

Adygeans Back Repatriation Bill

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Rival groups claim the Adygeans have no right to call the North Caucasus their "ethnic homeland"

Ethnic leaders in Nalchik fear that a new law aimed at luring thousands of ex-patriates back to Kabardino-Balkaria could spark fresh conflicts across the region.

The Nalchik parliament passed the Repatriation Bill on its third reading, despite fierce opposition from Balkar and Russian deputies who claim the law is primarily aimed at the vast Adygean diaspora.

With an estimated two million Adygeans currently living in Turkey, Jordan and Syria, critics say the move marks an attempt by local Kabardinians to boost their numbers and displace rival ethnic groups.

The Repatriation Bill was presented to parliament by Boris Pashtov, head of the Commission for Social Politics, and Muhamed Khafitse, leader of the Kabardinian association known as Adyge Khase.

Pashtov told deputies that the initiative was aimed at "representatives of the foreign diaspora of the peoples of Kabardino-Balkaria irrespective of their ethnic origins, whose ancestors were forced to leave their historical homeland as a result of the Caucasian wars of the 19th century and subsequent repression".

He concluded, "Under the new law, these ex-patriates would be granted the right to return to the Kabardino-Balkarian republic."

This invitation would be extended to the extensive diasporas in the Middle East where nostalgia for the Caucasian homelands run high, fed by colourful myths passed down through the generations.

The question of repatriation has been high on the Kabardinian agenda since an Adygean delegation put its case before the United Nations, claiming that ethnic kin in Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adygea had been the victims of Russian repression for the past two centuries.

Adygean nationalists make no secret of their ambition to build a Greater Cherkessia in the North Caucasus - an independent state which would unite the Cherkess, the Kabardinians and the Adygeans under a single ethnic banner.

The state would combine territories across the three republics and would ultimately displace rival ethnic groups.

In this month's parliamentary sitting, deputies led by Vladimir Gugov openly accused the Adygean factions of attempting to secure demographic pre-eminence by "importing" ethnic kin from abroad.

Gugov argued that, in any case, the Adygeans had no historical right to call Kabardino-Balkaria their ethnic homeland.

Some historians claim the Adygeans originated from Anatolia, in modern-day Turkey. According to one version, a group of Adygean leaders were paid by the Turkish sultan to settle on the Black Sea coast, thereby forming a buffer between Turkey and the north.

Unable to dislodge the settlers by force of arms, the Russian tsar weakened the Adygean tribes by sparking off internecine vendettas between their leaders. He was then able to defeat them in a swift military campaign.

Towards the end of the 16th century, some of the Adygean tribes swore allegiance to Russia and were granted large tracts of territory in return for their loyalty. The national museum in Kabardino-Balkaria boasts a standard presented by the tsar to his new subjects who have remained there ever since.

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Location: Middle East
Caucasus
Palestine
Israel

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