

AZERBAIJAN:
THE STATUS OF ARMENIANS, RUSSIANS, JEWS
AND OTHER MINORITIES



1993

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OVERVIEW OF GENERAL CONDITIONS

SUMMARY OF PRESENT SITUATION

Since 1988, Azerbaijan has been embroiled in a territorial conflict with Armenia. During the Soviet period, various futile efforts were made to settle the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, a territory entirely within the borders of Azerbaijan but with a predominantly Armenian population. Following independence, Armenia gained the upper hand militarily and was able to make significant advances into Azerbaijan's territory.

In July 1993, growing disappointment among certain factions of the population about recent failures in the battle with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh led to the flight of President Elchibey and his replacement by Heydar Aliyev, the founder of the New Azerbaijan Party and the former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party under Brezhnev. His prime minister is Surat Huseynov, a military man turned wool trader, who had led a putative rebellion against Elchibey's rule. Only time will tell whether the new leadership will continue the process of democratization begun by the first post-independence government despite wartime conditions imposed by the conflict with Armenia. Initial reports indicate increased governmental violence against, and repression of, demonstrators, members of opposition parties, and the media.¹

Conditions for Azerbaijan's ethnic and religious minorities vary. All the major human rights monitors agree that the status of Armenians, those married to or otherwise associated with Armenians, and those who are, or are perceived to be, sympathetic to Armenians, is extremely grave. Human rights monitors agree that societal-level hostility toward Russian-speakers --

¹Letter to the Resource Information Center from Professor Audrey L. Altstadt, History Department, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 17 July 1993.

particularly Jews but also to a lesser extent ethnic Russians -- is a problem, but there is some disagreement about the severity and pervasiveness of the hostility. Human rights monitors have also identified difficulties faced by Azerbaijan's other ethnic minorities, including Lezgians, Kurds, and Meskhetian Turks. That this paper deals only briefly with Lezgians, and does not discuss Kurds, Meskhetian Turks or other minority groups is a decision based entirely on which groups are currently applying for asylum in the United States in the greatest numbers, and does not reflect a stated or implied dismissal of claims by human rights monitors of human rights abuses against these groups.²

Brief History

The territory of the present Azerbaijan Republic was ceded to Russia by Iran as a consequence of the second Russian-Persian War by the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828. The core population consisted primarily of Azeri Turks most of whom were Shi'i (Shi'ite) Muslims. Two-thirds of the remaining Azeri Turkic population remained in Southern, or Iranian, Azerbaijan. In addition, there were also concentrations of Jewish and Christian (primarily Armenian) inhabitants, mostly in the region's urban centers. In Karabakh, which is now claimed by Armenia, 78 percent of the population were Azeris, and 22 percent Armenians at that time.³

²Memorandum from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, 13 June 1993. Letter from Paul A. Goble, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, May 3, 1993. Letter from Roger P. Winter, Director, U.S. Committee for Refugees, to John D. Evans, Director, Resource Information Center, 10 May 1993.

³Kh.D.Khelilov, "Garabaghyn etnik tarikhinden" ["From the ethnic history of Karabakh"] AN Azerbaydzhanskoy SSR, *Izvestiya*, 1988/3, p. 42. The data are taken from the Yermolov census of 1823.

(By the time of the 1989 All-Union Census, this ratio had shifted in the opposite direction: the Armenians constituted 77 percent of the population and the Azeris 21 percent).⁴

The discovery of oil in the Caspian Sea in the Baku area gave impetus to a rapid industrial and urban development in Azerbaijan, which caused a large increase in population fueled by the arrival of skilled and unskilled workers from other parts of the Russian Empire, Iran and parts of Europe.⁵

In 1917, despite a vocal Bolshevik minority, Azerbaijan declared its independence and established an independent government. In April 1920, however, the Red Army entered Baku and, with its support, the Azerbaijan Communist Party seized control. Azerbaijan, along with Georgia and Armenia, became part of the Transcaucasian SFSR. In 1922, this federation entered the USSR, and in 1936 Azerbaijan became a separate entity within the USSR as the Azerbaijan SSR. This arrangement lasted officially until December 31, 1991.⁶

During the Soviet period, social and economic changes resulting from the rapid development of capitalism in the region were accentuated by Soviet policies of industrialization and collectivization. At the same time, both traditional and reformist Islam, which had directly or indirectly provided many of Azerbaijan's social institutions such as schools and community centers as well as many of the cultural trends and developments (including many aspects of the country's social reforms), became a partial victim of the official Soviet policy of atheism. These conditions

⁴Gosudarstvennyy Komitet po Statistike, *Natsional'nyy Sostav Naseleniya, Chast' 2* (Moscow: Informatsionno-izdatel'skiy tsentr, 1989), p. 80.

