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AVRASYA İNCELEMELERİ MERKEZİ
CENTER FOR EURASIAN STUDIES

AVİM Commentary • No: 2017 / 40 • May

# THE FORCED EXILES OF THE CRIMEAN TATARS AND THE CIRCASSIANS

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For the many, the month of May brings the joy of the best days of spring. People energized by the blaze of the sun and the blossom of nature fall into the reverie of the summer. One can notice a general livelihood in the month of May. However, for some, the month of May resurrects other images which are, allas, painted with sorrow; the misery of the choking muggy heat of the cattle wagons and the cold winds that penetrate into the soul; despair of the never ending railroad tracks disappearing into the Urals and Central Asia, and the endless darkness of the waves of the Black Sea; the distress of being uprooted from the native land and being separated from the loved ones; and the anxiety of the obscurity of the new destinations imposed by the invaders. In brief, the month of May signifies the terror of the forced exile.

These are the images that the month of May resurrects in the minds of the Crimean Tatars and the Circassians, whose ancestors were deported from their native lands; the green peninsula of Crimea and the majestic highlands of the Caucasus, and found a new home in Anatolia and elsewhere. 18 May and 21 May are observed by the Crimean Tatars and the Circassians, respectively, as the commemorative days of their forced exiles.

## The Tsarist Russias Expansionism and the Exodus of the Crimean Tatars and the Circassians

The dark clouds for the Crimean Tatars and the Circassian appeared on the horizon by the late 18$^{th}$ century, when the Tsarist Russia stepped up its southward expansion. Crimea was annexed by the Tsarist Russia in April 1783. This resulted in the massive emigration of the indigenous Crimean Tatars from the peninsula to present-day Romania, Balkans, and Turkey, which were then Ottoman lands. Whereas in 1778 there were approximately 500,000 Crimean Tatars in Crimea constituting 95% of the total population, this number fell to 171,751 by 1793. The emigration of the Crimean Tatars continued in the coming decades that resulted not only in the erosion of the Crimean Tatar population, but also in the loss of the human capital in the peninsula. Meanwhile, the Slavic population both in percentage and in real numbers unnaturally increased as a result of the replacement of the Crimean Tatars by the Slavs in line with the long-term demographic policy of the Russian Empire that sought to Slavicize the annexed lands.