

THE GREEK DIASPORA IN UZBEKISTAN: HISTORY AND PRESENT

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Annotation

The article explores the history of diasporas, the Greek diaspora on the territory of Uzbekistan, and the process by which representatives of the Greek nation-exiled political migrants as a consequence of the Second World War-were relocated to Uzbekistan. It analyzes the life of the Greek diaspora in Uzbekistan, emphasizing the humanitarianism, care, and tolerance inherent to the Uzbek people, who, even in the most difficult times, provided selfless assistance to Greeks alongside other national groups. The current situation and social role of the Greek diaspora in Uzbekistan are also examined.

Keywords

Diaspora, global issues, Greek diaspora, Second World War, democratic forces, exile, humanism, care, tolerance.

1. Relevance

The rapid growth and deepening of migration processes worldwide have led to increased scholarly interest and discussion regarding diasporas. Diasporas emerge as a result of either voluntary or forced migration of populations. Today, there are over 200 sovereign states in the world, inhabited by more than three thousand nations and ethnic groups. Consequently, these nations and ethnicities have formed distinctive diasporas, each characterized by its own culture, lifestyle, and language.

At present, numerous researchers are conducting studies on diasporas, focusing on their origins, influence on demographic processes, and their role in the socio-political, economic, and cultural life of various countries, as well as the challenges associated with them. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, a number of scholars and researchers have carried out scientific investigations dedicated to the history of diasporas and their significance in society.

In the modern world, nearly every nation and ethnicity, either entirely or in part, resides within particular regions in the form of national diasporas. The

Republic of Uzbekistan, as an independent state, is also among the multiethnic countries of the world. The ethnic composition of Uzbekistan is diverse, as more than one hundred and thirty nationalities and ethnic groups live together harmoniously as members of a single family.

The preservation, development, and enrichment of the national traditions and cultural values of different nations and ethnic groups residing in our country have always been among the key priorities of the state. Furthermore, Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan stipulates that “The people of Uzbekistan shall consist of the citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan, regardless of their nationality.”[1]. Article 19 of the Constitution asserts that “All citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall have equal rights and freedoms, regardless of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, social origin, beliefs, or personal and social status; all are equal before the law.”[2].

The inclusion of these principles in the fundamental law of the country ensures the protection of freedom of conscience and belief for individuals of all nationalities living in Uzbekistan. Throughout the history of Uzbekistan, each diaspora representing different nations and ethnic groups has had its own distinct historical path and experience.

Among the various diasporas existing in our country, the Greek diaspora holds a notable place. The study of this community—composed primarily of political migrants relocated to Uzbekistan after the Second World War—is of particular contemporary relevance. During the post-war years, despite the hardships of reconstruction, the Uzbek people not only made significant contributions to the restoration of the national economy but also extended sincere humanitarian assistance to the Greek migrants who had been displaced from their homeland.

The successful integration of the Greek diaspora into Uzbek society, their ability to find their place and contribute meaningfully to the community, exemplifies the tolerance, humanism, and compassion of the Uzbek people. The study of this process holds both scientific and practical significance, as it reflects the broader themes of intercultural coexistence and the humanitarian values that define Uzbekistan’s social fabric.

2. Methods and Degree of Study

This article is based on generally accepted historical research methods such as historicism, comparative–logical analysis, sequential analysis, and the principle of objectivity. It provides evidence from historical sources demonstrating that representatives of the Greek nation have lived and settled in the territory of our country since ancient times. In addition, the study highlights the large influx of Greeks who, as political refugees, were forced to leave their homeland due to the

social and political transformations and civil war that took place in Greece during and after the Second World War, seeking refuge in other countries, including Uzbekistan.

The article also explores the resettlement of Greeks to Uzbekistan, their adaptation and integration into the Republic, and their participation in the socio-political and cultural life of the country. Moreover, it underscores the humanistic qualities and tolerance of the Uzbek people, which played a crucial role in enabling the Greek diaspora to survive and thrive within Uzbekistan's society.