⁵David B. Nissman, *The Soviet Union And Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism For Political Penetration* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 14, 15.

⁶"Azerbaijan Sovet Sosialist Respublikasy," *Azerbaijan Sovet Ensiklopediyasy* (Baku,1976), v. I, p. 170.

effectively damaged much of Azerbaijan's social fabric. The Stalinist purges, which began in the early 1930s and continued until Stalin's death in 1953, decimated Azerbaijan's academic and cultural intelligentsia. Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, introduced in 1985, quickly took hold. Social agitation became more pronounced and more open as press censorship was gradually relaxed. It was not until 1988, however, that the frustrations caused by Soviet rule came to open, public expression on a mass scale.⁷

NKAO Crisis and the Baku Demonstrations of 1988

In February 1988, the Armenian government stopped defending Armenia's large Azeri minority in the face of public Armenian pressure against the Azeris in Armenia; as a result, Azeris were compelled to seek refuge in neighboring Azerbaijan. The Armenian policy was orchestrated with demands of the predominantly Armenian population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast [NKAO] for a popular referendum on national self-determination. Subsequently, leaders of the Armenian "Karabakh Committee" suggested that Armenia should annex the NKAO. While the Azeri press, still chafing under the remnants of censorship, at first paid very little attention to these claims, the arrival of thousands of refugees from Armenia in Azerbaijan's major cities became more and more noticeable.⁸

The increase in Azeri-Armenian ethnic hostility, which had slumbered for some 70 years, attracted notice even in the Western press, which reported on anti-Armenian acts in a number of Azerbaijan's cities. As the expulsions of Azeris from Armenia mounted, so did public frustration

⁷David B. Nissman, "The National Reawakening Of Azerbaijan," The World & I, February 1992, p. 80.

⁸David B. Nissman, "The National Reawakening Of Azerbaijan," The World & I, February 1992, pp. 80, 81.

in Azerbaijan. In November-December 1988, a massive demonstration took place in Baku's central square in which hundreds of thousands of Azeris heard speakers call for an end to the expulsion of their compatriots from Armenia, an end to the repression of religion, reunification with their perceived co-nationals in Iranian Azerbaijan, democracy, national sovereignty, freedom of the press, and political pluralism. Although these demonstrations continued for two weeks without interruption, they were orderly and free of violence. It was the first public expression of what had hitherto been suppressed during the entire Soviet period.⁹

The major consequence of this public mass action was that political organizations separate from the Azerbaijan Communist Party began to form, foremost of which was the Azerbaijan People's Front [APF] (also referred to as the Azerbaijan Popular Front or the Popular Front). The APF developed local organizations throughout Azerbaijan; its major initiatives throughout 1989 consisted of insisting that the provisions of the Soviet-Iran Treaty, which had been ratified the year before, be fulfilled (meaning that border crossing points into Iranian Azerbaijan be opened and contacts between Azeris from Iran and the Soviet Union be broadened), that Armenia allow the return of Azeris who had been expelled from their homes in the Armenian SSR and that they be compensated for the loss or damage to their property, and that Azerbaijan retain full sovereign rights over the territory of the NKAO. By this time, some 250,000 Azeri refugees had arrived in Azerbaijan from Armenia, and interethnic clashes between Azeris and Armenians began to intensify.¹⁰

⁹David B. Nissman, "The National Reawakening Of Azerbaijan," The World & I, February 1992, pp. 80, 81.

¹⁰Dr. Nadir Mekhtiyev, "Testimony...", The Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis: Prospects For Resolution, CSCE (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 23 October 1991).

