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THE ACTIVITIES OF IRANIAN AND TURKISH RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND  
ORGANIZATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC BETWEEN 2003-2012 AND THE POSITION  
OF AZERBAIJAN STATE

Thesis submitted to the  
Institute of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

International Relations

by

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Fatih University

June 2013

**M.A. Thesis in International Relations**

**June - 2013**

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**Thesis Date** : June 2013

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## **AUTHOR DECLARATIONS**

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
2. This thesis is consisted of:
  - i) Research of the activities of external religious groups, i.e. Iranian and Turkish, in Azerbaijan between 2003-2012.
  - ii) Examination of the position of Azerbaijan to these movements during 2003-2012.

Seljan GASIMZADE

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Seljan GASIMZADE**

**June 2013**

### **The Activities of Iranian and Turkish Religious Groups and Organizations in Azerbaijan Republic between 2003-2012 and the Position of Azerbaijan State**

This thesis is aiming to provide the information about the activities of Iranian and Turkish religious movements in Azerbaijan republic between 2003-2012 and how Azerbaijan reacts to the influences of these organizations within the country. It consists of four parts after the introduction that is included to explain the title "description of religious environment in Azerbaijan". The first part following it identifies the internal religious dimensions formed in Azerbaijan after the fall of Soviet Union. The second part is about the Iranian and Turkish religious movements operating in Azerbaijan and reaction to these processes by Azerbaijan. This part also shows how Iranian and Turkish religious groups, events and processes of Azerbaijan affect their relationships in political level. The thesis is finalized by the analyzing of the thesis subject and putting concluding remark.

All the work is to depict to answer the questions about "what is the importance of religion in Azerbaijan?" and "how the Iranian and Turkish religious activities in Azerbaijan influenced and shaped the public and political opinion about religion itself?"

#### **Key words:**

Religious movements, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Religious activities, public opinion.

## **KISA ÖZET**

**Seljan GASIMZADE**

**Haziran 2013**

### **2003-2012 Yılları Arasında Azerbaycan Cumhuriyetinde İran ve Türkiye Kökenli Dini Örgütlerin Faaliyeti ve Azerbaycan' ın Tutumu**

Bu tez, 2003-2012 yılları arasında Azerbaycan Cumhuriyetinde İran ve Türkiye dini hareketlerinin faaliyeti hakkında ve Azerbaycan devletinin ülke içinde bu kuruluşların etkilerine nasıl tepki gösterdiği bilgisini vermeyi hedefliyor. "Azerbaycan'da dini çevrenin tanımı" başlığını yanıtlamak üzere dahil edilen giriş kısmını takiben dört bölümden oluşmaktadır. Onu müteakip ilk bölüm Sovyetler Birliğinin çöküşünden sonra Azerbaycan'da oluşan iç dini boyutları tanımlıyor. İkinci bölüm Azerbaycan'da İran ve Türkiye dini hareketlerinin faaliyeti ve Azerbaycanın bu duruma tepkisi hakkındadır. Bu bölüm ayrıca, İran'ın ve Türkiye gruplarının Azerbaycan'daki dini olaylara ve süreçlere nasıl politik düzeyde devlet ilişkilerine etki ettiğini gösteriyor. Tez, tez konusunun analizi ve son açıklamaların konulmasıyla sonuçlandırılmıştır.

Bütün bir çalışma "Azerbaycan'da dinin öneminin ne olduğu?" ve "Türk ve İran dini faaliyetlerinin Azerbaycan'daki kamu ve siyasi kesimin din hakkında görüşlerine nasıl etki ettiği?" sorularını cevaplayıp ortaya sermek uğrundadır.

#### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Dini hareketler, İran, Türkiye, Azerbaycan, Dini faaliyetleri, Kamuoyu.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I gratefully acknowledge all those who has contributed to the preparation of this thesis. Special acknowledgements to the all teaching stuff and research assistants of Fatih University's International Relations department. Especially, my thesis advisor Mr. Savash Genc deserve very much thanks because of his comprehensive, useful and proper guidance during my thesis preparation.

Another person that has been crucial in the process is my mother, Mrs. Ghamar Khanim Javadli, the first deputy of Caucasian Muslim's Board who had great contributions and gave invaluable advices to the subject determination of this dissertation.

I should also mention my father Mr. Aliheydar Gasimov without whose encouragements maybe I would not find any motivations to begin and end this writing and come to this degree. Also thanks to my dear husband Anar for his great patience, worries and support during preparation of this work.

## **PREFACE**

This thesis has been prepared to describe the role and activities of Islamic movements in Azerbaijan which come from abroad, particularly Iran and Turkey. The influence and impact of their activities to Azeri society is subject to examine in this dissertation. A big attention is given to present the understanding, history, internal place and revival of Islam in Azerbaijan after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. Before starting to analyze the activities of Iranian and Turkish religious movements, the concentration also is given to look up and measure the Azeri-Iranian and Azeri-Turkish relationships from historical, cultural and political perspective.

Since I am Azerbaijani, this was not difficult for me to choose such a familiar theme. My aim is to show to the distinguished audience, the "different" side of Azerbaijan from the religious point of view, which is not much researched or payed attention yet. I am very grateful to the studies and works of Vali Nasr, Osman Nuri Aras, Sofie Bedford, Nasib Nasibli, Anar Valiyev and etc. notable researchers for providing me with useful information in this field. Special thanks to Gamar Khanim Javadli, Aydin Talibzadeh, Aynur Kerimova, Muqeddes Payizov, Ahliman Rustamov and Gulu Maharramli for their participation in my research study.

I hope that reading this dissertation would be helpful in understanding and enriching knowledge about Azerbaijan and its current relationships with Turkey and Iran. So, it will be great achievement for me if with the help of this work; I could interest those who until this time only saw Azerbaijan as a supplier of natural gas & petroleum and strategically important area in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

### Description of religious environment in Azerbaijan

*“The collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of Communist ideas paved the way for an Islamic revival in Azerbaijan. Being one of the most secular Muslim republics of the Soviet Union, today, Azerbaijan is facing a dilemma concerning how to address contemporary religious issues.”* (Valiyev, 2005).<sup>1</sup>

A majority of the population in Azerbaijan identifies itself as Muslim, but given its geographical location the area has throughout history found itself under the influence of the cultures of the large empires that surrounded it. Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam enriched the history of Azerbaijan and shaped the formation of Azerbaijani identity, which, also in turn, affected by Iranian, Turkish and Russian influences. As a result, Azerbaijanis, similarly to the Iranians, are predominantly Shi'ite, while ethnically and linguistically they are Turkic.

Along with this, Russian dominion in these areas for a more than one century significantly changed the perception of Islam and even played a “great” role in the diminishment of the knowledge of its most basic rules. According to one study (Bedford, 2009), *“Under the Tsarist power the traditional Islamic leadership was abolished and later on the Soviet leaders tried to further diminish the devoutness of Muslims in the area through an anti-religious and atheist policy. These measures seem to have had a major impact on Azerbaijan, which has been portrayed as the most secularized and modernized of the Islamic republics.”* (Bedford, 2009, “Islamic activism in Azerbaijan: Repression and Mobilization in a Post-Soviet Context”).<sup>2</sup> From this point of view we may say that, Russian supremacy had been “successful” in introducing their own anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Valiyev, A. (2005). “Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic”. Middle East Review of International Affairs. Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Bedford, S. (2009). “Islamic activism in Azerbaijan: Repression and Mobilization in a Post-Soviet Context”. *Stockholm Studies in Politics* 129. Department of Political Science, Stockholm University.

religious agenda and by this way, had impacted the course of Islam over the Caucasian Muslims for a long time.

In spite of this “unpleasant” background, today, Azerbaijan is experiencing a religious revival. However again, it faces challenges and obstacles of different type and “color” on the road of maintaining and understanding Islamic values. Ideological disorientation, the search for national and cultural identity, the Karabakh conflict with Armenia, and the position of Azeri state towards religious issues are among the major factors which define the place of Islam in modern Azerbaijan.

## **Brief history of Islam in Azerbaijan**

To begin with the history of Islam in Azerbaijan, it must be taken into the consideration that the first and dominant religious tradition of pre-Islamic Azerbaijan and Iran was Zoroastrianism. *“The name Azerbaijan is Persian and means “protect(or) of Fire”, which is said to have a direct link with Zoroastrianism.”*<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Zoroastrianism which originated in Azerbaijan was inspired by the fires that shoot from the soil in the country. This phenomenon Zoroastrians consider as a divine symbol. This new religion was not only accepted by the tribes living in the territory of Azerbaijan. At the same time, it became the religion of people living in Iran, India, Central Asia and other countries.

The founder of this flow was Prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), who was born in what is now Azerbaijan. The name of the religion is related to his name. Still, there is an ongoing debate among the researchers about the life and activities of Zoroaster. Despite the large amount of research on this subject for a long time, yet there is no accurate information about when and where exactly Zoroaster lived and worked as it was estimated range from 1700 BCE to 500 BCE.

The main provision of the religion of Zoroaster is that, the two oppositional forces in the world fight with each other constantly. It is reflected in Christianity as “Christ” and “Antichrist” and in Islam, in a more pure and divine form, as God (Allah) and Devil

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<sup>3</sup> Zoroastrianism, By Paula R. Hartz, Joanne O'Brien, Martin Palmer 3rd ed. at p. 102  
<http://books.google.com/books?>

(Iblis). In Zoroastrianism, "Hormuzd" (Ahura Mazda) is all good, and the evil – "Ahriman" (Angramanyu) is trying to destroy the creation of good. The struggle between good and evil forces is the connecting factor of these three religions.

Many researchers on this field claimed that, Azerbaijan was the papal state for Zoroastrian movement. The most prestigious fire temples were located there. According to local legends and ancient chronicles, the Old Friday Mosque (Juma Mosque) in the city, and the Albanian Church was built in the place of fire and water temples. The towers and castles of Absheron region (suburb of Baku city) were also considered as the Zoroastrian temples. Even the famous Maiden Tower, which located in the center of Baku, is thought to be the part of Zoroastrian culture.

According to A. Valiyev, (2005) *"more than 2,100 years ago, Azerbaijan became the center of Zoroastrianism."* He also points that, *"Until the seventh century, the religion dominated Azerbaijan and played an important role in shaping the worldview and traditions of the Azeri people."* (Valiyev, 2005, *"Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic"*). Indeed, Zoroastrian tradition can still be found in the culture, fairytales, music and literature of Azerbaijani nation. For example, still in many regions of the country, pouring water in a burning fire or blowing the burning candle is considered to be a sin. At the same level, the sudden burn out of candle, fire, or burning object means an affliction for the family in the near future.

In the seventh century A.D., Islam arrived in Azerbaijan with Arab invaders, gradually supplanting Zoroastrianism. In the era of the Arab Caliphate, everywhere in cities mosques were building, here was the resettlement of a number of Arab families (which were mixed with the local population). XIV century Persian historian Hamdallah Qazwini wrote that *"Ganja ... is a city of Islam built in 39 AH"*, which corresponds to 659/660 g<sup>4</sup>, i.e. period of the Arab conquest. According to another report, the city was founded in 844 by Muhammad ibn Khalid and populated by Arab veterans coming from Diyarbakir.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> M.M.Altman. "Historical Sketch of Gangi." Part 1. - Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1949. - p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> "Studies in the History of the USSR: the crisis of the slave system and the emergence of feudalism in the USSR III - IX centuries" - Moscow: Academy of Sciences, 1958. p. 534.

In the second half of the IX century as a result of the weakening of Arab Caliphate, in Shirvan the state emerged, known as the State of the Shirvanshahs. By the time of the emergence of Shirvanshahs, in the Muslim community split into Sunnis and Shiites were occurred. Shirvanshahs were the adherents of Sunni Islam and on their coins they portrayed Sunni creeds. However, on the coins of the later period of their rule there is Shiite symbols.<sup>6</sup>

According to one study (Abasov, 2001) the most significant difference between these two trends is that the Sunnis (the representatives of the so-called "classical Islam," the vast majority of Muslims) believe that the supreme power in the caliphate should belong to the Caliphs, elected by the whole community. Shiites, in turn, recognize the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through Ali and Fatima, the only legitimate heir and his spiritual successors. (Abasov, 2001, "Islam v sovremennom Azerbaydjane: obrazi i realii", p.281)<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of XVI century starts the peak of Safavid dynasty, headed by Shah Ismail I. The mainstay of the Safavids were Azeri-Turk nomadic tribes of different origin: "Rumlu", "shamlu", "ustajlu", "baharlu", "tekel", "afshar", "qajar", "zulkadar" and "varsak".<sup>8</sup> In the second half of the XV century, these tribes have a common name - Qzylybashs (Azerbaijani: "Red Heads"), because they wore turbans with twelve purple stripes in honor of the twelve Shiite imams.<sup>9</sup> According to Wagstaff (1985) based on them, Ismail marched against Shirvanshahs, possessed Shamakhy and Baku, and then defeated the ruler of Ak-Koyunlu. Once in 1501, Ismail I captured Tabriz and proclaimed himself shah, he announced the Twelvers direction of Shi'a Islam as the state religion, despite the dominance of Sunni Muslims on the newly acquired territories. (Wagstaff, 1985, "The evolution of middle eastern landscapes: an outline to

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<sup>6</sup> Rahimov, A. "Bakinskiy klad (naxodka 1948 g.)", *Materialnaya kultura Azerbayjana*. Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1953. - p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> Abasov, Ali. "Islam v sovremennom Azerbaydjane: Obrazi I Realii" in D.E. Furman (ed.), *Azerbaijan I Rossia: Obshchestva I Gosudarstva*, 2001. - p. 281.

<sup>8</sup> "Ocherki istori SSSR: Period feodalizma IX-XIII vv." Moscow: USSR Academy of Sciences, 1953. - p. 736.

<sup>9</sup> Pigulevskaya, N., Jakubowski, A., Petrushevsky, P., drill, L., Belenitski, A., "Istoria Irana s drevneyshix vremen do kontsa XVIII veka." - Leningrad: Publishing House of Leningrad State University, 1958. - p. 252.

A.D. 1840” )<sup>10</sup> Valiyev in his work the “Impact of Zoroastrianism” claim that, “*There were political considerations behind these actions. The Azerbaijani (Safavid) state was the rival of the Ottoman Empire, where Sunni Islam was the official religion.*”<sup>11</sup>

All of these studies suggest that, Shah Ismail’s “decision” somehow helped to preserve an Azeri identity separate from Turks and the Ottomans. Indeed, the adoption of Shiism during the reign of the Safavid Empire was the final factor in the formation of the Azerbaijani people and it influenced the formation of distinctive and common features of the Azerbaijani identity

### **Russian Conquest, the Secular Intelligentsia, and Soviet Atheism**

After the fall of the Safavid dynasty in the XVIII century and the years of chaos, in the territory of Azerbaijan formed two dozen semi-independent khanates and sultanates. In khanates adherents of both trends were living mixed, but somewhere dominated Shiite and in other places Sunni followers.

The Russian conquest of Azerbaijan during the first quarter of nineteenth century changed the situation. As noted by Tadeusz Swietochowski (2004), “Russian data of 1830 year show that the ratio of the Shiites and Sunnis in Azerbaijan with a slight advantage in favor of the latter, and in 1848 this ratio was 50:50, but in the 1860s as a result of suppression of the resistance of the North Caucasian highlanders and the mass emigration of Sunni Muslims to the Ottoman Empire, the proportion of Sunni followers significantly reduced and the majority of the population were belonged to Shi’a branch of Islam.”(Tadeusz Swietochowski, 2004, p.8, “Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community.”)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wagstaff, J.M. “The evolution of middle eastern landscapes: an outline to A.D. 1840.” — Taylor & Francis, 1985. — p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> Valiyev, Impact of Zoroastrianism.

<sup>12</sup> Swietochowski, T. “Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of a National Identity in a Muslim Community.” Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. 8.



In addition to this, the new policy aimed to establish Muslim provinces that would be loyal to the Russian empire and would be governed by Russian officials. In order to do this, Russians created a Shi'a and Sunni spiritual department, which made the religious leaders servants of the government. Valiyev (2005) wrote that, *"the creation of two spiritual departments, headed by **"Mufti"** for Sunni and **"Shaykh ul-Islam"** for Shi'a, pursued the aim of strengthening state control over mosques and fueling Sunni-Shi'a differences "* (Valiyev, 2005, "Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic"). All this observation's suggests that, such kind of anti-religious policy of Russia, changed religious composition of population, confused an already complex religious consciousness and led to the weakening of the position of Islam in the area of Azerbaijan.

