rather limited in their influence on political decisions of the host state. Since the collapse of the Bipolar World, the world has entered a new stage of development and reached an unprecedented level of integration. This integration does bring economic prosperity and benefits, but at the same time it limits the independent decision-making process. Keeping this in mind, one has to understand, that no matter how big, well-structured and institutionalized the diaspora is, it is highly unlikely that the diaspora community can produce the “policy capture”¹¹⁰ of the host-nation policy formation. What the diaspora can influence and produce is certain favorable policies towards homeland, easing of economic situation, providing information and cultural platforms for discussing the issue, establishment of transport links, etc. What the host nation does is it incorporates and at the same time adjusts the interests of diaspora group in such a way that it does not harm the host state, but brings benefits to it. The Abkhaz diaspora perfectly lines up with other similar diasporas – it has certain influence and depending on the host-nation leadership – it is stronger or rather distant. The Abkhaz diaspora has a major potential for creating favorable condition for the economic de-isolation of Abkhazia, by influencing and lobbying for direct economic and transport

¹¹⁰ Mearsheimer, J.J., Walt, S.M., “The Israel Lobby and the U.S. Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Policy*, V.8, N.3. 2006.

links between Ankara and Sukhum, recognition of Abkhazia issued documents as legal papers. And in the current state of the Georgian-Abkhaz negotiation process, where all the major international actors have been involved, be that the UN, USA, Russia and now the EU, Ankara still remains a major regional power that can be accepted by all sides as a new mediator that has still to realize all of its potential. However, the success and future of this initiative will depend on Ankara's ability to take a neutral and pragmatic to all parties to conflict, something the previous mediator failed to achieve.

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