Soviet Occupation

In January 1990, Soviet troops, allegedly responding to reports of a pogrom directed against the Armenian inhabitants of Baku, intervened in Baku and declared a state of martial law. At this point, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan had lost the majority of its rank and file membership due not only to the military occupation of Baku, but also to the ineffectiveness of the Gorbachev regime in dealing with the NKAO and the Armenian-Azeri ethnic clashes.¹¹

When the Soviet Union dissolved itself in December 1991, the former First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, Ayaz Mutalibov, was elected President of Azerbaijan in an uncontested election. A few months later, under charges that the election had been rigged and that Mutalibov's clique of former Communists was impeding the development of democracy in the country, he was deposed. New elections were held in June 1992. Abulfaz Elchibey, the candidate from the APF, was elected President.

The Azerbaijan-Armenian ethnic conflict has escalated into a full-fledged war, which is exacting a toll on the development of democratic institutions in those parts of the country directly affected by the war. In other parts of Azerbaijan a free press, freedom of religious belief and other democratic institutions are developing rapidly (initial indications suggest that political and religious freedoms may be affected negatively by the July 1993 coup).¹² While Azerbaijan does not yet have a Constitution, drafts of one are being worked out and are expected to be presented

¹¹Soviet troops officially withdrew from the conflict with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in late 1991. The final contingents of Russian (formerly Soviet) troops left Azerbaijan in early 1993. Shireen Hunter, "Azerbaijan: Search for Identity and New Partners," in Nations And Politics In The Soviet Successor States (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 225-260.

¹²Letter to the Resource Information Center from Professor Audrey L. Altstadt, History Department, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 17 July 1993.

for parliamentary approval during 1993. In the meantime, the basic document is the October 18, 1991, Act of Independence which stipulated that the 1978 Azerbaijan Constitution is valid insofar as it does not violate the Constitutional Act which serves as the basis for the forthcoming Constitution. As noted in a report by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe:

The Constitutional Act declares that Azerbaijan is a secular, democratic and unitary state, in which all citizens are equal before the law. Azerbaijan guarantees to all citizens all the rights and freedoms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other generally recognized international-legal documents, regardless of gender, race or national origin, religion, social affiliation or political conviction.¹³

In the event that laws pertaining to certain situations which require legislation have not yet been passed, laws of the former USSR remain in force.¹⁴ When these Soviet laws come into conflict with the Constitutional Act of the Azerbaijan Republic, republic laws take precedence. Among Soviet laws enumerated as retaining their validity is, "On the legal situation of foreign citizens in the USSR" of June 24, 1981. While this presumably refers to non-Soviet citizens, it is, in fact, ambiguous, as there is no mention of situations in which former Soviet citizens who are now citizens of any of the other former union republics, including the present-day Russian Federation or the Republic of Armenia, would be affected.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE POPULATION

According to the All-Union census of 1989, the total population of Azerbaijan was 7,019,739, of which the Azeri Turks amounted to slightly more than 82 percent (5,800,994), the

¹³Dr. Nadir Mekhtiyev, "Testimony..." The Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis: Prospects For Resolution (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 23 October 1991).

¹⁴"On the temporary legal validity of laws of the former USSR and their application on the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic: Law of the Azerbaijan Republic," Khalg Gezeti, 1 December 1992, pp. 1, 2.

Russians 5.6 percent (392,303), the Armenians 5.5 percent (390,495), the Lezgians 2.4 percent (171,395), the Jews and Mountain Jews [Jews indigenous to the region who speak an Iranian language, also referred to as Tats] less than 0.5 percent (25,190 and 5,484 respectively).¹⁵ Since the census was taken, however, there have been major increases or decreases in these numbers: some 250 thousand Azeris were expelled from Armenia and took refuge in Azerbaijan; approximately 300 thousand Armenians have fled to Armenia or other parts of the former Soviet Union; roughly 50 thousand Meskhetian Turks fled to Azerbaijan from Uzbekistan following a number of incidents of Uzbek-Meskhetian clashes in Uzbekistan; and while there were over 170,000 Lezgians in northwest Azerbaijan officially, it has recently been estimated that there may be over 800,000, many of whom are registered as Azeris. In addition, an unknown number of Russians left the republic following the Soviet occupation of Baku in January 1990.¹⁶

Of the minority populations in Azerbaijan, the Armenians, Lezgians and some of the Jews had lived in the area for centuries before it became part of the Russian empire. The Russians arrived in two waves. The first wave began to arrive following the Russian acquisition of the Transcaucasus in 1828 -- at first a mixture of Tsarist functionaries, and members of Christian sects such as the Molokans and Old Believers seeking the relative freedom of life on the periphery of the Russian Empire. As Baku became industrialized through the exploitation of oil resources in

¹⁵"Gosudarstvennyy Komitet SSSR Po Statistike," Natsional'nyy sostav naseleniya, Chast' II, Moscow, 1989, pp. 77-78.