Interestingly enough, in the weakening of the position of Islam, the Azeri "intelligentsia" also very much contributed. The rapid industrialization following the oil boom of the 1870s greatly affected Baku- the capital city of modern Azerbaijan. The intelligentsia that developed in Azerbaijan was very much influenced by European ideas transferred through Russia. In connection with the accession of Azerbaijan to the Russian Empire, there were growing the familiarity with the Russian people, science and culture, also developing the educational and philosophical ideas; some Azerbaijani writers and poets in their work criticized religious morals and oppose them. For instance, among these, poet Mirza Shafi Vazeh, who ridiculed in his works clergy and religious fanaticism, called for the fight for freedom of the individual.<sup>13</sup> Prominent Azerbaijani writer, educator and materialist philosopher of nineteenth century, Mirza Fatali Akhundov was one of those who opposed the religious dogma. He believed that all religions are "absurd and fiction", which is a major obstacle to the development and dissemination of education, science and culture. Akhundov rejected the idea of God as the first cause of the world, the source of life of the universe, holding the view that the existence of the universe *"... in its origin does not need any other being and there is a single, whole, powerful, perfect, all-encompassing entity, the source of many countless*

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<sup>13</sup> Vazeh, Mirza Shafi. Short Literary Encyclopedia.

*various particles of the universe on their substance ...*<sup>14</sup> (Akhundov, *Filosofskaya Ensiklopedia*). Along with this, Azeri revolutionary writer, politician, statesman, novelist and playwright Nariman Narimanov wrote the novel "Pir" ("The Feast"), which is one of the best examples of anti-religious literature.<sup>15</sup> With poetry and satire against religious fanaticism and backwardness performed many other poets and literature critiques.

In my opinion, these facts do not mean that all Azeri intelligentsia were irreligious and were only aimed to perform and disseminate anti-religious propaganda. Just, the trend and understanding of those times was different. By such a kind of secular stance, intelligentsia possibly hoped to bring modernization and development to society. Among eastern intellectuals there were many who have seen this in borrowing the European model and/or moving away from their own "roots", identity, traditions and culture in order to reach this achievement. Others do just stand on educational position or proposed democratic, humanistic and international ideas. Obviously, we should not also forget the political and ideological considerations of these circles. The impact of Russian Empire, Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Soviet State, and belief to a "bright future" by the hand of Communism – all these processes played an important role and thus, shaped the thoughts of the intellectuals, thereby society.

On the other hand, there were many who inclined to Pan-Islamist, Pan-Turkist and/or Turkish nationalism that gave an alternative way to those pro-Russian and Western sentiments. For instance, in September 1917, there was founded a party in Baku named "İttihad" ("İttihad-Islam", i.e. "Unity of Islam"), based on the ideology of Islamism. It was created by analogy of the Turkish Party of Union and Progress ("İttihâd ve Terakkî"). The newly formed organization, led by Kara Karabekov adhered Islamism and considered Sharia as the main principle of political action. Interestingly, according to one study (Vekilov), it rejected the struggle for independence of Azerbaijan and Turkism in favor of the concept of the national republics in the democratic and decentralized Russia. Party leaders announced that they would support the communist ideas to the extent that they do not conflict with Islamic beliefs. In general, they were

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<sup>14</sup> *Filosofskaya Ensiklopedia*. Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1960. – V.1. - p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> Narimanov, Nariman. *Literaturnoe Ensiklopedia*. 1934.

attracted by the Bolshevik's non-acceptance of Azerbaijan's fragmentation from Russia. That is what made the "Ittihad" natural political opponent of the party of founders of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic's "Musavat", which defended Pan-Turkist ideas. The antagonism between the two parties was one of the main features of the internal policy of Azerbaijan in the period of independence. (Vekilov, "Istoriya vozniknoveniya Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki").<sup>16</sup>

When the "Muslim world's first parliamentary democracy" was established in Azerbaijan (1918-1920) the founding fathers of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) tried to build modern and secular state with allowing the freedom of religion and respect to Islamic values. Among the important accomplishments of the Parliament was the extension of suffrage to women, making Azerbaijan the first Muslim nation to grant women equal political rights with men.<sup>17</sup> In this accomplishment, Azerbaijan preceded the United Kingdom and the United States. When it comes to Islamic attitudes, it is clearly seen in the formation of national flag of Azerbaijan. On the national flag, the green color and the crescent symbolized Islam and belonging to the Islamic civilization and culture.<sup>18</sup> All these facts show that, the heads of Azerbaijan's first republic, by providing fair and moderate policy for all areas of public, tried to show a real example of democratic government. Without making neither prohibition nor extremes, by respecting religion and religious beliefs of the people, at the same time, by founding secular and democratic state, the members of the ADR could built a unique and successful balanced policy that was rarely seen in the history of Azerbaijan.

Unfortunately, ADR's duration was too short, and it had been replaced by Soviet ruling. As a result of atheist policy of Soviet's mosques was closed down, many Muslim leaders were exiled or killed, revoked teaching religion in all public and private schools, and efforts for the emancipation of women were implemented.

Ultimately, the first supreme legal act of Azerbaijan - Azerbaijan SSR Constitution of 1921 proclaimed: "*In order to provide for the working people of the real freedom of*

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<sup>16</sup> R.A.Vekilov.Istoria vozniknoveniya Azerbaydzhanskoy Respubliki.

<sup>17</sup> Kazemzadeh, Firuz (1951). The Struggle for Transcaucasia: 1917-1921. The New York Philosophical Library. pp. 124, 222, 229, 269-270.

*conscience, the church is separated from the state and the school from the church, and the freedom of religious and anti-religious propaganda is recognized for all citizens.*"<sup>19</sup>

Next in 1921, the organs of Soviet power in Azerbaijan was discovered and dismantled a large underground organization - "Azerbaijan National Party defense of Islam", uniting the remnants "ittihadists".<sup>20</sup> In 1923, Central Committee plenum of Azerbaijan's Communist Party (ACP), accepted to strengthen the anti-religious propaganda, and in August of the following year Baku Committee of the party decided to organize the Society of Militant Atheists in Baku.<sup>21</sup> However, Malashenko (2007) reported that "until 1929, the official policy towards Islam in the Soviet Union was the most favorable in comparison with the line held in respect of other faiths and religious groups."(Malashenko, 2007, "Islam dlya Rossii")<sup>22</sup>

The turning point between government and religion comes in the second half of the 20's. At the initiative of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan's Communist Party, in 1920 in Baku there was opened Central Women's Club. At the first meeting at the club, seven Azerbaijani women cast off the veil that was the beginning of the movement for the removal of veils in Azerbaijan.<sup>23</sup>

In 1930's unfolds persecution of the clergy, closing mosques and etc. By this time, throughout the country there are only 17 mosques, 11 of which were Shia, 2 of which were Sunni and 4 were mixed, where Shiites and Sunnis prayed by turn.<sup>24</sup> On the condition of Islam of those time, Tadeusz Swietochowski wrote that:

*"Islam as a religion, of course, suffered terrible damage in the atmosphere of repression and terror. Its rituals are no longer observed in public, religion has been "privatized" and hidden in the depths of family life – in the most stable and conservative social institution of Azerbaijan. Some scholars have pointed out that women who gained more than anyone else, from the early*

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<sup>18</sup> Sabuhi Ahmedov, PhD. Historical science. Flag of the Republic of Azerbaijan // Journal IRS-Legacy. - 2010. - № 2 (44). - p. 23-24.

<sup>19</sup> Hrestomatiya po istorii otecestvennogo gosudarstva i prava: forma gosudarstvennogo edinstva v otecestvennoy istorii XX veka. (Readings on the history of the fatherland and the state of law: a form of national unity in the national history of the XX century). - Yurayt, Higher Education, 2009. - p. 94.

<sup>20</sup> Istoriya Azerbajjana. Baku: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 1963. - Volume 3, Part 1. - p. 271

<sup>21</sup> Izvestia. - Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan SSR, 1965. – p.103

<sup>22</sup> Malashenko, A. "Islam dlya Rossii". M. ROSSPEN, 2007, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> "Vechno jivie traditsii." Baku: Azerneshr, 1968. - p. 167.

*Soviet secularism, gaining formal rather than real equality of rights, later assumed the role of defenders of tradition, which includes the preservation of the Islamic identity of the unit."*<sup>25</sup>

In a similar vein to T.Swietochowski, Farideh Heyat explains that:

*"It is fair to say that a basic belief in God, or more precisely, the fear of Allah, remained in the hearts and minds of the population. As a result, throughout the Soviet period, certain religious practices, such as for example **"paying alms"** (nazir) continued, even if people forgot the wording of **"namaz"** (daily prayers) and no one fasted any longer. And because the Soviets prevented Muslims from going on the **"hajj"** (pilgrimage to Mecca), they unintentionally made other practices, such as visiting **"pirs"**, - the shrines of Muslim holy men, more attractive as substitutes."<sup>26</sup>*

We may suppose from these passages that, Islam "stayed" in the hearts of the Azerbaijani people during those 70 years of communist supremacy, but "reformatted" a little bit to another way. Since, Islam could not be performed officially; people were searching for and alternative and non-traditional ways in order to express their beliefs and adherents. This reason made Azeri Islam unique from either Turkish Sunni group or Iranian Shia movement, since as can be understood, in Azerbaijan, Islam, whether Shi'a or Sunni, was perceived as "culture rather than a religion". Subsequent problems about the perception of Islam by Azeri people arose from this depth.

Another policy of Soviet Union was close cooperation between Shiite and Sunni faithful. According to one study (Heyat, 2008), because the number of mosques open was so small, members of both trends often used the same ones, sometimes with religious leaders providing services to both groups. As a result, today, most Azerbaijanis are not conscious of the distinctions between Shiite and Sunni beliefs and practices (Heyat, 2008, *The Resurgence of Islam in A Post-Soviet Azerbaijan*).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Abasov, Ali. "Islam v sovremennom Azerbajjane: obrazi i realii".

<sup>25</sup> Swietochowski, T. "Russian government, for modernization of the elite and the establishment of national identity in Azerbaijan." Retrieved in March 22, 2012. sakharov-center.ru

<sup>26</sup> Heyat, F. "The Resurgence of Islam in A Post-Soviet Azerbaijan". ADA Biweekly. Vol. I, No. 13 (August 1, 2008)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

In conclusion, from these information's and facts, it is possible to say that, for centuries the way and position of Islam in Azerbaijan was frequently non-stable and tense. Unfortunately in Azerbaijani case, foreign intervention becoming more powerful force than domestic one, had considered it its "duty" to completely upside down the religious values. Thus, Islam in Azerbaijan, especially in the beginning of the last century, had been subjected to the heavy anti-religious policy and propaganda provided by Soviet Union. But in today's day, when we see the restoration of interest and respect to religious values, one can be understood that, religion in Azerbaijan, particularly Islam, had successfully passed its major test. This once again proves that, no regime or ruling is in the power to forcibly break away the beliefs of the nation forever.

### **Islam in Azerbaijan after the collapse of Soviet Union**

The collapse of the USSR and independence of Azerbaijan Republic in October 1991 opened the way for the revival of various identities, including Islamic ones. After the independence of Azerbaijan about 99% of the population began to be known as Muslims. Lots of projects and works began to connect Azerbaijan with the Islamic culture. The foundation of Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, Baku Islamic University and the membership of Azerbaijan to Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1991 were among those achievements.

At the same time, it should be noted that, Azerbaijan after the independence from Soviet Union choose to follow the secular idea. In 1992, Milli Majlis (Parliament of Azerbaijan Republic) adopted the Law "On Freedom of Conscience," which subjected to change regularly. It mandates the separation of religion from the state, their mutual non-interference in each other's affairs, equality before the law for all religions and etc. Additionaly, Art. 18 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan in 1995 declares:

- I. The religion is separate from state, in Azerbaijan. All religions are all equal before the law.

- II. Prohibited the spread and propaganda of religions (religious movements) which is degrading dignity and contradicting the principles of humanity.
- III. The state level education system is secular.<sup>28</sup>

Next to this, the problems with the division of Suni-Shia population of a country, is worth to be known. Although Azerbaijan is considered as a second Shia country after Iran, the Sunni population is not in minority. Generally, Sunni Muslims populate the northern and western part of Azerbaijan, while other areas, including the capital Baku and its suburbs, are dominated by Shi'a Muslims. Unfortunately, the statistics about the percentage of Sunni-Shia population living in Azerbaijan is lacking to show the exact number. It is commonly estimated that, Shia population is consisting about 60-65% and Sunni's are 35-40%. But again, due to the non-sufficient information, this number drops to almost 50:50. These allow us to assume that, in recent years Azerbaijan may rightly be titled as multi-religious country instead of just only Shia state.

In addition to these factors, the population's attitudes toward Islam also should be mentioned. Many researchers claim that, there are certain problems and contradictions in the society's approach to religion. Alizade (2011) reports that, "on the one hand, many Azerbaijani's consider themselves as Muslim and a part of Islamic culture, but on the other hand, they (Azerbaijani's) do not want to increase the Islamic tenets and tendencies in the society. Many see these tenets and dogmas just only in religious practices." (Alizade, 2011, *Çağdaş Azərbaycanca İslam dini və din-dövlət münasibətləri*).<sup>29</sup> Hence according to this study, despite the number of people following religious rules and principles were in increase in the independence years, the secular outlook is more dominated in the society.

These factors shows that, Azerbaijan's position toward Islam is not clear enough. On the one hand, Western-oriented policy, on the other hand, Islamic affiliation, brought it to a very difficult road to manage. Secondly, the anti-religious policy of Soviet

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<sup>28</sup> Abasov, Ali. "İslam v sovremennom Azerbajjane: obrazi i realii."

<sup>29</sup> Alizade, Aydin. 2011. "Çağdaş Azərbaycanca İslam dini və din-dövlət münasibətləri". From <http://alizadeh.narod.ru/meqaleler/37.html>

government in the past and the current politico-religious processes in the world have promoted more confusion and non-correct information about the Islam itself.

There are countless of assumptions and debates about whether Islam is strong or weak in the public life of Azerbaijan. But it is a reality that, Islam is getting more and more influential and neither state nor public can stay indifferent to this.

## **The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Disappointment with the West and the rise of Islam**

Several key factors have contributed to the rise of Islam in Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period. Some of these factors play a more important role than others, and some have a longer history than others. Yet together, they contribute to the gradual rise of political Islam in the country.

Basically, Islam is rising year by year, because during Soviet times, religious practice was not permitted, but when independence was acquired, people felt free to exercise their religious rights and freedoms. So the one reason for the rise of Islam in Azerbaijan is the downfall of the atheist ideology after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, obtaining religious freedom, being able to go to the mosque without fear, and wanting to return to traditional values and roots are arguably the main reasons why Islam has been rising in Azerbaijan. Especially, last ten years, *“increasing numbers of people have started praying, fasting, making the Hajj pilgrimage and attending mosques. In other words, Azerbaijani society is simply returning to a normal level of religiosity as compared with the unnatural condition during Soviet rule. Such processes taking place in Azerbaijan are similar to those in Armenia or Georgia, or Russia and Eastern Europe for that matter, where spiritual revivals have been recorded since the collapse of Communism”* (Cornell, 2006).<sup>30</sup>

Another reason of popularity of Islam is related to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. According to one study (Sultanova, 2012), “Nagorno-

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<sup>30</sup> Cornell, Svante (2006). The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, October



Karabakh conflict has influenced the revival of Islam rather in some hidden form than obvious. This is one of those difficult conflicts in the former Soviet Union, which still remains unresolved, despite the efforts of both sides and the international community to reach a compromise and find a solution."<sup>31</sup> Among Azerbaijanis conflict was seen as a war between "Christian Armenia and Muslim Azerbaijan". Thus, the conflict sharpened sense of national identity among Azerbaijanis. Also, the threat of territorial losses contributed to the formation of national unity. National identity can be formed on the basis of various factors, including such as language, cultural values, common history, physical features - in short, everything that binds people together and united into one nation. Among the many similar features, which are the basis of national identity, religion, perhaps, is the most powerful feature, tied to nationalism. That is to say, the Karabakh war has contributed in more indirect ways to strengthening of the Islamic tendencies in Azerbaijan.

The disappointment with the Western policy also provided to the growing of pro-Islamic sentiments in Azeri society. As the conflict has not been resolved, this has led to rapidly growing levels of frustration and belligerence in society. From the Azerbaijani perspective, the indifference of the West to the trouble of Azerbaijani refugees, and the failure of it to uphold principles of international law have contributed to disillusionment with the West.