Globally, the topic of diasporas has attracted the attention of numerous scholars and researchers who have produced a wide range of scientific studies and theoretical works. Among them are W.Connor (1994), J.Clifford (1994), R.Cohen (1997), Mary Lodigiani (2015), G. Sheffer (2003), U.Safran (2004), M.A.Astvatsaturova (2002), V.I.Dyatlov (1999, 2015), T.S.Illarionova, Z.I.Levin (2001), A.V.Militarev (1999), T.V.Poloskova (1999), V.D.Popkov (2003), V.A.Tishkov (2000), J.T.Toshchenko (1996), T.I.Chaptikova (1996), and A.Ataev (2015). Their works not only present analytical interpretations of diaspora-related issues but also engage in active academic debates, reflecting the diversity of perspectives and conceptual approaches within diaspora studies.

Among foreign scholars, such as Edgar O'Ballance (1966), Howard Jones (1989), Major Frank J. Abbott (1994), T. Lomperis (1996), Jacob Berkovich, Richard Jackson (1997), Jose Cristy (1999), Nikos Marantzidis, Giorgos Antonio (2004), Frank H.Zimmerman (2007), Michael B.O'Sullivan (2010), Katelyn Squires, Erisian Mysteries (2018), A.Kojanov (2014), and S.Balashkin (2018), extensive attention has been given to the Greek Civil War, its political consequences, and the exile of members of the Democratic Army of Greece. Their works document how political displacement contributed to the formation of Greek diasporas abroad.

In the context of Uzbekistan, many scholars have focused on the diasporas residing within the country, emphasizing the tolerance, compassion, and humanism of the Uzbek people toward minority nationalities, as well as the social and cultural conditions created for them. Among these researchers are R.H.Murtazaeva (2010, 2016, 2019), A.S.Sagdullaev (2018), K.Saipova (2018), J.N.Abdurakhmanova (2018), B.Haynazarov (2018), A.Odilov (2019), and D.Inoyatova (2019), whose scientific articles, monographs, and other works have provided detailed analyses of these issues.

Today, the study of various diasporas currently residing in Uzbekistan, including the Greek diaspora, their historical development and contemporary condition, remains one of the most important and relevant areas of research in the field of social and historical sciences.

3. Research Results

Historical sources confirm that representatives of the Greek nation have inhabited the territory of present-day Uzbekistan since the 4th century BCE. Written accounts by ancient Greek historians provide evidence of the presence of Hellenic peoples in this region during antiquity, and these written records are further corroborated by archaeological findings discovered through scientific expeditions. For instance, archaeological materials unearthed by Uzbek scholars E.V.Rtveladze and A.S.Sagdullaev during their excavations of the Talashkantepa ruins in the Surkhandarya region substantiate the historical presence of Greeks in ancient Bactria.

Further evidence of Greek settlement has been found in another ancient archaeological site – Kampirtepa, dating back to the 1st century BCE. Academician E. V. Rtveladze stated that “at the intersection of the Oxus River, there are ruins of ancient settlements called Pardagvi and Pandaxeyon (from the Greek – Pandocheion, meaning inn or guesthouse). This fortified military site (katoikia) was built by the order of the Hellenistic rulers of Bactria to protect a key section of the main road leading into Bactria”[3].

Subsequent historical sources also indicate the continued presence of Greeks in Central Asia in later centuries. During the Timurid period, records mention Greeks and Armenians residing in Samarkand. By the late 19th century, Greeks, Russians, and other foreign nationals appeared in the Turkestan region, engaging in crafts, trade, and entrepreneurship. Some Greeks achieved notable success as merchants and bakery owners. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Greek community in Turkestan numbered between 600 and 1,000 people, with the wealthiest living in Tashkent. In 1917, a specialized school named after Plato was established in Tashkent to teach the Greek language, geography, and history [4].

The first wave of Greek migration to Central Asia occurred during 1942–1943, when Greeks from the Black Sea region and Crimea were forcibly relocated to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In Uzbekistan, they were settled in Samarkand, Kokand, Andijan, and Fergana. The second, larger wave took place in July 1949, when Greeks were expelled from Sukhumi, Poti, Batumi, Krasnodar, and other cities along the Black Sea coast [5].

By the late 1940s, the Greek Civil War had led to a massive exodus of Greek refugees to the Soviet Union. Approximately 12,000 ethnic Greek political refugees were relocated to Uzbekistan, where they settled in Tashkent, Chirchik, and Yangiyul [6]. To accommodate them, 14 residential settlements—later called “Greek districts” by locals—were built near industrial enterprises.