¹⁶cf. "Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 118. "Baku Reports Armenian Actions; Fighting Near Lachin, Fizuli" (Baku: Radio Baku Network), as reported in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 9 October 1992, p. 39.

the late 19th century, the second wave began: Slavic and other non-Azeri settlers continued to migrate to the region throughout much of the Soviet period.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

During the Soviet period, the Soviet state actively pursued a policy of atheism and, with few exceptions, banned the practice of religion. In Azerbaijan, in which some 90 percent of the population is Muslim, and the remainder either Christian or Jewish, the dismantling of the religious apparatus left a void in community life: mosques and churches had functioned as centers of cultural, social and educational activities until 1920.

After achieving independence, Azerbaijan, which defines itself as a secular state, enacted a Law On Religious Freedom which was put into effect on August 20, 1992. In it, church and state are considered to be separate and the freedom to worship and believe what one wishes is emphasized strongly. This applies to both individuals and religious organizations, on which no restrictions are placed whether they are local in origin or international. The only restriction placed on religious practices is specified in Article One, which states that:

Only in necessary cases can limitations be placed on the practice of freedom of religious belief when required for the protection of rights and freedoms, considerations of state and public security and international commitments of the Azerbaijan Republic.¹⁷

Unfortunately, the meaning of "necessary cases" remains undefined.

Article 29 of the same law states that Religious Affairs Administrations are to be established in order to ensure compliance with the law's requirements as well as to resolve any

¹⁷"Law On Religious Freedom," Khalq Gezeti, 19 September 1992, p. 2. English translation in FBIS Report: Central Eurasia: Laws (FBIS-USR-92-145), 12 November 1992, pp. 195-200.

disputes which might arise with regard to its application. As yet, it is unclear whether these administrations have been set up, nor have any cases of religious discrimination been reported.

Despite the constitutional guarantees against religious discrimination, numerous acts of vandalism against the Armenian Apostolic Church have been reported throughout Azerbaijan.¹⁸ These acts are clearly connected to anti-Armenian sentiments brought to the surface by the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

ETHNICITY

Armenians (and those associated with Armenians)

As stated in the summary of this paper (pages 1-2), all the major human rights monitors agree that in Azerbaijan, the status of Armenians, those married to or otherwise associated with Armenians, and those who are, or are perceived to be, sympathetic to Armenians, is extremely grave.¹⁹ While there were almost 400,000 Armenians in Azerbaijan at the time of the 1989 census, some 300,000 have left as a consequence of the Armenian-Azeri conflict over Karabakh and ethnic clashes between Azeris and Armenians in Azerbaijan's cities. Armenians remaining in Azerbaijan have complained that they are subject to human rights violations, harassment and

¹⁸Memorandum from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, 13 June 1993, p. 4.

¹⁹Memorandum from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, 13 June 1993. Letter from Paul A. Goble, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, May 3, 1993. Letter from Roger P. Winter, Director, U.S. Committee for Refugees, to John D. Evans, Director, Resource Information Center, 10 May 1993. "Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 118.

terrorization.²⁰ Pogroms directed against the Armenian population have taken place in the city of Sumgait in February 1988, in Ganja [Kirovabad] in November 1988 following the expulsion of Azeris from Armenia, and in Baku in January 1990.²¹ Armenian churches remain closed, partly due to the large outmigration of Armenians and partly due to fear of Azeri attacks. The Armenian church in Baku was burned down in 1990.²² By the end of April, 1993, it was been estimated that only 18-20,000 Armenians remained in Baku, mostly in hiding.²³

Azerbaijan's government officially recognizes freedom of emigration and has provided written guarantees to that effect. According to the Department of State, however, Armenians and part-Armenians (most of whom remained in Azerbaijan because they are married to non-Armenian citizens of Azerbaijan) still remaining in the country have reported being refused permission to leave. They have alleged that the Department of Visas and Registrations struck them off the rolls of residents and then refused to issue exit visas.²⁴ A recent report from the American Embassy in Baku noted an additional problem faced by those in mixed Azerbaijani-Armenian marriages:

"...those of mixed marriages cannot look to emigrate to Armenia since Azerbaijanis believe that

²⁰"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 118.