It is understandable since the West, was seen as a variant of the Azerbaijani dreams of a beautiful life. There was a naive belief that by using a policy of "oil-for-Karabakh," it will be possible with the help of the West to resolve the conflict and live well. However, gradually, the population had become aware that those who gained access to the oil fields are not going to return Karabakh and assist in the conflict resolution.<sup>32</sup>

Section 907a of the Freedom Support Act, and the U.S. humanitarian assistance to the separatist territory of Nagorno-Karabakh disastrously impacted on the reputation of U.S. and West in Azerbaijan. "*Section 907a of the Freedom Support Act, passed by U.S.*

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<sup>31</sup> Sultanova, Sh. May 2012. "Natsionalnaya identichnost, Nagorno-Karabaxsiy Konflikt I vozrojdeniye Islama." Retrieved in Nov, 1. 2012. From: <http://caucasusedition.net/ru/>

<sup>32</sup> Interview of Arif Yunusov in russian language: <http://www.noev-kovcheg.ru/mag/2007-07/774.html> .Retrieved in 03.03.2012

*Congress in 1992, and prohibited any kind of U.S. direct government assistance to the government of Azerbaijan” (Cornell, 2006). Despite many actions and aspirations from Azerbaijani government to remove this signing the Section 907 is still in force. In addition to these factors, most Azerbaijanis no longer see the United States as an honest mediator within the OSCE’s Minsk group; many strongly believe that the United States is helping to the Armenian side in the conflict. Thereby, “this has become leverage in the hands of the Islamic activists portraying America as an enemy that favors Christian Armenia to Muslim Azerbaijan and interested in Azerbaijan only because of its oil.” (Geybullayeva, 2007).<sup>33</sup>*

Presidential election of 2003 and Parliamentary one of 2005 in Azerbaijan was a major blow to the image of the West. After the collapse of the USSR, all the 90s until the Ilham Aliyev's leadership in 2003, secular parties, which were of different colors and orientations - from the Democrats to the nationalists, played a significant role in politics and mass of Azerbaijan. As mentioned before, at that time, in Azeri society, there was a very strong belief in Western values. But elections in 2003 and the role played by Western countries, primarily the United States, in the coming of Ilham Aliyev to power, inflicted a huge blow to the faith of the Azerbaijani society in Western values and led to widespread disillusion. Yunusov (2004) reports that “*Activists of political parties, NGOs and youth movements put substantial blame on the West for the failure of democratic progress in Azerbaijan. They believed that the primary reason why democracy is failing in Azerbaijan is because of the West, especially, the United States, and its interests in the country’s oil.*” Hence, West “closed eyes” to the repeated reports of widespread fraud in the election process and crackdowns on the opposition parties.

As soon as Ilham Aliyev came to the politics, he began the policy of harsh suppression of dissidents and struck first blow to the pro-Western parties. By the beginning of 2006 they were completely defeated, and since that time the society has ceased to hear of any active actions of the traditional opposition, which played before the main role in society all the years after independence of the country. As a result,

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<sup>33</sup> Geybullayeva, A. “Is Azerbaijan Becoming a Hub of Radical Islam?” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2007, <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2007-03-caucasus/TPQ2007-3-geybullayeva.pdf>

there was a vacuum in society. And this vacuum began to fill the supporters of political Islam.<sup>34</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this way, in the Introduction part, by evaluating the religious history of Azerbaijan, my aim was to show the religious atmosphere and awareness of it from past to present times. Because, all we know that, in order to understand the subject, it becomes necessary to analyze its roots. In the case of Azerbaijan, we firstly look at to its historical chronicles.

Main goal of Introduction part was to analyze the Islam in Azerbaijan from the historical side. As can be understood, Azerbaijan is the secular state with the Muslim population, Shia-Sunni composition and sophisticated identity (geographically located in the Caucasus area, ethnically and linguistically Turkish roots; religiously Persian impact; and the Western manner world view). All these circumstances, obviously makes it different from other Muslim nations in terms of religious sense and consciousness.

Today, the reason of the complex relationship of Azeri state and society with religious elites are the going to the past evidences. Along the history, Azerbaijan was under the influence of big powers from political, economical and/or religious perspectives. It always had to deal with the rules and principles bringing by those foreign forces.

In modern times, despite Azerbaijan is independent politically and economically, in the religious issues it is still vulnerable to the influences of abroad. Thereby, along with the past experiences, today's religious activities coming from abroad also outline the perception and conception of religion in the political and public spheres. The issue of the religious activities of foreign countries in Azerbaijan, particularly Iranian and Turkish ones, will be outlined in the coming chapters more in detail.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.elections-ices.org/russian/publications/textid:9133/> Retrieved in 25.02.2012

## CHAPTER 1

### STATE-RELIGION RELATIONSHIP IN MODERN AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC

Azerbaijan of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the secular republic. The influence of religion, particularly Islam in the political life of Azerbaijan is not big. According to the first deputy of Caucasus Muslim's Board, Gamar Khanim Javadli, "*because Azerbaijan declared itself as a secular state, in the political platform, it doesn't formally provide space to religious trends.*" (see App.1) All interviewed respondents of my research confirmed that, the source of minimal impact of the Islamic tendencies to the political and public life of a country is the secularism adopted by Azerbaijani government since the formation of its sovereignty in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The separation of religion from state and state from religion was reflected in the constitution of a country. Then, we may say that, rules which are determining state's social, political, economical and legislative order are not composed according to religious canons and orders, but according to social needs. Secularism, that is one of the components of a state, is the institution which provides the guarantee of a state to allow freedom of conscience and religion. Then the real freedom of religion may be realized in secular state. Because, only in this state, people can choose their religion without the interference of foreign force, and to apply the rules of those religion in that degree as they wish, or not applying if the person does not wish to do this. In a secular state the freedom of religion means believing to certain religion and applying those religion's rules, and at the same time, cover the freedom of person who not believe to any religion and not applying any religion's dogmas.<sup>35</sup>

In Azerbaijan, after 20 years of release from atheist ruling of Soviet Union, Islam is still concerned as not unambiguous. From one hand, it is clearly determined that religion is separate from state, that's the state has a secular nature. But from the other hand, the discourses about the role and place of Islam - the official religion of a country does not slow down. The best explanation about this issue in today's life of

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<sup>35</sup> Kamil Kaya, "Türkiye'de Din-Devlet İlişkileri ve Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı", İstanbul: 1998, s. 66-67.

Azerbaijan, gives the journalist, academician and the first deputy of Caucasus Muslim's Board, Gamar Khanim Javadli. She defends the argument that:

*Under the influence of the West, the traditional and non-traditional, monotheistic and polytheistic religions and communities of different confessions passed from the state registrations and are functioning along with the Islamic institutions that have historical roots. Although political and governmental structures declared in every manner that they are far from Islam, the mutual cooperation, relationships, benefits and also problems always exist. For example, believers do not have the right to be chosen, but there are attempts to use them as the electorate. Very enthusiastically state financially assists to the repairing and restoration of mosques and other worship places, and at the same time, some restrictions are applying to religious freedoms. From this view, we cannot consider that the influence of Islam is big to political life, but to consider it small is also wrong. (see App.1)*

The similar interpretation is also coming from Associate Professor of Baku State University, Muqaddas Payizov. According to him:

*The population of a country was released from communist regime 20 years ago and still, to claim that, big portion of population (if not all) are religious will be wrong. Despite the head of country's high value to national and moral values and emphasizing repeatedly the role of Islam in the formation and basis of Azerbaijani people's ethical and moral values, the right of pious people (clergy) to be elected or worked in the government agencies and/or law-enforcement organs still does exist as a problem. (see App.1)*

From these opinions we may understand that, secularism in today's Azerbaijan's political life is dominant and there are no places to Islamic sentiments. As noted earlier, restrictions to the religious freedoms, right of a religious person to be chosen in elections and etc. are the some problems that placed in the agenda of a country. Through next parts of the thesis we will try to find, how Azerbaijani government manage with the issue of balanced policy between state ideology and religious

questions. In this chapter the place of Islam – the official religion of Azerbaijan, within the country's life, relations between state organs and religious establishment, functions of state controlled religious institutions and their impact to the society will be evaluated.

### **1.1. Official institutions that regulate state-religion relations**

Religion and state in their establishment of relations always need the mediation of sub-institutions. Religion as a social reality and the state as a most active and most developed form of social mobilization, are the two concepts that settled on the basis of their relations. In this sense, in Azerbaijan Republic there are two institutions that mediate the state-religion relations and play a role of bridge between them: Caucasus Muslim's Board and the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations. Caucasus Muslim's Board represent in itself as a big importance, since, it has an effect on the formation of religious life in the country, depending on the state principles. We may say that, almost all religious organizations and activities are related to this organization.

The other institution is the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations which represents the state and regulate state-religion relations in terms of three main formulas: *Azerbaijanism*, *Secularism* and *National and Moral Values*. For this purpose, it is necessary to examine these two institutions in terms of state-religion relationship.

#### **1.1.2. Caucasus Muslim's Board**

In 1943 was founded the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Caucasus, with residence in Baku, who became the supreme spiritual and administrative authority of Transcaucasian Muslims. Head of the newly created body was the former chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Caucasus, Sheikh-ul-Islam Agha Akhund Alizadeh. In 1980, the chairman of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the Caucasus is headed by Sheikh-ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade. After Azerbaijan gained independence in 1992, the structure was renamed the Office of Caucasus Muslims (or the 'Caucasus

Muslim's Board"). Caucasus Muslim's Board is the high Islamic and historical authority which combines in its own structure all religious organizations of Muslim's living in an area.

The head of board Sheik-ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade, is himself a Shiite Muslim and originally a Shi'a cleric. He is also the world's only Sunni-Shia Grand Mufti (The title of Grand Mufti actually refers and is normally reserved to the highest official of religious law in a Sunni Muslim country), giving each group "fatwas" according to their religious belongings, reflecting Azerbaijan's Sunni-Shia mix. In sum, he holds the position of "*Sheikh ul-Islam and Grand Mufti of the Caucasus*" which includes his native Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Georgia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adygea in the Russian Federation."<sup>36</sup> Chairman of Board of Caucasus Muslims contact with the Office of Islamic organizations and to try to establish close relations with Muslim countries in the religious sphere. In general, the Board manages to Islamic communities of Azerbaijan, oversees the proper observance of the rules of Sharia, progresses in the field of religious workers on the base established in 1991 Baku Islamic University, and in overall, is responsible for the processes taking place in the religious life of the country.

#### **1.1.2.1. The legal structure of Caucasus Muslim's Board.**

In the Law "On Freedom of Religious Beliefs" of Azerbaijan Republic, the legal structure of a Caucasus Muslim's Board were openly determined. Article 9. states that:

*"In the Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic religious communes are united in their historical center - the Caucasian Muslims Board."*<sup>37</sup>

It is known that, Caucasus Muslim's Board is ruling on the basis of regulations which adopted by themselves in their own units. It does this according to the Article 5. of the Law "On Freedom of Religious Beliefs" of Azerbaijan Republic. *"In the Azerbaijan Republic, religion and religious associations shall be separated from the state. The state*

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<sup>36</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allahshukur\\_Pashazadeh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allahshukur_Pashazadeh)

<sup>37</sup> The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Freedom of Religious Belief", II, Article 9, p.4

*shall not instruct religious associations to fulfill any state's affair and doesn't interfere with their activities.*"<sup>38</sup>

#### **1.1.2.2. Function's of Caucasus Muslim's Board.**

Board ensures and defends the rights and legal outcomes of religious organizations that it represents. It guides the religious institutions, places to visits, Islamic education and the activities of science centers of Muslim's settled in the region which are under the jurisdiction of Board, controls them, appoint or dismiss clergy and directs their works based on the law and the law of Board itself.

According to one study, (Gurbanov, 2001) the Board has also the right to arrange the trip to the places of worships (visiting holy places - Hajj, Mashad and Kerbela), helping to organize religious rites and ceremonies related to them, helping to orphanage, people with disabilities and low levels of life and etc. (Gurbanov, Azerbaycan'da Şeyhülislamlik, 2001)<sup>39</sup>

Along with this, Board has a right to participate in religious ceremonies and religious knowledge festivals and conferences taking place outside of the country. Moreover, Caucasus Muslim's Board may connect with state, private and religious communities of abroad and different peoples. In short, we may sum up that, religious services, religious education, protection of social peace and brotherhoods are the functions of Caucasus Muslim's Board.

### **1.2. State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations**

The Azerbaijani government in 2001 established a secular institution, the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, in an attempt to more effectively monitor and regulate religious activity in the country. Headquarter of Committee is in Baku. The committee was formerly headed by Professor Rafiq Aliyev and writer Hidajat

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, I, Article 5, p.2

<sup>39</sup> Gurbanov, "Azerbaycan'da Şeyhülislamlik", Unpublished Master's Thesis, Marmara University, Istanbul, p.102.



Orudjev. In 2012, its chairman position replaced by Elshad Iskenderov, who was the founder of the National Council of Young Organizations of Azerbaijan.

The Committee's main activity, in accordance with the article 48. of the Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic, is to create a favorable environment for the implementation of the freedom of religious belief. In article 48.of the Constitution the title religious conscience is given as follows:

- I. Everyone has freedom of conscience.
- II. Everyone has a right to determine its interest to religion, or not believe to any religion, openly express and/or spread its religious beliefs.
- III. The fulfillment of religious ceremonies is free, when it is not disturbing comfort of social environment and/or not contrary to social morality.
- IV. Religious faith and belief do not give the right to violate the law.<sup>40</sup>

SCWRO in it's activities guided by the Constitution, laws and codes of Azerbaijan Republic, orders and decisions of the President of Azerbaijan Republic, decisions of council of ministers, and official documents which regulate the state-religion relations of Azerbaijan Republic. It is also in mutual connection with the central and local government bodies, legal and physical persons that are related to religious activities.

### **1.2.1 Main tasks and duties of State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations**

There are many tasks undertaken by the Committee. We will try to show the most important tasks and functions.

The main functions of the committee are:

- to create the conditions for the practice of religion in Azerbaijan.

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<sup>40</sup> Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic, Article 48, p.3

-checking for compliance with the laws of the religious practices of religious freedoms.

-registration of religious organizations.

-monitoring for the presence of whether the changes made to the statutes of these organizations.

-the promotion of religious organizations on various issues.

-the creation of interfaith dialogue among religious organizations.

-the creation of a database of information and analysis based on the information and statistics on religious organizations.

-participation in international conferences on religious movements, forums, and analysis of educational programs prepared religious schools.

-creating conditions for a religious pilgrimage to other countries for citizens Azerbaijan and the approval of the State where the sacred religious sites.<sup>41</sup>

It has also broad responsibility in the area of control of the publication and distribution of the religious literature, monitoring of the importation and dissemination of the religious literature, and has the power to suspend the activities of religious groups violating the law. Accordingly, all religious organizations must register with the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, before perform any religious practice.<sup>42</sup>

According to the official internet web page of SCWRO, it also works in the field of avoiding tensions in the religious situation of a country, preventing religious discrimination sentiments to rise into the level of national relations, prevention of efforts of various anti-government groups, under the guise of religious ceremony, to cause a conflict, preservation of social security and stability, and etc. In order to regulate state-religion relations in a normal level, SCWRO, arranges a necessary control to the current

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/StatePower/Committee/committeeConcern\\_02\\_a.html](http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/StatePower/Committee/committeeConcern_02_a.html)

<sup>42</sup> Cornell, "The politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan" (2006)

religious condition and in the way of preventing any kind of negative tendencies are collaborating with relevant international organizations.<sup>43</sup>

### **1.3. Religious education in Azerbaijan Republic**

Religion for people is both individual, as well as, social necessity. It is not possible to dislodge this kind of need from people's mind. For this reason, education in the field of freedom of religion and freedom of conscience emerges as well. For a religious person can choose it as a belief or disbelief, in order to maintain a life consistent with faith or unbelief and to be relieved off the imitation and fanaticism that is the source of ignorance, it is necessary to have a freedom of education which consist of proper religious education and training.<sup>44</sup>

Azerbaijan Republic presents the freedom of religious education within the scope of freedom of religion and conscience in the Article 6. of the Law "On Freedom of Religious Belief".

*In the Azerbaijan Republic, the system of state education is separated from religion.*

*On the other side, theological, religious and religious-philosophical subjects, as well as acquaintance with the bases of sacred-cult books may be included into educational programs of state educational associations.*

*Citizens have the right to study theology and receive religious education in any language, individually or together with others.*

*In accordance with their relevant charters (provisions), religious associations have the right to create, for the purpose of religious enlightening of children and adults, educational associations and groups, and also teach them in other forms and use them-owned properties for this purpose.*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Title name: "Azerbaycanda Tolerantliq". <http://www.scwra.gov.az/view.php?lang=az&menu=253&id=359>

<sup>44</sup> Kaya, Kamil . "Religion-State Relations and the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey", İstanbul, 1998. p. 75-76.

<sup>45</sup> The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Freedom of Religious Belief", I, Article 6. p.3

While within the twenty-one years Republic of Azerbaijan could exceed all issues in certain extend, the field of education is still observing as a problem. The Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan Republic while understanding the necessity to include religious courses into the learning program, still have difficulties in solving this issue properly. There are number of reasons of this. Many connect the source of these problems in the lack of teaching stuff. But now, one can see some changes in the way of solving this problem. In Azerbaijan and other countries there are out of 2,000 graduates who have higher religious education. This condition lesser the degree of problem with lack of teaching cadres. While there are no religious courses in secondary and elementary schools, in higher educational institutions the religious education is seen. Theology faculty of Baku State University, Baku Islamic University, faculty of "National Ethics and Study of Islam" at the Sheki Higher School and etc. are the examples in this field. Additionally, there are religious courses in some private schools operating in Azerbaijan.