The influx of Greeks to Uzbekistan was directly influenced by the Second World War. Following the Italian invasion of Greece on 28 October 1940 and the German occupation on 6 April 1941, Greece was fully seized by Axis forces by 2 June 1941[7]. The collaborationist government sought compromise with the occupiers, while patriotic Greek forces organized resistance. On 27 September 1941, the National Liberation Front (EAM) was established, followed by the creation of the People's Liberation Army (ELAS) in December 1941[8]. These forces played a decisive role in liberating Greece from fascist occupation. However, after liberation, the monarchy was restored, and attempts to suppress democratic movements led to the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). The conflict ended with the defeat of the Democratic Army in October 1949, resulting in the exile of thousands of political refugees, many of whom sought asylum in the Soviet Union and later in Uzbekistan[9].

In October – November 1949, 12,000 Greek refugees arrived in Uzbekistan – 8,571 men, 3,401 women, and 28 children[10]. Despite postwar hardships, the Uzbek people provided them with generous humanitarian assistance, helping them integrate into society, find employment, and pursue education. Greeks were employed in factories and industrial enterprises and were provided with housing and vocational training. Educational opportunities were created through special courses and schools. By the 1954–1955 academic year, 600 Greek children had completed 7th grade and 65 had graduated from 10th grade. By 1972–1973, the number of Greek students in Uzbek schools, colleges, and universities had risen to 3050[11].

By 1975, the monarchy in Greece was abolished, and political conditions improved, enabling many Greek exiles to return to their homeland. However, some chose to remain in Uzbekistan, where they had established new lives.

In 1964, Greek political emigrants in Tashkent founded the Society of Greek Political Emigrants, which in 1997 was reorganized into the Tashkent Greek Cultural Society. In 2001, the cultural center revived the “Bouzouki” Greek vocal and instrumental ensemble. The Greek diaspora in Uzbekistan maintains active ties with compatriots in Greece, Russia, and Kazakhstan, and participates in joint cultural events[12]. The community celebrates both Uzbekistan's and Greece's Independence Days, as well as traditional Greek holidays such as “Oxi Day” (“No to Fascism!”), Easter, and Christmas. They also regularly perform in national festivals held in Uzbekistan.

Today, the Greek diaspora in Uzbekistan numbers around 10,000 people. Many members of national cultural centers have received state awards, including 14 who have been honored with the title “Hero of Uzbekistan”, and over 120 others

decorated with orders and medals. In 2023, Duras Eleni Anastasios, a member of the board of the Tashkent Greek Cultural Society, was awarded the “Friendship” Order by Presidential decree.

The tolerance and humanism of the Uzbek people have played an invaluable role in the cultural and spiritual development of Greeks living in Uzbekistan. During the years of independence, the spirit of interethnic harmony and tolerance has reached new heights. Owing to the stable national policy of the Republic, interethnic relations have continued to strengthen, contributing to the peaceful and multicultural coexistence that defines modern Uzbekistan.

4. Conclusions

The noble qualities of the Uzbek people – kindness, humanity, and tolerance toward ethnic minorities – were clearly demonstrated even during the difficult years following World War II. As a result of war and political persecution, members of the Greek nation were forced to leave their homeland and arrived in Uzbekistan as migrants. The local people received them with warmth and sincerity, helping them to adapt to a new environment, find places to live, and actively participate in the economic and social life of the country.

Even during the years when the Soviet ideology dominated and life was full of hardship, the people of Uzbekistan remained faithful to the noble traditions of Eastern spirituality, providing shelter and care for those who had lost their homeland. In these events, we can clearly see the humanity, compassion, and tolerance that are inherent in the Uzbek nation.

Today, as a result of reforms aimed at ensuring interethnic harmony and freedom of belief, Uzbekistan is home to more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups, as well as 16 religious confessions, all living together in peace and friendship.

Moreover, there are now over 140 national cultural centers operating across the country. Among them is the “Greek Cultural Society”, established on March 4, 1997, in Tashkent. This society plays an important role in the cultural, spiritual, and social life of the Greek diaspora living in Uzbekistan. Through its activities, Greeks preserve their national traditions and values, while also educating the younger generation in the spirit of patriotism, culture, and friendship.

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