²¹United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1993), p. 708. "Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), pp. 115-118.

²²"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 116.

²³"*Increased Harassment of Refugee Applicants*," U.S. Department of State Cable from American Embassy, Baku, to the State Department, Washington, D.C., 29 April 1993.

²⁴United States Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1992 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1993), p. 708.

they will be discriminated against just as Armenians are here, and because Yerevan Armenians [ethnic Armenians from Armenia] are openly hostile to Baku Armenians [ethnic Armenians from Azerbaijan], and most Azerbaijani Armenians have no ties to Russia."²⁵

In a meeting of Helsinki Commission staff in September 1992, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister acknowledged that incidents of ethnic "intimidation" against Armenians do occur. But he claimed that ethnic Azeri refugees who had come to Baku from Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia are primarily responsible. According to official figures, there are approximately 400,000 refugees and, "given their lack of housing, the number of cases of seizures of apartments [by Azeri refugees from ethnic Armenians], especially in Baku, has risen."²⁶ The Foreign Minister emphasized that the policy of the government is to protect national minorities.

It is clear that Armenians are the target of violence from societal forces and that the Azerbaijani government is unable or in some instances unwilling to control the violence or acts of discrimination and harassment. Some sectors of the government, such as the Department of Visas and Registrations mentioned above, appear unwilling to enforce the government's stated policy on minorities. As long as the Armenian-Azeri conflict over the fate of Karabakh continues, and possibly long after a settlement is reached, Armenian inhabitants of Azerbaijan will have no guarantees of physical safety.

Russians

²⁵"*Increased Harassment of Refugee Applicants*," U.S. Department of State Cable from American Embassy, Baku, to the State Department, Washington, D.C., 29 April 1993, paragraph 5.

²⁶"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 120.

The Russians began to arrive in the territory of modern Azerbaijan following the Treaty of Turkmenchay, signed in 1828 between Russia and Persia, and this first wave consisted of Russian soldiers, Tsarist administrators and members of Christian sects such as the Molokans and Old Believers who felt that they would find greater religious freedom on the periphery of the Russian Empire. With the development of industry, especially the petroleum industry in the late 19th century, in Baku and its environs, the second wave of Russian settlers arrived: these were skilled and unskilled workers, bureaucrats and wealth seekers who settled primarily in the country's industrial concentrations. Many other foreigners, primarily Scandinavians and Germans who worked for Baku's oil industry, also emigrated in this period. Baku was a major international city by the time of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and like the other cities of the Russian Empire, was seething with new political ideas. Although Azerbaijan had declared itself to be independent and had formed itself into a republic, the Bolsheviks were able to seize power and overthrow the new republic in April 1920. Bolshevism and socialism, at the outset, were not movements which were nationally or nationalistically oriented; there were also powerful Muslim socialist movements. Because the initial phases of political change were a co-operative effort by Russian Bolsheviks and Muslim socialists, Russians were not initially perceived as an ethnic oppressor in Azerbaijan.

The situation changed drastically when Stalin came to power and solidified his position in the late 1920s and early 1930s through collectivization and purges which lasted until his death in 1953. During this period, Azerbaijan's native intelligentsia was swept away through exile and execution, and Azeri Turkish, which had continued to develop in the first years of Soviet rule, gradually began to be neglected in politics, meetings, offices and education in favor of Russian. It

must be noted that there was no time when Azeri was not the state language of the Azerbaijan SSR (unlike the situation in the Central Asian republics in which Russian became the sole official language). During the Stalin era, a native Azeri political and managerial elite was co-opted by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and they, too, gave precedence to Russian language knowledge. Programs designed to teach Azeri to the Russian and other non-Azeri peoples living in Azerbaijan in the 1920s were abandoned by the mid-1930s, and were not resurrected until the late 1980s. While the Russian population of Azerbaijan received little blame for the excesses and incompetence of the Soviet Communist Party (which was, after all, multi-ethnic), it was and is felt by some of the core Azeri population that they could be accused of russification and neo-colonialism.²⁷