In my opinion, the absence of religious education in the elementary, secondary and high schools cause serious and non preventable problems. Because the member of other religions and their institutions may see these existing gaps and would like to fill this in accordance with their own interests. In this way, the future of youth who have fallen away from their religious and moral values is not so promising.

The issue of religious courses was repeatedly stated by media organs. Many scientists, academicians, religious figures and intellectuals of a country also stay on the issue of religious education. One of the scientists of Azerbaijan, Prof. Esedulla Gurbanov, thinks that religious lessons should place within the secular educational system. He defends that, religious courses is necessary for the secular education and explains the necessity of it in this way:

*"If we will educate, promote and investigate religious courses into our education system, we will restore our historical past, help in the emergence of our national conscience and identity, and by benefiting from the worldwide morals and values of Islam, we will be developing in the way to create our national ideology."<sup>46</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> Esedullah, Gurbanov. "Musteqil Azerbaycanda Islamsunasligin Aktual Problemleri." Respublika 12 Apr, 2001, p.4.

The case of religious education to take place within the education system of Azerbaijan is inevitable. This is one of the important points, since it is required by the needs of today's live. It is also important since, world and especially European countries could transcend this problem within the framework of law. Moreover, on the basis of democratic principles we may say that, democracy means the implementation of laws and wills of the citizens. In this sense, democratic principles demand immediately the creation of the same environment to those who would like to get religious education.<sup>47</sup>

Since Azerbaijan also claims that it is a democratic state, it would need to take into the consideration of the will and requests of its citizens. Because, the teachings of fundamentals of Islam in the schools is contrary to neither democratic principles nor Azerbaijani laws. It is a principal right of citizens who live in democratic state.

As was mentioned before, this chapter deals with the internal place of religion and its dimensions in the country. It found that, however Azerbaijan is the secular country, religion is not situated in the last place. In contrary, the interest to religion is rising day by day. "Honored Journalist" of Azerbaijan Republic Gulu Maharramli explains that, *"In the main, most people (especially elders) incline to religion, when the violation of social justice and the rise of hopelessness and injustice in public sphere are occurring. Certainly, modern and educated young people's attitudes to religion have more friendly and more conscious nature."*(see App.1)

From this point of view, it is understandable that, in Azerbaijan mostly people apply to religion in a moment of hopelessness and in order to find an alternative way to overcome the difficulties of life. This means that, as soon as violations and injustice will be observed in the social field, the possibility of the strengthening of the positions of religion will rise in the society of Azerbaijan.

Another fact which revealed in this chapter is that, religious institutions are operating in the country but they have little power to prevent certain undesirable cases (for example, spread of harmful religious flows and ideologies within the country) or go against state's will in terms of certain restrictions in the field of religious freedom. This

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<sup>47</sup> Nedim Kaya, "Dünyevi tehsil Sisteminde Dîni Öğretimi", (t.y.) <http://www.İslam.az/statyi/tehlaz.htm>

fact is also stated by Associate Professor of Baku State University and Head of Foreign Affairs department of Caucasus Muslim's Board Muqaddas Payizov. According to him, *"Islam is a great power but Azerbaijani religious leaders do not mature enough to influence politics with the hand of religion. State's law also does not allow and do not create any condition for this."*(see App.1)

Some measures taken by the government led to serious discontents among the people towards to the decisions of a state. Some of those are: prohibition of hijab wearing in the schools, arrests and sentences of religious figures or religious party leaders, closures of mosques, minimization of a religious knowledge and education and etc. The threat of religious extremism and terrorism is one of the basic arguments of a government that had to take these actions. Obviously, this situation is not favoring state and may lead to the undesirable consequences like striking of religious feelings of a people in opposition and counterweight to state policy. As pointed by the first deputy of Caucasus Muslim's Board, journalist and academician Ghamar Khanim Javadli, *"Restrictions cannot bring stability! Stability may be reached by consensus. State should demonstrate its magnitude and realize true democracy, based on the rule of law, in the respect to believers."*(see App.1)

The absence of officially accepted religious education in elementary, secondary and high schools also observed as a problematic issue. As was noted earlier, lack of religious knowledge may bring misinterpretation and false imagination of real religious values. In this sense, it raises the possibility of certain religious activists from abroad to present an alternative look to religion and promote here their faiths and teachings.

According to all these factors we may sum up that, today the religious policy in Azerbaijan is not easy to direct in a proper and precise way. Azerbaijani government still has difficulties in regulating such a sensitive subject like state-religion relations. This creates a condition where religious forces coming from abroad are getting more prestige and more influence in formation of a religious consciousness among ordinary people.

## CHAPTER 2

### ***IRANIAN AND TURKISH RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING IN AZERBAIJAN***

After independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has faced various problems related to the socio-economic and political orientation, and with the search for the identity of the Azerbaijani state. The problems of self-identification of the Azerbaijani statehood were primarily due to the strong influence of Ottoman and Iranian empires on Azerbaijan. According to one study (Cornell, 2006), socially and linguistically, Azerbaijan resembled secular Turkey, and indeed emulated it. Yet historically and through bonds with the much larger ethnic Azeri population of Iran, Azerbaijan was also tied with Iran, which had rejected secularism and promoted a theocratic state. (Cornell, 2006, "The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan")<sup>48</sup> From the religious point of view, Azerbaijan also has a deep connection with Iran, since Shia branch of Islam is more prevalent among the population of a country. On the other hand, significant Sunni minority, if not people (about 35% of an Azerbaijani population)<sup>49</sup> also living in Azerbaijani lands, that tends to support various Sunni schools of neighboring countries, like Turkey and North Caucasus.

Due to its strategic geographical position and relative religious vacuum after the fall of Soviet regime, Azerbaijan has attracted the attention of many religious organizations coming from abroad. Among Islamic ones three movements were and still are considering active in sovereign Azerbaijan: Iranian, Turkish and Wahhabi groups.

In this thesis study, primarily the activities of Iranian and Turkish religious groups will be evaluated. As was mentioned above, both Iran and Turkey have linked with Azerbaijan whether historically, ethnically or religiously. And both religious ideologies

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<sup>48</sup> Cornell, Svante (2006). The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. p.25-26.

<sup>49</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Muslim-majority\\_countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Muslim-majority_countries)

have a more influence to Azerbaijani believers than any other religious confessions operating there. To the question about impact of which foreign country is more for Azeri believers, specialist in drama study and theater critic Aydin Talibzadeh answered that,

*"I am not politician: But based on my observation, I may say that, this is Iran and our "brother" Turkey." (see App.1)*

The first deputy of Caucasus Muslim's Board and associate professor of Baku State University Gamar Khanim Javadli goes on to detail and explains that,

*"To the south- Iran, to the north – Turkey, to the center - Saudi Arabia and Kuweyt." (see App.1)*

Taking into account that, a big portion of Sunni people settled in north parts, and Shiite followers in south of the country and suburbs of Baku, the claim of the Gamar Khanim Javadli seems plausible. All this shows that, certain religious groups in Azerbaijan have more or less role and influence, not only in accordance with historical, ethnical, political and religious background of a country they represent, but also with the geographical place and religious belongings of an Azeri believers. At the end of the day, this "unique" condition puts Azerbaijan to the difficult crossroad, as to which Islamic version and single direction "lend an ear".

## **2.1. Iranian influence**

It is undisputable fact that, Iran is one of the big and influential neighbors of Azerbaijan, which situated in the south part of it. The two states share about 618 kilometers of land borders. The two countries border each other in the Caspian Sea as well. Both share values from their mutual past and of a common culture.<sup>50</sup> Both have a deep historical and political relationship. Along with it, common religious identity and faith (Shi'a branch of Islam) plays no less role in their "inevitable" connection.

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<sup>50</sup> Nassibli, Nasib L. "Azerbaijan- Iran Relations: Challenges and Prospects (Event Summary)." Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.



To begin with history, it should be mentioned that, for many centuries these two countries and peoples (Persians and Azeris) were belonged to a single empire. The territory of the present day Republic of Azerbaijan was a part of Persian Empire, specifically during the reign of dynasties such as "Median", "Achaemenid", "Parthian", "Sassanid" and various dynasties of Iran. But in the past several centuries' parts of Iran sometimes were controlled by dynasties of Turkish origin, like "Qajar", "Afshar", "Timurid", "Seljuks", "Ghaznavids" and "Safavids".<sup>51</sup> That is why, the modern-day Iran is impossible to imagine without the Azerbaijanis, who perceive most of the history and culture of this country as their own. But at the same time, Persians, in turn, perceive much of the history and culture of Azerbaijan as its own.

However, significant difficulty in the Azerbaijani-Iranian relations brought geostrategic factor and policies of other states. Series of Russian-Persian War in the early 19th century, left Azerbaijani people to remain in north and south sides of Araz River. "Gulistan Treaty" of 1813 and "Turkmenchay Treaty" of 1828 that was signed between two empires after the end of war left a deep impression in the minds of Azeri people till today, since this document meant the breaking up of the Azerbaijani territory into two sides. Northern Azerbaijan, which is today's Republic of Azerbaijan, "passed" to Russia, while southern part remained in Iran. This subject evaluated by Cemil D. Ipek in his article "The Question of Identity among the South Azerbaijani Turks". According to him;

*The division constituted a bad place in the memory of Turks remaining on the both sides. Nevertheless, the boundary between north and south did not stop the interaction between them.*<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Brenda Shaffer in her book "Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity" explains that:

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<sup>51</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan%E2%80%93Iran\\_relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azerbaijan%E2%80%93Iran_relations)

<sup>52</sup> Ipek, Cemil Dogac. "Güney Azerbaycan türklerinde kimlik sorunu" (The Question of Identity among the South Azerbaijani Turks). Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi / Journal of Turkish World Studies, XII/1 (Summer 2012), p.270

*Despite the formal division of Azerbaijan, direct ties between the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the border continued, especially due to the active economic interaction between the two areas. Iran and northern Azerbaijan seemed to remain one intellectual and cultural sphere.*<sup>53</sup>

Tadeusz Swietochowski goes on more detail and explains that:

*"Mutual influences were quite significant, and important thinkers and activists constantly moved between the territories of northern and southern Azerbaijan. Mutual cultural ties continued and common poetry, songs, and fables developed among the Azerbaijanis on both sides of the Araz."*<sup>54</sup>

Obviously, both two powers in their own way affected the culture and world outlook of peoples living in their area and had an impact to the further course of events. The prevailing opinions comes to the conclusion that, South Azerbaijanis within the Iran were belonged to Islamic or more widely to Eastern civilization, while northerners began to join Russia, and through it - the European culture. According to one report (Priego, 2009) "*in the north, Russia promoted the development of the oil and gas fields and the growth of Baku as an urban center, whereas Iran did little to transform the traditionalist, rural, and agricultural society of the south.*"<sup>55</sup> However, this seems a controversial opinion.

One of the first steps which Russia took related to Northern Azerbaijan was planned resettlement of Armenians to Azeri lands particularly, Nakchivan and Irevan. In spite of this migration, local people outnumbered the Armenian settlers. This is obvious from

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<sup>53</sup> Shaffer, Brenda. (2002) "Borders and Brethren: Iran and the Challenge of Azerbaijani Identity". Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Harvard University. p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Swietochowski, Tadeusz (1995). "Russia and Azerbaijan. A Borderland in Transition." New York: Columbia University Press. p.21

<sup>55</sup> Priega, Alberto (April 20, 2009). "The Southern Azerbaijan Question And Its Implications For Iranian National Identity". Retrieved on April 6, 2013 from <http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com/Iran/Priego-Alberto/The-Southern-Azerbaijan-Question-And-Its-Implications-For-Iranian-National-Identity>

official statistics, particularly those printed in the *Caucasian Calendar*, a book published for more than 50 years; publication of the first Russia-wide census in 1897 showed that Azerbaijanis were in the majority in the territory of the modern-day Armenian Republic, even after Russia's migration policy. Nonetheless, the aggression of Armenians against Azeri people had always been observed. Tale Heydarov and Taleh Bagiyev in their book *Azerbaijan: 100 questions answered*, noted that, intending to create "Greater Armenia", 20<sup>th</sup> century Armenians three times committed mass-deportation, slaughter and genocide against Azerbaijanis in 1905-06, 1918-20 and finally in 1988-91.<sup>56</sup> Result of Russia's policy of Northern Azerbaijan is not limited just in this aspect. According to Babashov (2002), heavy taxes and impositions over peasants, despise and underestimation of national and religious identities, officially calling non-Russian population as "other nation" and etc. were observed in the Tsarist Russia's policy of Northern Azerbaijan.<sup>57</sup> Obviously, Russia's complete denial of national existence of Azeri people gradually "awaked" the national consciousness. The developments of the generation of devoted educator-democrats, charitable and educational initiatives, national media, and the emergence of the theater, have further strengthened this process.

When it comes to Iran's Southern Azerbaijan policy after "Gulistan" and "Turkmenchay" treaties, we see that, the treatment of Azeri Turks under the Qajar Iran dominance was different from their "northern" brothers. In spite of the views of some authors that, Iran's ruling elite was totally composed of Persians<sup>58</sup>, the role of the Turks in the executive system and army of Qajar Iran was appropriate to the "weight" of total number of Iranian population. However, Professor Nasib Nasibli, in his article "South Azerbaijan at the dark of XIX century" notes that, such position of Azeri Turks in Qajar Iran was not determined as a special status for either Azeri Turks themselves or the

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<sup>56</sup> Heydarov, T. and Bagiyev T. (2008) "*Azerbaijan: 100 questions answered*". Baku. The European Azerbaijan Society & The Anglo-Azerbaijani Youth Society. p. 28.

<sup>57</sup> Babashov, M. (2002) "*The nature of national and religious discrimination policy tsarist Russia imposed on Azerbaijan in the XIX century.*" Qafqaz University. pp.39-50

<sup>58</sup> Medvedev, A. I. "*Persia. Voенно-statisticheskoe obozrenie*" "St. Petersburg, 1909, p. 432.

territories where they settled. Here as in other parts of Iran the traditional autocratic governance were dominant.<sup>59</sup>

From the beginning of the twentieth century, Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran caused the realization of various historical events towards the way to protect their Turkish national identity. For this reason, a series of revolts and struggles for independence by Azerbaijani Turks marked deeply in the Iranian history. One of the most prominent specialists on the field of conflict and history, Arif Yunusov (2007) in his book "Azerbaijan at the beginning of XXI century: Conflicts and potential threats" notes that,

*"The most brilliant pages of the Iranian Revolution of 1905-1911 associated with the rebellion of the Azerbaijani urban population in 1908-1909 under the leadership of Sattar Khan. At the same time the northern or "Russian" Azeris took a very active part in the uprising"*<sup>60</sup>

Later, the attempts to revolt and creation of "Azadistan" by Sheikh Muhammad Khiabani during the WWI and "Azerbaijan People's Government" by Mir Jafar Pishavari during the WWII were taken, but hardly suppressed by Iranian government. According to one study (Seyidaga Onullahi, 2010), "these events were results of Iran's 'united Iran', 'united nation', 'united language', 'Iranian nation', 'Iranian Muslim nation' and etc. policies." Onullahi also claims that, Pan-Iranist saw Iran as the Persian country, people living in Iran as the "Iranian nations", Persian as the Iran's sole language, and all other languages, including Azeri, Talish, Kurdi, Gilan, Mazandaran, Arabic and etc. were banned.<sup>61</sup> Later, during the Shah period and even after the 1979 Iran Islamic Revolution, the Pan-Iranist ideas were visibly converted to Pan-Islamist one, which

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<sup>59</sup> Nasibli, Nasib. "Güney Azərbaycan XIX yüzülin garanlıqlarında." p.10. <http://www.gunaz.tv/?id=4&vmode=1&sID=2558&lang=1>

<sup>60</sup> Yunusov, Arif. (2007) "Azerbaijan at the beginning of XXI century: CONFLICTS AND POTENTIAL THREATS". Baku. Peace and Democracy Institution (with the support by Friedrich Ebert Foundation). p. 59

<sup>61</sup> Onullahi, Seyidaga. (2010) "Iran'da milli meselenin qoyulushu". Güney Azərbaycan: Tarixi, siyasi ve kulturoloji mustevide. Meqaleler toplusu ( The collections of articles).Baku. Azerneshr. p.5-6.

denies the concept of nation and nationalism and calling for equal rights for all nations under the "Islamic nation" ("Islam ümmeti").<sup>62</sup>

All these suggestions gave us a chance to suppose that, the treaty results between Russia and Iran, was not only changed geographical position and borders, but also deeply impacted to the identity and future fate of a "divided" Azeri nation. From one side, we see a split of a nation, or more concretely ethnic group living under the dominance of two different powers. At the same time, this split gave an impulse to mobilization, solidarity and calls for unity. In other words, the trauma of "Gulistan" and "Turkmenchay" treaties actually gave a way to a more deep understanding of national consciousness among Azeri people living in both sides. After this period, the path which Northern Azerbaijan will follow and various factors that would determine his fate on this road will be evaluated in this thesis.

As can be understood from brief historical review, the most important factor affecting the Iranian-Azerbaijani relations is the South Azerbaijan factor. Today, about 40% of Iran's population consists of Azerbaijani Turks. That is corresponds to 60% of Azerbaijani Turks in the world.<sup>63</sup> Despite calls for unity voiced time to time by nationalistic groups of Azerbaijan Republic and Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran, this did not give its results. Recently, Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran demand more and more cultural rights and permission to use Azeri Turkish language in an official level. Thus, they believe that, these demands do not contradict to Iranian identity. Elvin Veliyev (2007) puts forward in his master thesis "Iran's South Caucasus policy after the Cold War", that;

*"According to Azerbaijani Turks Iranian identity is already superior one that includes in itself all other ethnic identities. However, Iran considers the highlighting of an ethnic identity problem and Azeri Turkish language as a disloyalty to them."*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Akman, A.(2005)"Azerbaycan Kadim Coğrafyanın Genç Ülkesi". İstanbul, İlke Yayınları, p. 80.

<sup>64</sup> Veliyev, Emil (2007). "Iran's South Caucasus policy after the Cold War." Master Thesis. Ankara University. p. 61-62.

From this suggestion we may suppose that, seemingly, Iran beware of the majority of Azerbaijani Turks and some internal problems to cause break of a country. According to one study (Shaffer, 2002), in this respect, "Iranian regime tries to bring Republic of Azerbaijan to its own political domain in order to eliminate this country's impact on Azerbaijani Turks living in Iran."<sup>65</sup>

One of the factors that affect the Iranian-Azerbaijani relations is the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Starting from the end of the 1980's and becoming in all senses a serious issue by the 1992, Karabakh war cost the occupation of Azerbaijan's 7 administrative regions by Armenia, death of about 30.000 Azeri people, and 1 million refugee that spread around the country.

The stance of Iran in respect to Nagorno-Karabakh question is pretty much ambiguous. According to the Iranian source (Ruintan K, 2010), "*Iran accepts that, the conflict broke out due to the territorial claims and aggression of Armenia to the Azerbaijan, and this is not considering as a religious war.*"<sup>66</sup> However, in accordance with the Azerbaijani side<sup>67</sup>, in this question, while "Islamic state" of Iran claimed to exhibit its neutral stance, it has supported "Christian" Armenia due to the perceived threats coming from Azerbaijan. Many authors incline in that, Iran considers the Nagorno- Karabakh problem as one of the most important factor that threaten its national security. According to prominent Azeri specialist in Iranian-Azerbaijani relations, historian and deputy of Azerbaijani parliament Nasib Nasibli;

*"The reason for this is that Nagorno-Karabakh process is taking place between close neighboring countries of Iran. For that reason, Iran establishes its Nagorno-Karabakh policy either on instability in the region, on prevention of intervention by foreign powers in the region and non-emergence of an Azerbaijani state as a strong state. In order to achieve this, Iran from one hand, played a mediator role in the*

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<sup>65</sup> Shaffer, Brenda. (2002) "*Azerbaycan Cumhuriyetinin Kuruluşu: İran'daki Azeriler üzerindeki etkisi.*" in Emine Gursoy-Naskali and Erdal Sahin (eds.) *Bağımsızlıklarının 10. Yılında Turk Cumhuriyetleri.* Amsterdam/Istanbul, Sota Publications. (in Turkish).

<sup>66</sup> Ruintan, Kemale.(2010). "Dagliq Garabag problemi ve Iran Islam Respublikasi". *Muasir dovr.* No:4. p.138.

<sup>67</sup> Nasibli, Nasib. (2000) "Azerbaycan ve Moskova-Erivan-Tahran İttifakının Jeopolitik Kuşatması", *Stratejik Analiz.*, No: 4, p. 71.

*resolution process, but from the other hand, supported Armenia against Azerbaijan.*<sup>68</sup>

Factors that “positively” affect Iran's connections with Armenia are presented as in the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. After gaining independence in 1991, Armenia's relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan did not improve at all, and always remains problematic. Armenia bases a buffer area between Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as between Turkey and Turkish World (Türk Dünyası). In this regard, Iran and also, Russia, in the high level continue their relationship with Yerevan which is the only factor that can prevent the integration of the Turkish World.<sup>69</sup>

All in all, it is obvious that, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and stance of Iran in respect to Armenia and Azerbaijan are seen one of the most complicated issues of a region and, therefore Islamic Republic pays special attention to this in its own foreign policy.

One of the other factor that affect Iranian-Azerbaijani relations is the legal status of Caspian Sea. After the collapse of the USSR, the rise of the Caspian littoral states from two (USSR and Iran) to five (Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan), did it necessary to review the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The legal status of the Caspian Sea for many years regulated by the bilateral agreements concluded between Iran and Russia (USSR). Starting from 1992 has begun the process of bilateral and multilateral meetings, discussions and negotiations of Caspian countries on the issue of the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Subsequent discussions on the issue of the legal status of the Caspian Sea showed that each state has different view on this issue and that this time their views is not inclined to the norms of international law, but to their own interests.<sup>70</sup>

Starting to analyze the legal status of Caspian Sea we should firstly note that, Caspian Sea is a unique water basin and has hydrocarbon resources which have no analogue.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> Veliyev, E. (2007) “*Iran’s South Caucasus policy after the Cold War.*” Master Thesis. Ankara University. p.88

<sup>70</sup> “Xəzərin hüquqi statusu anlayışının meydana gəlməsi.” Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from [http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/WorldCommunity/CaspianStatus/caspianStatus\\_a.html](http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/WorldCommunity/CaspianStatus/caspianStatus_a.html)

According to various sources, oil reserves in Caspian Sea estimates to 200 billion barrels. Apart from this, the sea has significant natural gas reserves.

The geographical position of Caspian Sea as whether "lake" or "sea" is a debatable question. If we'll consider that, a body of relatively still water, localized in a basin and not communicated with a World Ocean is called lake, then worldly adopted this geographic axiom is fully appropriate to Caspian Sea. It is also known that, Caspian Sea is the world's largest lake by volume (78,200 km<sup>3</sup>).<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the lack of training on the border lakes in the Soviet legal sciences and the preference to the concept of a closed sea in the Soviet doctrine of international law has caused some authors to consider the Caspian Sea as a closed sea ("Mare Clausum"). Lawyer and scholar Rustam Mammadov explains the geographical status of Caspian Sea in this manner:

*"Water basins, washing the shores of two or more states and not having a natural connection with the ocean and having an independent legal status and a definite regime, determined by concrete international contracts signed between the coastline countries are considered border lakes from the international and legal point of view."<sup>72</sup>*

Thus, summing all these factors Azerbaijani side advocates that, Caspian Sea is the international border lake and must be divided into the national sectors.<sup>73</sup> According to this view, the five coastal states should share Caspian Sea and states should have the exclusive rights in their regions.<sup>74</sup> This idea also was founded in 1995 Constitution of Azerbaijan. Article 11. states that,

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<sup>71</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake>

<sup>72</sup> "Xəzərin hüquqi statusu anlayışının meydana gəlməsi." Retrieved on April 1, 2013 from [http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/WorldCommunity/CaspianStatus/caspianStatus\\_a.html](http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/WorldCommunity/CaspianStatus/caspianStatus_a.html)

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Terzioglu, S.S. "Hazar'ın Statüsü hakkında kıyıdaş devletlerin hukuksal görüşleri". OAKA. Volume:3, Issue: 5, pp. 26-47, 2008



*"Internal waters of the Republic of Azerbaijan, The portion of Caspian Sea (Lake) that belongs to Republic of Azerbaijan ... an integral part of the Republic of Azerbaijan (art. 11/II)."*<sup>75</sup>

Contrary to Azerbaijan, Iran holds the idea that, Caspian Sea must be divided among the Caspian States by the principle of 20% for each. However sometimes, Iran defended the argument that, Sea is a common wealth of the Caspian states (condominium) and "third" countries should not take advantage from the Sea.<sup>76</sup> Determining its views on these two axes, Iran is trying to bring to the fore the thesis: by opposing the unilateral gaining of Caspian energy resources, and until the legal status of Caspian Sea was not determined, to insist that the petroleum searches in Sea are illegal. Iran also declared that, it will continue to base on 1921 and 1940 agreements, until the Caspian Sea issue will find its solution.<sup>77</sup> (According to the agreements of 1921 and 1940, about 86% of the Caspian Sea was part to the Soviet Union during the Soviet period, while 14% belonged to Iran.) According to one study (Djalili, 2002), "The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, along with the achievement of independence by the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia has considerably modified the geopolitical environment of Iran"<sup>78</sup> So, after the sudden demise of the USSR, Tehran tried to be active and set up a policy in regard to this new situation. In this respect, distribution of 86% of Soviet portion to Kazakhstan (29%), Turkmenistan (22%), Russia (16%) and Azerbaijan (19%), has changed Iran's Caspian Sea policy. Several factors determine the position of Iran in respect to the status of the Caspian Sea. Academician Emil Veliyev in his master thesis notes that,

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<sup>75</sup> Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic, art. 11. Baku, 1995. Retrieved on April, 3 2013 from <http://www.ajb.az/site/konstitusiyaya.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> Çolakoğlu. S. "Uluslararası Hukukta Hazar'ın Statüsü Sorunu", p. 112. <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/42/479/5535.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> Aras, Osman Nuri (2008). "Azerbaycan'ın Hazar Ekonomisi ve stratejisi". Istanbul. Derin Yayinlari. Part:5. p. 192

<sup>78</sup> Djalili, Mohammed-Reza (2002). "Iran and the Caucasus: Maintaining Some Pragmatism" The Quarterly Journal. No.3, September 02. p. 49 Retrieved on April 10, 2013 from <https://pfpc Consortium.org/system/files/Iran%20and%20the%20Caucasus.pdf>

*"Main purpose of Iran is to prevent the establishment of Western powers, especially United States, in the region. Because, Iran sees as a threat to its security the investments of Western powers in Caspian Sea, that in order to maintain their security may bring military force to the region."*<sup>79</sup>

From the economic perspective, due to the growing western capital in the region and the ongoing U.S. embargo, Iran believes that it did not receive necessary cake from "Caspian pie". For example, Azerbaijan at first, in the "Contract of the Century" (1994) gave 5% of share to Iran, but as a result of the pressures coming from U.S relinquished from its decision.<sup>80</sup>

From the political perspective, again the case of South Azerbaijan plays one of the key roles on determining the position of Iran in terms of legal status of Caspian Sea. Iran, due to the problem of South Azerbaijan, in the perception of regional threat, sees Azerbaijan Republic as a first degree threat. Osman Nuri Aras (2008) in his book "Azerbaycan'ın Hazar Ekonomisi ve Stratejisi" ("Caspian Economy and Strategy of Azerbaijan") explains this notion in that;

*"It (Iran) exhibits uncompromising attitude on Caspian Sea issue, in order to prevent oil agreements that would significantly contribute to the development of Azerbaijan which by this may become a center of attraction to the "South"."*<sup>81</sup>

Although in the issue of legal status of Caspian Sea not only Iranian and Azerbaijani side involved, it gave additional confusion to the relations of both countries. Consequently, resolution of legal status of the Caspian Sea is not only significant to those consortium countries that invests to Caspian resources in order to ensure their

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<sup>79</sup> Veliyev, Emil (2007). "Iran's South Caucasus policy after the Cold War." Master Thesis. Ankara University. p. 79

<sup>80</sup> Gokce, Mustafa (2011). "Soguk Savas oncesinden gunumuze Iran'in Hazar denizi siyaseti". The Pursuir of History-International Periodical for history and social research. 2011, Issue: 6 Page: 153-176

<sup>81</sup> Aras, Osman Nuri (2008). "Azerbaycan'in Hazar Ekonomisi ve stratejisi". Istanbul. Derin Yayinlari. Part:5. p. 193

economic benefits, but also presents inevitable factor to the littoral states, especially new republics (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan), in terms of their political and economical developments and transformations. Moreover, in the case of resolution, at least a significant portion of tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan will reduce. It is no news that many experts recognize that stability in the Caucasus and Caspian region is largely dependent on Iranian-Azerbaijani relations. For this reason, on the basis of mutual interests and equal rights it is necessary to continue negotiations which aim peace and cooperation in the region.

Another factor that adds "stress" to the relationships with Iran is the Western-oriented policy of Baku. Azerbaijan, with the support of Turkey, approached to the West and thus, has led to the increase of the Western population in the region.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy, after gaining independence, mainly carried out on three topics: the release of the Armenian occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region, the legal status of Caspian Sea and the provision of oil exports in a proper way.

As Azerbaijan acquired independence, the first president Ayaz Mutallibov was inclined to Russian side. However, his successor Abulfaz Elchibey who came to power in 1992, were not hidid its nationalist and pan-Turkist ideas. Namely, during his period the idea of "United Azerbaijan" with the unification of South and North were proposed. Those periods may be considered as critical in terms of Iranian-Azerbaijani relations. Heydar Aliyev who came to power in 1993, for about a year provided pro-Russian sentiments, but changed his foreign policy line in 1994 and practiced balanced policy. His son and subsequent president Ilham Aliyev followed the line of his father adding to his balanced policy pro-Western priority.

One of the main features of modern Azerbaijani foreign policy is the balanced policy and the development of good -neighborly and mutually beneficial relations with neighboring as well as, regional countries. Throughout the history, socio-political processes that took place in Caucasus were stretched by means of setting

contradictions and discord between countries and peoples of the region. Efforts in the field of creating common security system in the Caucasus have also been prevented.<sup>82</sup> In this way, today, Azerbaijan provides balanced policy considering its location in a "delicate" zone - South Caucasus - and as a country that "sandwiched" between Iran and Russia. On the other hand, under the known circumstances, keeping good relations with all countries is not easy to handle. The positions of Iran and Russia on such an acute problem like Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and their mutual relations with Armenia make it hard for Azerbaijan to list them as ally countries. In that situation, against the pressures of Iran and Russia on Nagorno-Karabakh and Caspian Sea issues, Azerbaijan constrained to develop its relations with the West and United States of America.

The U.S and Azerbaijan relations are not only shaped on the reason that was mentioned in above paragraph. Middle Eastern policy of United States, geopolitical and strategically importance of Azerbaijan, as well as its petroleum and gas resources are among the main factors that determine their relationship.<sup>83</sup>

Azerbaijan's pro-western foreign policy line is a condition which upsets Iran. At the same time, Azerbaijan established relations with Israel that also disturbing Islamic Republic of Iran. Azerbaijan-Israel relations are more on military level and this case perceived by Iran as a threat to its security. Current president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev's convergence with Israel naturally affected the relations with Iran. Since 2009 Baku-Tel-Aviv relations established very quickly. For Israel Azerbaijan is an important country and at the same level, cooperation in military direction also installed between two countries. We may assume that, in this context Ilham Aliyev could not maintain his balanced policy and all these factors did not favours to Iran-Azerbaijan relations.<sup>84</sup> As a concluding remark we may framework that, the question of South Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, disputes over the legal status of Caspian Sea, and Western

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<sup>82</sup> Alizade, Firdovsi. (2010) "Azerbaycan xarici siyasetinin esas istiqametleri". Retrieved on April 12, 2013 from <http://siyasielmler.wordpress.com/2010/11/24/az%C9%99rbaycanin-xarici-siyas%C9%99tinin-%C9%99sas-istiqam%C9%99ti%C9%99ri/>

<sup>83</sup> Veliyev, Emil (2007). "Iran's South Caucasus policy after the Cold War." Master Thesis. Ankara University. p. 73

<sup>84</sup> Gafarli, O., Cinar, Y., Balci, C. "Kafkasyada Iran-Israil cekismesi ve guvenlik sorunlari". p. 3-5 Retrieved on April 12, 2013 from [http://www.academia.edu/2252202/Kafkasyada\\_Iran\\_Israil\\_cekismesi\\_ve\\_Guvenlik\\_Sorunlari](http://www.academia.edu/2252202/Kafkasyada_Iran_Israil_cekismesi_ve_Guvenlik_Sorunlari)

oriented foreign policy of Azerbaijan Republic are among the most substantial features that formalize Azeri-Iranian relations. However, all these factors prevent for both countries to have really trustful and confident bonds. It is an undesirable process since, both countries share also mutual history and religious background. For these similarities and present complexities some authors agreed on that, Iranian-Azerbaijani relations are similar to the relationship of “two rebellious brothers”.<sup>85</sup>

In this part, were evaluated political, historical and economic aspects of Iranian and Azerbaijani relations. However, bonds of these two countries with each other are not limited on this. In the coming part, my aim is to pay attention to the religious factor and religious policies developed by Iran in respect to Azerbaijan.