In 1989 and 1990 a plan called the 'government Azeri language program,' the purpose of which was to stimulate the use of Azeri in place of Russian and create an educational network permitting non-Azeri speakers to learn sufficient Azeri for use in the workplace, was established. It is still too early to determine its effectiveness. Azeri's growing importance as a tool of communication was observed as early as 1989, when it was noted that "the first psychological barrier confronted by leading workers when they had to go out among the people is a poor knowledge of the mother tongue."²⁸ It is clear that as the importance of Azeri continues to increase and the need for Russian, which is still considered to be Azerbaijan's other official

²⁷cf. M.E. Resulzade, "Russification in Form, Russification in Content," Edebiyyat Ve Injesenet (Baku), 19 October 1990, p. 6, reprinted from Azerbaijan (Ankara #5, 1952).

²⁸Vagif Aslanov, Kommunist (Baku), 25 January 1989, pp. 2, 3.

language, wanes, those citizens of Azerbaijan who are unable to learn Azeri will gradually begin to lose opportunities.

Azerbaijan's citizenship law, as it is now being formulated, confers automatic citizenship to anyone born on Azerbaijan's territory regardless of nationality or religion. Azerbaijan is also a signatory to the Helsinki Final Act which commits them to observe the strictures agreed to by the Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe [CSCE] in Helsinki internationally on human rights, democratization and the development of a free market economic system. As a consequence, the government of Azerbaijan has not espoused any policies which would be any more detrimental to Russian ethnic interests than to those of the Azeri Turks themselves. Members of the Russian Orthodox community in Baku, meeting with members of the Helsinki Commission staff in June 1992, made no complaints about their freedom of religion (there are two Russian Orthodox churches in Baku).²⁹ An additional factor to consider is that Russia is Azerbaijan's most important trading partner, a point which is stressed in the Azerbaijan-Russia Agreement On Trade-Economic Cooperation, Monetary and Credit Relations and Trade Policy which was signed in the Autumn of 1992.³⁰

Azerbaijan has also signed an agreement on economic, scientific-technical and cultural cooperation with the city of St. Petersburg and another on trade and economic cooperation with Tatarstan, and there is no doubt that similar agreements with other regions of the Russian

²⁹"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 116.

³⁰"Documents on Cooperation with Russia Signed," Khalg Gezeti (Baku), 26 September 1992, p. 1.

Federation will soon follow.³¹ Subsequently, the presidents of Azerbaijan and Russia signed the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Security on October 12, 1992, which implies further assurances of the safety of Russians in Azerbaijan.³²

While the Azerbaijani government appears strongly committed to protecting the rights of ethnic Russians in Azerbaijan, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe reports that some societal-level hostility toward Russians and Russian-speakers exists. Among the issues raised were incidents in which Azeri refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh seized apartments belonging to non-Azeris (a few Azeris also had their apartments seized), and hostility toward Russians married to or otherwise connected with Armenians.³³

Jews

While all sources appear to agree that the Azerbaijani government is making a sincere effort to guarantee the rights of Jews in Azerbaijan, and all agree that there is some societal hostility against Jews in Azerbaijan which the government has been unable to control, there are differences in perceptions of the level or extent of societal hostility against Jews. More than eight thousand Azerbaijani Jews emigrated to Israel or other countries between 1979 and 1989 under a relaxed Soviet policy with regard to Jewish exit permits. Many of the Jews who remain, as well

³¹The agreement with St. Petersburg is detailed in Khalg Gezeti, 30 September 1992, p. 3, and with Tatarstan in Khalg Gezeti, 25 September 1992, p. 2.

³²"Azerbaijan-Russia: Treaty On Friendship, Cooperation And Mutual Security Is Signed," Khalg Gezeti, 14 October 1992, p. 1.

³³"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 118-119.

as many who moved to Israel, are involved in Azerbaijan-Israel trade and economic relations, a role which they play with the full support of both countries. In a report on the granting of dual citizenship to Israeli Azerbaijani Jews, it was pointed out that Israel was one of the two countries (the other was Iran) which had supported Azerbaijan during the Soviet Army's occupation of Baku in January 1990.³⁴

According to the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre report on the status of Jews in the various republics of the former Soviet Union, "there is no long history of anti-Semitism in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan."³⁵ The report quotes a former Jewish resident of Baku stating in January 1992 that Azerbaijan, of the former Soviet republics, is "perhaps the best place for Jews to live."³⁶ In June 1992, members of the Helsinki Commission staff met with representatives of Baku's Jewish community and reported that Jews made no complaint about restrictions on their freedom of religion, and there are now several synagogues in Azerbaijan.³⁷ The Law on Religious Freedom, passed subsequent to the Helsinki Commission's visit, confirms Azerbaijan's commitment to religious freedom.