## **2.2. Iranian influence – religious factor**

As was mentioned before, along with common historical, political and cultural stories, Iran and Azerbaijan have also deep religious ties between each other. Religious connection of two states dates back to the emergence of first schism in Islamic religion-Shiism. However, religious influence and policy of Iranian state in respect to Azerbaijan clarified itself mainly after acquiring independence of later in the last decade of XX century.

Azeri’s and Persians are the followers of Shia group - the second largest denomination of Islam after Sunnism. Along with them such countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, Yemen, Afghanistan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Tajikistan and etc. have an adherents of this interpretation of Islamic religion. In sum, 10-13% of a population of the world constitutes Shias, that there are between 154 million and 200 million Shia Muslims in the world today.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Samedov, N., “Azerbaycan ve İran Arasındaki Diplomasi Savaşı” Retrieved on April 15, 2013 from [http://www.dunyaturkforumu.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=95%3AAzerbaycan-ve-ran-arasndaki-diplomasi-sava&catid=10%3Ahaberler&lang=en](http://www.dunyaturkforumu.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=95%3AAzerbaycan-ve-ran-arasndaki-diplomasi-sava&catid=10%3Ahaberler&lang=en)

<sup>86</sup> The Pew Forum on religion & public life. “A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population”. ANALYSIS October 7, 2009. Retrieved on 1 May, 2013 from [http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population\(6\).aspx](http://www.pewforum.org/Muslim/Mapping-the-Global-Muslim-Population(6).aspx)

Like all Muslims, Shiites believe that the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.v) is the messenger of God. A distinctive feature of the Shiites is the belief that the leadership of the Muslim community should belong to the imams - appointed by God - that are elected persons from the progeny of the Prophet to which they relate, Ali ibn Abu Talib and his descendants of Muhammad's daughter Fatima, but not elected officials - the caliphs. The Shiites are critical to the caliphate of the first three caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar and Osman.

One of the leading experts in the field of Middle East and Islamic world, Vali Nasr in his book "The Shia Revival" notes that;

*"The dissenting voices rejected the legitimacy of the first three Rightly Guided Caliphs, arguing that God would not entrust his religion to ordinary mortals chosen by the vote of the community and that Muhammad's family –popularly known as the "ahl al-Bayt" (people of the household) – were the true leaders of the Muslim community, for the blood of the Prophet ran in their veins and they bore his charisma and the spiritual qualities that has vested in him."<sup>87</sup>*

From this approach we may suppose that, Shias believe that the Prophet possessed special spiritual qualities, was "pure" from sin and could penetrate to the hidden meaning of religious teachings. Shias further believe that Ali - the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet- and his descendants had these special spiritual qualities too, and that he was chosen as a successor by Prophet Muhammad (s.a.v). As a profession of faith Shias proclaim that "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet, and Ali is the executor of God's will" (*la ilaha illallah, Muhammadan rasul allah wa Alian waliullah*). For Shias, therefore, Ali was always the rightful caliph.<sup>88</sup> In this way, it must be noted that,

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<sup>87</sup> Vali, Nasr. (2006) "The Shia Revival". W.W.Norton & Company, Inc., New York. p.37

<sup>88</sup> Mahmud, Shahabi, "Shi'a," in Kenneth Morgan, ed., *Islam: The Straight Path; Islam Interpreted by Muslims* (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), pp.188-197.

the word "*Shia*" means follower and is the short form of the historic phrase "*shi'atu 'Ali*" meaning "followers of Ali".<sup>89</sup>

Along with this, Shia theology consists of the rules that are not sharply distinctive from Sunni one. Main five pillars of the Shia faith are:

1. The Oneness of God (*Tawheed*)
2. The Justice of God (*Adl*)
3. Belief in the Prophets and Prophecies (*Nubuwwah*)
4. Leadership of Mankind (belief in the spiritual and political leadership of the 12 Imams) (*Imamah*)
5. The afterworld (*Mi'ad*)

At the same time, praying, fasting, pilgrimage and etc. rules of Islamic religion are also takes place in Shia theology.

The peak of Shiism and foundation of it as a political doctrine comes to the period of Safavid dynasty. As was noted before, Ismail I announced the Twelvers direction of Shi'a Islam as the state religion, despite the dominance of Sunni Muslims in Persian area. The bloody persecution of the Sunnis, as well as "extreme" Shias occurred wherever established the power of the Safavid's.<sup>90</sup> The population of Baku khanate and much of the Talish khanate (territories of modern Azerbaijan Republic) were only consisted of Shia population.<sup>91</sup> The Safavids had created a safe haven for Shiism in Iran, propagated the faith in their domain, established Shia law as the law of the land, and patronized Shia scholarship.<sup>92</sup> At the early XVI century, after Safavids official recognition of Shiism, it became a dominant religious denomination in the regions of Azerbaijan that situated in south part of Araz River and the other areas, except northern part of the River. There should be noted the role of Azeri's in promoting

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<sup>89</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia\\_Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shia_Islam)

<sup>90</sup> "Istoriya Irana s drevneyshikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka" ("History of Iran from ancient times to the end of the XVIII century".) Leningrad: Leningrad University Publishing, 1958. – p. 390.

<sup>91</sup> Dubrovin, N.F. "Istoriya voyni i vladichestva russkix na Kavkaze. Ocherk Kavkaza i naroda ego naselyayushix: Zakavkazye" ("History of the War and Russian domination in the Caucasus. *Outline of the Caucasus and the people inhabiting it: the Caucasus.*") St. Petersburg., 1871. - Volume 1, Book 2. - p. 328.

<sup>92</sup> Vali, Nasr. (2006) "The Shia Revival". W.W.Norton & Company, Inc., New York. p.74

Shiism in the Persian lands where the majority of the population belonged to the Sunni faith of Islam. Azeri's were one of the firsts who converted to Shiism. Ismail I was originally Azeri. While decades of Soviet rule seem to have declined the role of Shiism in Azerbaijan, Iranian Azeri's continue to be a strong pillar of the faith in the region. Some of the most prominent Shia ulama since XIX century, such as Ayatollah Abol-Qasem al-Khoi, or present Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Hosseini Khamenei are of Azeri origin.

So in this way, "Safavid Shiism" survived for nearly five hundred years, until the Iranian revolution of 1979, when the ayatollahs and the monarchy parted ways and Khomeini imposed his theocratic doctrine of *velayat-e fagih* (guardianship of the Islamic jurist) on Iran.<sup>93</sup>

Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran initiated a new line of foreign policy that contains in it Islamic and religious discourse. The new religious regime of Iran consistently depicted itself as one that responsible for the promotion and protection of all Muslims in the world, and formulated a new policy aimed at the "exporting regime" to all Muslim states. Bayram Sinkaya (2005) in his article "Transformation of Iranian Foreign policy from Revolution to Present" ("Devrimden Günümüze İran Dış politikasının dönüşümü"), notes that, "the idea of exporting regime based on a perception of Muslims or non-Muslims to consider "Islamic revolution" as a tool which release them from oppression of tyrants that serve to international imperialism." From his article also revealed that, according to the leaders of the revolution both USA and Soviet Union are the two major imperialist powers that exploit Third World countries.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, according to the idea of "export regime", the "renewal" of adherence to Islam, as in the case of Iran which overthrew the Shah, will allow the oppressed nations to defeat imperialism. Any country that follow Iranian example, can release itself from the dominance of imperialism.<sup>95</sup>

The religious policy of Iranian state towards Azerbaijan revealed itself even a little before acquisition of independence of Azerbaijan from Soviet Union in 1991. Iranian

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p.75

<sup>94</sup> Bayram Sinkaya, "Devrimden Günümüze İran Dış Politikası'nın Dönüşümü," Mülkiyeliler Birliği Journal, vol 247, issue 5-6 (April and May 2005). p. 6

<sup>95</sup> Helen Chapin Metz (1989), "Iran, A Country Study", Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, p. 222



regime had taken initiatives in order to increase its influence in the region. In Azerbaijan the groups which were sympathetic to Iranian government were supported and encouraged. Especially, Iran and some villages near to Baku that contain strong Shia culture, and the southern part which borders with Iran could have been the potential precursors of the present Iran Islamic model. Thus, in Azerbaijan the leaders that defended and still defends the Islamic model also originally came from these regions. The first Islamic community in Baku –“Tovba”- was founded in April 1989 in under the leadership of Haji Abdul Abdolov who live Nardaran, that known as the most religious and pious regions of a country.<sup>96</sup> At that period, the first Islamist party – Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA) was founded. IPA under the leadership of Haji Alikram Aliyev passed from official registration in 1992. IPA explained its advocacy for Islamic state model and clarified Qur’an, Prophet and the people of the house (*Ahl al-Bayt*) as the major line in their party policy. Bahram Hassanov in his doctorate thesis “Religion in Azerbaijan from Soviet generation to post-Soviet generation” noted about the activities of IPA at that times. According to him, openly pro-Iranian and known to have oppositional views on Turkism, West and Jews, IPA, at the same time, criticized communist government and the representatives of official Islam by publishing “Islamic World” and the “Voice of Islam” newspapers that frequently contained articles which reflected such opinions.<sup>97</sup> However, the lack of demand to political Islam in society seems to have diminished the role of IPA to marginal party level.

Iran from one hand continuing to support IPA in political sphere, on the other hand, sending clergy and religious literature to Azerbaijan, at the same time, by taking students to Iran’s religious centers tries to increase its impact in its neighbor. One of the tools that Iran uses to advance its influence in Azerbaijan is through madrasas (religious schools) for young children. These madrasas target children who want to learn to read the Qur’an. Iran's religious education is not limited to the activities of madrasas built only in Azerbaijan. By providing financial assistance in Iran’s

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<sup>96</sup> Abasov, Ali (2001) “İslam v Sovremennom Azerbaydjane: Obrazi i Realii” Dmitriy Furman (ed.), Azerbaydjan i Rossiya: Obşestva i Gosudarstva, Moskva: Fond Andreyax Saxarova, , p. 294.

<sup>97</sup> Hassanov, Bahram. (2007) “Sovyet kusagından Sovyet sonrasi kushagina Azerbaycan’da din” (“Religion in Azerbaijan from Soviet generation to post-Soviet generation”). Doctorate thesis. Marmara University. The Institute of Social Sciences. p. 206.

religious centers, especially in Qom, although majority from Southern regions, many Azerbaijani students are taking religious education there. Now, the official or roughly number of those students is uncertain, only known that in 2003 the head of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, Rafiq Aliyev reported that he met with 200 Azeri students educating in Qum city.<sup>98</sup>

One of the major contributions of Iran in terms of Azerbaijan's religious life is the sending of religious literature to there. While in Baku and Sumgayit cities, in all book stores of Azerbaijan there can be found religious books coming from Iran. One of the most important feature of these books are that, despite they were published in Iran, it can be read in Azerbaijani language. These books are publishing both in Latin and in Cyrillic alphabet. Along with books, religious videos, audios, and CD are also selling there. In Baku, in almost all metro station and crowd parts of the city it is possible to see such kind of books and tapes.

A couple of Iran's charity, social and cultural associations are also operating in Azerbaijan. Among them, "Imdad Imam Khomeini" is one of the most active associations. Since 1993, this committee opened representative offices in Baku, Lankaran, Ganja, Göyçay, Nakhchivan and other regions of Azerbaijan and had taken in total 7000 families under its protection.<sup>99</sup> The community assists these families with various funds and economical support.

Consequently, among the Iranian activities that contribute to its influence for Azerbaijan, we may point the broadcasting of "Sahar" Television channel in Azerbaijani language and one radio channel from Ardebil.

Except south part and Apsheron peninsula, Iranian centered Shiism is not so much welcomed in other parts of Azerbaijan. Professor of Journalism Gulu Maharramli explains it in this manner;

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<sup>98</sup> Dini Qurumlarla İş Üzre Dövlət Komitesinin Bülleteni: DK-nin Yaradılmasının Üç İlliyine Həsər Olunmuş Xüsusi Buraxılış. (Bulletin of the State Committee for Work with Religious organizations: Special edition dedicating to the foundation of SCWRO) Issue 10, 2004, p. 41

<sup>99</sup> Hassanov, Bahram. (2007) "Sovyet kusağından Sovyet sonrası kusağına Azərbaycan'da din" ("Religion in Azerbaijan from Soviet generation to post-Soviet generation"). Doctorate thesis. Marmara University. The Institute of Social Sciences. p. 210

*"At the moment, in the surface, there is a certain influence of Iran to Azerbaijani believers, but the overestimation of this impact in the media is far away from the reality. Even, the independent newspapers sometimes overestimate the role of Iran and Islamist tendencies in the public life..."*(see App.1)

However, Azerbaijan for Iran presents importance due to some reasons. Since the independence movement, the gradual rising of nationalism and Pan-Turkism feelings in society, let Azerbaijan to go away from Iran to its major competitor- Turkey- and thus, provided for Turkey to increase its role in the region. Iran by sparking religious feeling hoped to prevent in Azeri society, where majority belongs to Shia denomination, both nationalistic feelings and gradually rising sympathies to Sunni Turkey, and thus by preventing the role of Turkey to Azerbaijan, to provide the society to side for Iran. However, the realization of this goal was going to be hard and Iran has made to settle its manipulative facilities in certain regions of Azerbaijan (South border areas with Iran and Absheron peninsula) and in certain extend it could reach the parts of society.<sup>100</sup>

In conclusion it is possible to say that, the disappearance of prevailing political competition during Cold War and the diminishment of the value of communist ideology as an alternative system, gave Iran to think it as an opportunity to spread its system and look for ways to be effective in political sense in the Caucasus region. Religious closeness with Azeri's and belonging to the same Shia sect of Islam, seemed to facilitate Iran's policy in the region.<sup>101</sup> However, Iran's fiasco as a mediator on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, issue of Southern Azerbaijanis living in Iran, in subsequent periods, Azerbaijan's rapprochement with Turkey and United States, made Iran to affiliate its relationship with Russia and Armenia, and to follow the policy that was much contrary to its founding Islamic principles. For all these reasons, Iran's position in Azerbaijan and how its religious efforts perceived by society is not unambiguous. According to one survey conducted in recent years (2012) only 8, 1 % of Azerbaijanis sees Iran as a friendly country:

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 210

(Part of the survey)

Most friendly states:

Turkey- 80,7%; Russia – 39,3%; Georgia– 26,6%; Ukraine – 16,4%; Iran – 8,1%; USA – 7,9%; Pakistan – 5,5%; Great Britain – 4,9%; Germany – 2,8%; China – 0,5%; France – 0,1% (only 1 respondent stated France).

The enemy countries:

Armenia– 97,7%; Iran – 32,9%; France – 25,5%; USA – 20,5%; Russia – 13,8%; İsrail – 7,0%; Georgia – 2,3%; Great Britain – 0,7%; Vatikan – 0,3%; Turkey - 0,2%.<sup>102</sup>

Explaining the situation around the attitude of Azerbaijani society towards Iran, Professor of Journalism, Gulu Maharramli to the question, "Which Muslim states ideological activities you see as important to struggle against?" asked that;

*It is important to prevent the efforts of Iran in their dissemination of political Islam, because, Tehran's efforts to deepen Islam in Azerbaijan is not sincere and these endeavors are directed against Baku's rapprochements with USA and especially, Israel. Iran's supreme leader Khomeini's policy of "Islamic solidarity" is also seems to bankrupt in terms of the motive of deep and strategic cooperation with Armenia."*  
(see App.1)

All these discourses shows that, besides the Azerbaijani "resistance" to the influence of Islamic republic, Iran also has to deal with the competition from

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<sup>102</sup> Survey on freedom of religion in Azerbaijan. Voice of America 1 August - 1 September 2012. Retrived on December 24, 2012 from <http://www.amerikaninsesi.org/articleprintview/1520948.html>

Turkish side in order to not lose its position in Azerbaijan. It is obvious that, the Caucasus policy is not easy to direct and each country and regional powers has their own interests that even sharply cross with the interests and priorities of other states. However, there is hope that, if Iran Islamic Republic will make even minimum efforts to minimize those critical problems with Azerbaijan, the possibility of the strengthening of its position in there will surely rise.

### **2.3. Turkish influence**

Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey have a long history. Common roots, language and religious identity, culture, customs and traditions are among the factors causing these connections. Although Azerbaijan's history shows the mark of substantial religious and cultural influence from Iran, linguistically and ethnically the country is predominantly Turkic. It is also commonly known that, Turkey and Azerbaijan in the most difficult periods of their history supported each other.

Historically speaking, the rescue of Baku in 1918 as a result of long struggle and war, from the side of Turkey's Caucasus Islamic Army under the command of Nuri Pasha was an important turning point in the history and consciousness of Azerbaijani people. The leader of Azerbaijani Republic and former president Heydar Aliyev stated that:

*"The arrival of the Turkish army to Azerbaijan, Baku, Azerbaijan salvation from the "Dashnak" (Armenian) aggression is in the heart of every Azerbaijani. Azerbaijani people will never forget the assistance provided by the Turkish people to it in that difficult period."<sup>103</sup>*

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<sup>103</sup> Heydar Aliyev's speech on the opening ceremony of the "Kazim Karabekir Pasha Mosque" in Nakchivan. October 13, 1999. "Azerbaijan" newspaper, October 16, 1999. Retrieved on May 4, 2013 from <http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/tk/9530689.html>

At the same time, Azeris also provided material and moral support to the national struggle, conducted in Anatolia, headed by Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Even at a time when Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union, between the two republics existed official relations. Visits to Baku of Prime Minister of Turkey Suleyman Demirel in 1967 and the President of the Republic of Turkey Cevdet Sunay in 1969 played a major role in determining the nature of these links.<sup>104</sup>

Turkey - one of the three major states of the region (along with Russia and Iran), which play an important role in the fate of not only Azerbaijan, but also the whole of the Caucasus. Turkey's position in the Caucasus is represented primarily, from Azerbaijan and Georgia. Turkey, where it can be said there is no direct land connection with Azerbaijan (except for communications with the isolated Nakhchivan) has the ability to access and fully integrate in Azerbaijan and Central Asia only through Georgia, Russia and Iran.

Azerbaijan plays an important role for Turkey as a mediator in the Caucasus and in Central Asia and the Caspian region in communicating with others, especially with the Turkic states.

The sayings of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's "*Joy of Azerbaijan - our joy, his grief - our grief*" and Heydar Aliyev, "*We are - one nation, two states*" both in Turkey and in Azerbaijan accepted as the most perfect formula that accurately expresses the history, reality and prospects of relations between the two countries.<sup>105</sup>

After Azerbaijan gained independence, the first country to recognize it in November 1991 was Turkey. In 1992 Azerbaijani-Turkish diplomatic relations have been settled. Since that time, Turkish diplomatic mission started its activity in Azerbaijan and from August 1992 - Azerbaijan's diplomatic mission in Turkey.

Nevertheless, despite all of these positive kind of dimensions between two countries, there are also a number of factors that determine Azeri-Turkish relations.

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<sup>104</sup> Azerbaijan-Turkish relations (inquiry of 2011), Retrieved on May 4, 2013 from <http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/ru/4610295.html>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

First and foremost is the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, which is the primary priority of Azerbaijani foreign policy and determine its relations with almost all countries in the world. Turkey, since the beginning of a conflict supported Azerbaijani side. This support was not only in the army level, but also in economic and political sphere Turkey has a big contribution to Azerbaijan in order to let him to talk to international community about its problems, development and recognition of the independence of the country by international forces and etc. In 2000's these relations rose from friendship and brotherhood degree to strategic partnership level. Both countries while signing international projects like, BTC, BTE, BTK and others, on the other hand, took common actions in their foreign policy to figure out together lots of problem in international community.<sup>106</sup>

Reha Yilmaz in his book "Foreign policy of Azerbaijan and Turkey" (2012) insist on that, "Turkey closed borders with Armenia, after the Armenian invasion of Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan and this support is the highest support that Turkey could do in respect to Azerbaijan. Despite all of the efforts and pressures of Western countries this border gates were not opened by Turkey. Even if Turkish governments changed by time to time, the positions of Turkish public, people and government in respect to support for Azerbaijan was not fall down, rather continued to increase."<sup>107</sup>

The arrival of AKP government in 2002 to Turkey and the efforts to make it leading regional power also showed itself in the foreign policy of Turkish Republic. In this framework, instead of Turkey that has problems with almost all its neighbors, the policy that based on close co-operation and "zero problems" policy were undertaken by new government.<sup>108</sup> In this direction, Turkish side also started the process of rapprochement and negotiations for the solution of historical problems and to talk about the possibility of opening borders with Armenia. For this reason, in Zurich, with the participation of OSCE co-chairman's, signed a protocol to ensure

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<sup>106</sup> Ruinten, S, (2005), *Azərbaycan Türkdövlətləri ilə Siyasi Eləgələr Sistemində*. Baku. Adiloglu publishing house. pp. 27-78

<sup>107</sup> Yilmaz, Reha. (2012) "Azərbaycan dış politigi ve Türkiyə" Cankiri Karatekin University. *Avrasya Araştırmaları Serisi-2*. P.95.

<sup>108</sup> Aras, Bülent, (2009), "Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy", SETA Policy Brief, no: 32.

normalization of relations. This rapprochement and the signing of protocols met in Azerbaijan with reactions and events that negatively affect the relations of two countries were occurred.<sup>109</sup> After all assurances given by Turkish side that, doors will not be opened unless Armenia will cease to seek international recognition of the Armenian Genocide and to withdraw troops from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>110</sup>, normalization of relations were took place between Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Turkey and Azerbaijan had very dynamic economical and strategic relations that positively affect to their progress and economic growth. In the "Contract of the Century" signed in 1994 that have seen the submission of international oil companies, the company "Turk Petrolleri" was a real manifestation of the strategic cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In general, in all five contracts related to the Azerbaijani oil and gas sector, there is a share of Turkey: in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline - 6.53, in the project "Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli" - 6.75%, in the project "Shah Deniz" - 9%, in the project "Kurdashi" - 5% and in the project "Araz -Alov-Sherg "- 10%.<sup>111</sup>

In July 13, 2006 in the terminal at Ceyhan on the Turkish Mediterranean coast was started the export of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, and thus was carried transcontinental international project, with the participation of the two countries. The total length of the pipeline is 1,769 km (part of Azerbaijan - 443 km, the Georgian part - 250 km, the Turkish part - 1076 km), the annual capacity - 50 million tons. Officially, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is the pipeline to transport Caspian oil to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. This is the first oil pipeline in the CIS, padded bypassing Russia and with the direct participation of the U.S. and the UK. Since the beginning of this work once again significantly changed the geopolitical balance of power in the vast region covering Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Transporting large amounts of oil that could be implemented through

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<sup>109</sup> Yilmaz, Reha. (2012) "Azerbaycan dis politigi ve Turkiye" p.95.

<sup>110</sup> <http://lenta.ru/news/2005/08/22/armenia/>

<sup>111</sup> Ciaretta, A. and Nasirov S.(2011). "Analysis of Azerbaijan Oil and Gas Sector". pp.1-25 Retrieved on May 5, 2013 from [http://www.usaee.org/usaee2011/submissions/OnlineProceedings/Ciarreta\\_Nasirov-Article1.pdf](http://www.usaee.org/usaee2011/submissions/OnlineProceedings/Ciarreta_Nasirov-Article1.pdf)



Russia via the existing pipeline Baku - Novorossiysk, bypass Russia, reducing its influence in the region.

With the opening in 1999 of the giant gas field "Shah Deniz" laid the foundation for cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey in the gas sector.<sup>112</sup> South Caucasus Pipeline, which began operation at the end of 2006, transports gas from the Shah Deniz field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea to Turkey, through Georgia. The associated condensate is mixed with the oil from the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli field and is transported to Turkey through Georgia, along the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.<sup>113</sup>

In January 2007, there was commissioned the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. 690 km of the pipeline that passes through Azerbaijan and Georgia, is the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), a part of the Turkish pipeline company BOTAŞ, attached to the SCP on the border between Georgia and Turkey, and covered the distance of 280 km, comes to Erzurum.<sup>114</sup>

Another significant point in economic relations of Turkey and Azerbaijan is the Nabucco project that is the projected gas pipeline stretching 3,300 km from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to the EU countries, especially Austria and Germany. Most of the pipeline will pass through Turkey.

At the initiative of Turkey and Azerbaijan, two countries are implementing a number of projects that are significant for both countries and, in general, for the region. One of them is the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. For many years, this issue was discussed only between the two countries in international financial institutions. This important project is actually not carried out. As a result of manifestation will of the leaders of Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan have reached a solution to this issue. The successful implementation of the project will connect Azerbaijan with Turkey via rail. Undoubtedly, this project is of great economic and

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<sup>112</sup> Azerbaijan-Turkish relations (inquiry of 2011), Retrieved on May 4, 2013 from <http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/ru/4610295.html>

<sup>113</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shah\\_Deniz\\_gas\\_field](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shah_Deniz_gas_field)

<sup>114</sup> <http://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/ru/4610295.html>

political importance. It is expected that, construction of the road will open up real opportunities for increasing trade volume between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In the field of foreign investment, Turkey is one of the main partners of Azerbaijan. Businessmen and companies of Turkey for 2002-2010 have invested in oil and non-oil sector of Azerbaijan in total of 1.653 billion AZN, (the currency of Azerbaijan) which was 7% of investments made in the country in this period.<sup>115</sup>

As can be understood from these factors, the transport of Azerbaijan's natural resources to the global markets and its growing importance for the region, together with Turkey's initiative to direct the foreign policy strategy in the region in recent years, has caused further rapprochement between two countries and to act as a strategic partner. As a result, between Azerbaijan and Turkey, politics, economics, trade, education, health, culture, tourism and other fields increasingly began cooperation. Even this partnership and cooperation had reached successful results in configuring the Azerbaijani army, rising to the level of NATO standards, the help to Turkish army in international missions, common attitude in regional problems, the joint efforts in the international institutions, consensus in international projects in the field of economy and trade and etc.<sup>116</sup>

Eventually, it is possible to suppose that, Azerbaijan-Turkey relations present in itself the core of security in Caucasus region. For this reason, the partnership in the fields of economy, politics, trade, culture and social issues is inevitable not only for Azerbaijan and Turkey, but also for whole Caucasus region.

## **2.4. Turkish influence – religious factor.**

As was mentioned before, in the post-Soviet period, one of the most important rivals of Iran in Azerbaijan was Turkey. Trying to increase their influence in many areas from politics to economy, for both countries religion constituted a very important aspect of competition. At the first sight, the majority Shia population of

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid

Azerbaijan showed Iran in advantageous place. In fact, the first evaluations were also in this direction. But in reality, Turkey was much more in fortunate condition. First of all the place of nationalistic feelings in the foreground caused everything coming from Turkey to meet with sympathy. As was explained by Journalist Gulu Maharramli in the research;

*"...there are more likeable attitudes towards Islamic trends coming from Turkey in the Azerbaijani society. Most part of the population and especially young people consider the attitudes to the religion in Turkey more progressive and sincere, in contrast to Iran."* (see App.1)

This attitude which is common in the society in certain extent, is not enough for Turkish religious groups activities to cover whole regions of Azerbaijan. As was mentioned before, southern regions and Absheron peninsula and most parts of Baku are consisting of Shia population. So in this case both Azerbaijani government and Turkish side tried to act in accordance to certain criteria's. The Azeri authorities fearing of the dangerous consequences of Sunni religious propaganda in conservative Shia regions do not favor to the Turkish activities in these areas.<sup>117</sup> Turkish side also understanding these feature implement its religious activities in predominantly Sunni parts (Northern regions of Azerbaijan) by not interfering to political questions.

Apolitical stance of Turkish religious groups is one of the key factors to success in predominantly Shia population of Azerbaijan and at the same time trusted by both society and state.

It is possible to divide the activities of religious groups of Turkish origin into two directions: Official and non-official religious movement. While official actions is carried out by Turkey's Ministry of Religious Affairs (Turkiye Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı)

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<sup>116</sup> Yılmaz, Reha. (2012) "Azerbaycan dış politikası ve Türkiye" – Part II pp.13-23

<sup>117</sup> Hassanov, Bahram. (2007) "Sovyet kuzayından Sovyet sonrası kuzayına Azerbaycan'da din" ("Religion in Azerbaijan from Soviet generation to post-Soviet generation"). Doctorate thesis. Marmara University. The Institute of Social Sciences. p. 222

and Religious foundation (Diyanet Vakfi), non-official actions carried out by groups and communities of Turkey. Among the concerned groups and communities the two are most influential. One of them is Naqshibandiyya group, stayed under the influence of teaching of Aziz Mahmut Hudayi living in 16<sup>th</sup> century, and headed by Osman Nuri Topbash. The second one is the Gulen community that took the morals and teachings of Said Nursi who lived in XX century and headed by Fethullah Gulen.<sup>118</sup> However, be it official or non-official there is no sharp lines between the groups of Turkish origin their religious activities.

According to official information, Turkey's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Religious foundation until present built 8 mosques in Azerbaijan.<sup>119</sup> The majority of mosques are situated in Baku and Turkish imams are serving there. In those mosques, Qur'an courses are also taught and those who come to the course may also learn basic religious knowledge during the lessons. In Baku, there is also high school that operates under the supervision of Religious foundation. This high school is the winner of the last few years in terms of education quality and also there taught religious knowledge and Qur'an courses. But one of the most important project of Turkey's Ministry of Religious Affairs and Religious foundation is the opening of theology faculty under the Baku State University in 1992. In Azerbaijan, Turkey is the only country that qualified to this opportunity.

The contribution to Azerbaijan's religious and intellectual life is not only limited on the activities of official organizations. Hudayi foundation, headed by Osman Nuri Topbash has also had significant activities in this direction. Hudayi foundation in Azerbaijan is represented by the community named Youth Fund Foundation (Genclige Yardim Fondu). YFF started operations at the beginning of the nineties and provide economical support and sends the undergraduate and graduate students to the training seminars of the theology faculty of Marmara University of Istanbul.

Another important religious community in Azerbaijan is the Gulen movement knowns as "Nurcus", which is an active group, under the leadership of Fethullah Gulen.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

According to Ihsan Yilmaz (2010) in his article "Civil Society and Islamic NGOs in Secular Turkey and Their Nationwide and Global Initiatives: The Case of the Gülen Movement",

*"The Gülen movement engages in interfaith and intercultural activities and works towards a peaceful coexistence and alliance of civilisations. The Gülen movement successfully turned its spiritual, religious, intellectual and human resources into effective social capital and utilized this social capital in promoting interfaith dialogue and in establishing educational institutions attracting students of diverse ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds."*

From this point of view it becomes clear that, Gülen movement is more concerned on social and educational activities rather than sending political messages to certain state or society. This moderate stance is the distinctive feature of Gülen movement together with other Turkish religious groups operated in Azerbaijan.

The Gülen movement's educational activities in Azerbaijan are led by *Çağ Öğretim İşletmeleri A.Ş.*, a private Turkish company that runs a network of Turkish high schools and one university. Currently, there are 11 high schools, one elementary school, one gymnasium, 10 university preparation schools, and one university (Qafqaz University).<sup>120</sup> High schools are generally situated in Baku, Sumgait, Mingachevir, Sheki, Lankaran, Guba and Nakhchivan, university preparation schools in major cities like Baku and Sumgayit and the University is in Baku. The high schools and *Araz* preparatory school of *Çağ Öğretim* and its whole educational training system is not only an issue that frequently mentioned in the education communities but also appreciated and supported by the state.<sup>121</sup> The *Qafqaz University* which is also established by company is also mentioned among the high quality universities of the country. Consequently, among Gülen movement activities

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<sup>119</sup> Dini Qurumlarla İş Üzre Dövlət Komitəsinin Bülleteni. (Bulletin of the State Committee for Work with Religious organizations) Issue 7, 2003, p. 24

<sup>120</sup> [www.cag.edu.az](http://www.cag.edu.az)

<sup>121</sup> [http://www.zaman.az/az/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=45004](http://www.zaman.az/az/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=45004)

we may point the broadcasting of the broadcasting of "Samanyolu" Television channel, "Burc Fm" radio channel and publication of "Zaman" newspaper.<sup>122</sup>

The religious activities of Turkish origin have multi-dimensional effects in Azeri society. Interestingly enough, it has contributed to the rising of religiosity within the elite and intellectual layers of society that accept the moderate religious message of Turkish religious movements without hesitation. This is especially important for Azerbaijani case, since it lives in the condition of war and any radical religious message can damage the stability and order which is undesirable situation for people. As the first deputy of Caucasian Muslim's Board, Ghamar Khanim Javadli stated that;

*"I am against to any state that attempt to promote political and religious extremism." (see App.1)*

Theologian Ehliman Rustemov goes on beyond and explains his view on this question that;

*"It is necessary and even important to strengthen to position of Islam in the public life in terms of respect to moral and religious values, reformation of society, education of teenagers and young people in a positive direction, which is the future foundation of our generation. However, whether it to be Iran or Turkey, if their ideological activities may cause to damage the stability, public order, present tolerant atmosphere, and might create a conflicts and oppositions in the religious grounds, then, as an every patriotic Azerbaijani, I will struggle against them." (see App.1)*

All this shows that religion is the inevitable part of Azerbaijani society. At the same time, it is a very delicate subject so how it is delivered and formulated by foreign religious groups to mass is correlational with their success in that country. In the example of the activities of Turkish religious movements, it becomes clear that, for

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<sup>122</sup> Hassanov, Bahram. (2007) "Sovyet kusagindan Sovyet sonrasi kushagina Azerbaycan'da din" ("Religion in Azerbaijan from Soviet generation to post-Soviet generation"). Doctorate thesis. Marmara University. The Institute of Social Sciences. p. 223

Azerbaijani society soft and moderate form of religiosity is much more preferable than the teachings of radical and extremist groups.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of my thesis aimed to evaluate the influence and activities of Iran and Turkey and their religious groups in Azerbaijan.