However, while the Azerbaijani government appears strongly committed to protecting the rights of Jews in Azerbaijan, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe reports that some societal-level hostility toward Russian-speakers and non-Azeris exists. Among the issues

³⁴Khalg Gezeti (Baku), 16 January 1992, p. 2.

³⁵"CIS, Baltic States and Georgia: Situation of the Jews" (Ottawa, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre, July 1992), p. 20.

³⁶Arye Wasserman in The Jerusalem Post, 4 January 1992, quoted in "CIS, Baltic States and Georgia: Situation of the Jews" (Ottawa, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre, July 1992), p. 21.

³⁷"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 116.

raised were incidents in which Azeri refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh seized apartments belonging to non-Azeris (a few Azeris also had their apartments seized), and hostility toward those married to or otherwise connected with Armenians.³⁸ The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and the Canadian Documentation Centre note that Jews, as well as Armenians, were targets of violence and verbal abuse in Sumgait (in February 1988) and Baku (in January 1990). The Lawyers Committee states that private interviews in the United States with Jews from Azerbaijan indicated that those interviewed perceived a greater level of societal hostility toward Jews than is indicated by the interviews conducted in Azerbaijan by the CSCE.³⁹

Jews who emigrated to Azerbaijan when it became part of the Russian empire, and whose first language is Russian, will face the same difficulties with employment and other opportunities as other Russian-speakers as Azeri becomes the primary language in Azerbaijan (see section above on Russian-speakers). However, Jews whose families settled in the region long before it became part of the Russian empire, and who are fluent in Azeri, will probably not be affected by the growing emphasis on the Azeri language.

Lezgians

There are numerous smaller groups of Caucasian peoples living in Azerbaijan. The largest such minority is the Lezgians, who are predominantly Sunni Muslim and speak their own

³⁸"Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union" (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, January 1993), p. 118.

³⁹"CIS, Baltic States and Georgia: Situation of the Jews" (Ottawa, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board Documentation Centre, July 1992), p. 21. Memorandum from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights to John D. Evans, Resource Information Center, 13 June 1993.

language, which is part of the Dagestani language group. There were officially somewhat more than 171,000 Lezgians, mostly in northwestern Azerbaijan, in 1989 (and 205,000 in neighboring Dagestan, which is part of the Russian Federation); unofficial statistics claim that more than 800,000 Lezgians actually reside in Azerbaijan, the disparity explained by the majority of Lezgians having registered themselves as Azeris during the Soviet period due to social and political pressure to conform to the dominant ethnic group. With the advent of perestroika, the Lezgian leadership in the then Russian and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics united to form the 'Sadval' Lezgian Peoples Movement which advocates the unification of the Lezgian-populated territories in Azerbaijan and Dagestan in order to form a sovereign Lezgian state within a Dagestani context. The mobilization of Azerbaijan as a result of the war with Armenia and the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks from Uzbekistan on land considered to be Lezgian has given added impetus to the Lezgian movement.⁴⁰

Under the Azerbaijan Republic there has been an effort to resolve various Lezgian issues at the Consultative Council of Small Nations which is headed by a state counselor to the President of Azerbaijan and which works closely with the Samur Cultural Center in Baku. Samur is a more moderate Lezgian movement, often at odds with Sadval. Recognition of the Lezgian problem at the state level in Azerbaijan along with a recent, far-reaching law on ensuring the rights and freedoms of national minorities in Azerbaijan could possibly reduce the chances of conflict over

⁴⁰cf R. Batyrshin, *The Lezghian Question as Detonator of a Fresh Conflict. Will Azerbaijan and Russia Be Able to Avoid It?* (Moscow: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 15 September, p.3) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 9 October 1992, p. 1 and "Potential For Lezgian Unrest Examined," FBIS: Central Eurasia: FBIS-USR-93-001, 4 January 1993, pp. 63-66.

the issue. If these measures prove to be ineffective, Lezgian requests for asylum are not outside the bounds of probability.

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