Firstly, both Iran and Turkey are the neighboring countries to Azerbaijan. Interestingly enough, Azeri identity inherited many features from two countries. Although Azerbaijan's history shows the mark of substantial religious and cultural influence from Iran, linguistically and ethnically the country is predominantly Turkic. It is also possible to say that, both Iran and Turkey have deep historical, cultural, political and religious relations with Azerbaijan. Both Iran and Turkey try to increase their influence and prestige in the region. For this reason along with other tools, in their religious policy both countries use religious networks, groups, mosques, TV and radio channels, newspapers and etc. instruments in order to spread their religious knowledge. However, while Iranian religious activities are more of political context and in oppositional stance, Turkish religious groups stayed apart from politics and directed their goals to young people, education and dialogue and development. For this reason Iranian efforts in recent years had not met in that degree that expected while the followers of Turkish version of Islam are rising year by year. In addition to this it is also important to note that, if ten years ago it was possible to insist that, Azerbaijan is a country with the predominantly Shia majority population, then now it is hard to claim this idea. With the role of the Turkish religious groups the percentage of Sunni adherents of Islam are increased to about 45% and now Azerbaijan may rightly be titled as "multi-religious" country.

Unfortunately there is no proper statistics about the exact percentage of Sunni-Shia population in Azerbaijan or the number of adherents of Iranian and Turkish religious groups. We can only measure by the activities they (Turkey and Iran) do and how popular are they among different layers of society. As was mentioned before, Turkish religious groups are in more advantageous place and trusted by state and society, even if Azeris and Turks are not sharing the same religious denomination. As

researches and related materials have shown, the popularity of Turkish Islam is not only the result of the rational approach taken by Turkish religious movements in terms of Azerbaijan. It is also the consequence of good political, economic, cultural and historical relations between two countries that did not meet any dramatic experience or bad memory as in the case of Iran's relations with Azerbaijan. Indeed, if Azerbaijan and Iran would not be experienced such dramatic historical event like the division of Azerbaijani lands and people in XIX century, or the support of Iran to Armenia in political sphere, the disagreements over the legal status of the Caspian Sea in economic level and etc. undesirable factors, then the possibility of strengthening of the Iran's position will surely be risen in Azerbaijan. All of this means that, religious policy of any country will not be fully successful unless it has disagreements and problems over certain issues with Azerbaijan.



## CONCLUSION

Azerbaijan is the unique country that combined in itself different identities, cultures and traditions. For this reason in order to understand the present situation around the religious process taking there it is crucially important to analyze the history of Azerbaijan from the religious perspective. Azerbaijan has a deep history of religious tradition that traces back to 1700 BCE. These lands have seen the different cultures, religions and teachings such as Shamanism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and lastly, Islam that arrived into country in VII century.

Azeri identity consists of not only different traditions and religions but also different denominations, such as Shia and Sunni branches of Islam. This feature reflected also in the history of Islam, too. Under the dominance of Azeri Shah Ismail I the first time in 16<sup>th</sup> century the Sunni majority population of Persia were made to convert into Shiism. Despite all of this, Shia and Sunni population of the region continued to live under the dominance of different powers and rarely involved in conflicts between each other in these areas.

Jumping to XIX century it is important to note that, the invasion of Azeri lands by Russian Empire and after it, Soviet Union affected the religious identity, too. As a result of the "atheist" policy provided by Soviet authorities the understanding of religion and its main principles among the people of Azerbaijan were in poor condition. Even now, especially those who came from Soviet generation has an uncertainties in determining its religious denomination or answering to basic religious questions.

This situation changed in a positive direction after the recognition of Azerbaijan as an independent state by international community. The religion began to be freely practiced by all segments of society without any fear and censorship. However, there are some factors that strengthened the influence of Islam to public. One of that factor was the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia and its tragic consequences for Azerbaijan. Hoping that Western countries and USA will assist and support Azeri side due to its rich oil and gas fields, the Azerbaijani society believed to

overcome the condition of war. However, West continuing to make use of natural resources of Azerbaijan was not interested in the solution of problem. The disappointment with the West and western ideals, together with non-democratic and authoritative nature of Azerbaijani government, made people to look for alternative ways for expression of their opinions in political platform. Among these religious groups was one of the leading rivals of traditional oppositional parties of Azerbaijan.

There is two official religious institution of Azerbaijan – the Caucasus Muslim’s Board and the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations- that supervise the religious condition and control the registration process of religious communities. However, they have little power to prevent certain undesirable cases (for example, spread of harmful religious flows and ideologies within the country) or go against state’s will in terms of certain restrictions in the field of religious freedom. The absence of officially accepted religious education in elementary, secondary and high schools also observed as a problematic issue since lack of religious knowledge may raises the possibility of certain religious activists from abroad to present an alternative look to religion and promote here their faiths and teachings.

Today, the religious activities of different origins may be seen in Azerbaijan, ranging from Muslim to Christian, Jewish to Buddhist one and etc. In this dissertation, we paid attention to the religious activities of certain Muslim countries – more concretely, Iran and Turkey.

Both countries present in itself the special place for Azerbaijan since both Iran and Turkey have a long history of cultural, political and religious relations with Azeri nation. For this reason, in my thesis, Iran’s and Turkey’s religious activities in Azerbaijan are evaluated from this perspective. In other words, the religious policy of these two states should be analyzed in terms of the level of political, economic and cultural relations with Azerbaijan.

The thesis revealed that, while Iran and Turkey used similar instruments in their religious propaganda in Azerbaijan, the level of the attitudes to them is not unambiguous in the different layers of society. While Iran religious groups are more of political context and oppositional view, Turkish religious movements stayed

apolitical, and directed their efforts into the development, youth and education programs. They don't interfere into polemics with state or society and only concerns on the spread of its religious teachings to the mass. This feature guarantees their success in Azerbaijan.

As a result we may conclude that, Turkish religious organizations are trusted and met with sympathy not only because of their rational and careful approach to different layers of society, but also is the result of good and friendly relations of Turkish republic with Azerbaijan. From this point of view, it is possible to suppose that, if Iran and Azerbaijan will make some efforts in order to minimize the degree of their "old" problems and reach the consensus, the attention and appreciation of the Iranian religious activities in Azerbaijan will surely increase.

## **Appendix 1.**

THE ACTIVITIES OF IRANIAN AND TURKISH RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC BETWEEN 2003-2012 AND THE POSITION OF AZERI STATE

RESEARCH

by

Seljan Gasimzade

October, 2012.

### **Respondents:**

#### **1. Ghamar Khanim Javadli**

*The first deputy of Caucasian Muslim's Board, Doctor in Philosophy (Dphil) in Baku State University*

#### **2. Aydin Talibzadeh**

*Specialist in drama study, theater critic. A member of the Writer's Union of Azerbaijan Republic. PhD in Musicology.*

#### **3. Aynur Kerimova**

*Head of Television and Radio Journalism Department of Baku State University. PhD in Philology.*

#### **4. Ehliman Rustemov**

*Theologian.*

#### **5. Mugaddas Payizov**

*PhD in Philology. Associate Professor of Baku State University. Head of Foreign Affairs department of Caucasian Muslim's Board.*

## **6. Gulu Maharramli**

*Journalist, Television critic, PhD in Philology. "Honored Journalist" of Azerbaijan Republic (2006)*

**Question 1:** In your opinion, how big is the influence of Islam in the political life of Azerbaijan?

**Ghamar Khanim Javadli:** *It is a very problematic subject. Because Azerbaijan declared itself as a secular state, in the political platform, it doesn't formally provide space to religious trends. Under the influence of the West, the traditional and non-traditional, monotheistic and polytheistic religions and communities of different confessions passed from the state registrations and are functioning along with the Islamic institutions that have historical roots. Although political and governmental structures declared in every manner that they are far from Islam, the mutual cooperation, relationships, benefits and also problems always exist. For example, believers do not have the right to be chosen, but there are attempts to use them as the electorate. Very enthusiastically state financially assists to the repairing and restoration of mosques and other worship places, and at the same time, some restrictions are applying to religious freedoms. From this view, we cannot consider that the influence of Islam is big to political life, but to consider it small is also wrong.*

**Aydin Talibzadeh:** *I don't think that the influence of Islam is big in the political life of Azerbaijan. But such a kind of influence may in certain times appear and this is absolutely normal.*

**Aynur Kerimova:** *I don't think so. Religious confessions cannot directly interfere to the public life of the country. This is due to the facts that, the country's socio-political structure were founded by the principle of secularism, in the earlier times.*

**Ehliman Rustemov:** *I don't think so. Because, Azerbaijan is democratic and secular state.*

**Mugaddas Payizov:** *Azerbaijan is the secular state and this fact reflected itself in the constitution which is the supreme law of country. The population of a country was released*

*from communist regime 20 years ago and still, to claim that, big portion of population (if not all) are religious will be wrong. Despite the head of country's high value to national and moral values and emphasizing repeatedly the role of Islam in the formation and basis of Azerbaijani people's ethical and moral values, the right of pious people (clergy) to be elected or worked in the government agencies and/or law-enforcement organs still does exist as a problem. (The concept of "clergy" remains an abstract in itself).*

*In Azerbaijan, the freedom of religion is guaranteed by the law and conditions for all religious confessions were created. In addition to the 1800 mosques (there were only 17-20 mosques in USSR period), Orthodox churches, synagogues, and Catholic church (even though there are 80-100 Catholics in the country) are active and operating. All of this, however again, does not give a chance to claim that, Islam is impacting the country's official life.*

*Islam is a great power and Azerbaijani religious leaders do not mature enough to influence politics with the hand of religion. State's law also does not allow and do not create any condition for this.*

**Gulu Maharramli:** *At the moment, the role of Islam in Azerbaijani society is not so big as it presented by media. But gradually the role of religious movements (especially wahhabism) and various religious organizations are seemingly rising. In the main, most people (especially elders) incline to religion, when the violation of social justice and the rise of hopelessness and injustice in public sphere are occurring. Certainly, modern and educated young people's attitudes to religion have more friendly and more conscious nature.*

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**Question 2:** *Is it necessary to strengthen the position of Islam in society (public life)?*

**Ghamar Khanim Javadli:** *It is a time to suggest and promote the moral values of Islam. Azerbaijani society needs this very much.*

**Aydin Talibzadeh:** *I don't think so. Just, we need to bring more civilized and more modern forms of Islam to Azerbaijan. The Turkish version of Islam is seems to me more noble*

and more attractive. But at the same time, I support and consider it rightful the government's realization of balanced policy in the society, about Islam.

**Aynur Kerimova:** *There is no need to this. Society must give more importance to modern thinking and scientific and technological progress.*

**Ehliman Rustemov:** *If the subject is about Azerbaijani society, then of course. It is necessary and even important to strengthen to position of Islam in the public life in terms of respect to moral and religious values, reformation of society, education of teenagers and young people in a positive direction, which is the future foundation of our generation.*

**Mugaddas Payizov:** *Maybe it is more important to pay more attention to the instilment of national and moral values based on Islam and thereby, to strengthen the fight against the negative manifestations and attractions in the society.*

**Gulu Maharramli:** *There is no necessity to artificially strengthen the role of Islam in the society, because, praying to God and the commitment to religion is the need of soul. Only if, human being envision and feel the presence of divine beings, and also believe and open his heart to those forces, then he become aware of the necessity of religion.*

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**Question 3:** Impact (influence) of which foreign country is more for Azerbaijani believers? (Or, which foreign country is more influential for Azerbaijani believers?)

**Ghamar Khanim Javadli:** *To the south- Iran, to the north – Turkey, to the center - Saudi Arabia and Kuweyt.*

**Aydin Talibzadeh:** *I am not politician: But based on my observation, I may say that, this is Iran and our "brother" Turkey.*

**Aynur Kerimova:** *Saudi Arabia, rarely Iran.*

**Ehliman Rustemov:** *It is difficult to say an exact name. In addition to the neighboring states which are seeking their certain interests in religious ground there are also playing no less role some Western states that tend to towards radical Islamic tendencies.*

**Mugaddas Payizov:** *When we say the influence of foreign states, we usually mean the impact of neighboring countries. In this issue the religious affiliation play no less role.*

**Gulu Maharramli:** *At the moment, in the surface, there is a certain influence of Iran to Azerbaijani believers, but the overestimation of this impact in the media is far away from the reality. Even, the independent newspapers sometimes overestimate the role of Iran and Islamist tendencies in the public life, and this is looks like the message of Azerbaijani government to the West as " if we will not prevent the Islamic extremism, then, religious people may capture the country."*

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**Question 4:** Which Muslim states ideological activities you see as important to struggle against?

**Ghamar Khanim Javadli:** *I am against to any state that attempt to promote political and religious extremism.*

**Aydin Talibzadeh:** *Applying the principle of non- interference in the interior affairs of any state, the struggle may be against every kind of ideological diversifications, regardless of their identity.*

**Aynur Kerimova:** *I don't accept the phrase "struggle against the ideological activity" in the question.*

**Ehliman Rustemov:** *Whether it to be Iran or Turkey, if their ideological activities may cause to damage the stability, public order, present tolerant atmosphere, and might create a conflicts and oppositions in the religious grounds, then, as an every patriotic Azerbaijani, I will struggle against them.*

**Mugaddas Payizov:** *About the struggle against particular country's ideological activities, it should be noted that, there are some unique merits of Islam in Azerbaijan. In this sense, the spread of hazardous and non-traditional ideology is not so easy. In all cases, the propaganda of radicalism and extremism are not permitted.*

**Gulu Maharramli:** *At the moment, it is important to prevent the efforts of Iran in their dissemination of political Islam, because, Tehran's efforts to deepen Islam in Azerbaijan is not*



*sincere and these endeavors are directed against Baku's rapprochements with USA and especially, Israel. Iran's supreme leader Khomeini's policy of "Islamic solidarity" is also seems to bankrupt in terms of the motive of deep and strategic cooperation with Armenia. On the contrary, there are more likeable attitudes towards Islamic trends coming from Turkey in the Azerbaijani society. Most part of the population and especially young people consider the attitudes to the religion in Turkey more progressive and sincere, in contrast to Iran.*

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**Question 5:** What measures, would you like to see, taken by the government, for the sake of the stability in a religious environment?

**Ghamar Khanim Javadli:** *Restrictions cannot bring stability! Stability may be reached by consensus. State should demonstrate its magnitude and realize true democracy, based on the rule of law, in the respect to believers.*

**Aydin Talibzadeh:** *Prohibition of certain "aggressive" religious sects (whether Islamic, or related to other religions) in the Azerbaijani territory, the strengthening of the struggle against religious arbitration, the removal of Islam from "mullah" level, and the replacement of the "luxury" and "shameful" mourning ceremonies with the modest condolence ceremonies.*

**Aynur Kerimova:** *Financial investment to education and science.*

**Ehliman Rustemov:** *I would like to see the preparation of codes of laws and concepts that are regulating the state-religion relations. As I know, plenty of works are doing in Azerbaijan in this area. In the near future, the religious map of Azerbaijan will be prepared by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations, in which places of worship in the territory of the country, religious and historical monuments and other important objects of this type will be reflected.*

**Mugaddas Payizov:** *If the state wants to achieve religious stability and thereby the stability in society, it should support the clergy's listed works against propaganda of harmful*

*ideologies and if needed take appropriate remedial measures. In the case of Azerbaijan, religious factors can be found in the attempts to undermine stability and these efforts are more from abroad.*

**Gulu Maharramli:** *Religious policy in Azerbaijan is based on quite sensitive and easily managed system. The government can "effectively" control and undertake necessary measures to the religious groups which consider seriously harmful, associations and also missionary organizations. In our opinion, sometimes the "eruption" of religious extremism on the sensitive political moments (the case of hijab, oppositions in the period of oil and gas exhibitions and etc.) may be the "product" of this "effective" control.*

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The results of this research show that, all respondents agree that the role and influence of Islam in the political life is not big and mostly they explained it in the secularist ideology applied in the country. When it comes to the strengthening of the position of Islam in public life, then there was a clear disagreement among them. Three of them agreed that there is no need to strengthen the positions of Islam in public life, while two respondents clearly expressed that, especially in Azerbaijan, it is very much significant to increase the role of religion. One stated more moderately about the instilment of national and moral values in the society based on Islam. From this view, we may estimate that, the later one is also agree on the necessity to strengthen the positions of Islam in Azerbaijan. All respondents mentioned the impact of neighboring states, and especially Iran, from religious terms to the Azeri believers. Religious extremism, harmful flows, ideological diversifications and activities which may damage the stability of the society, are among the main reasons, which may call for the struggle against certain countries ideological activity. Just only one respondent clearly expressed the exact name – Iran and struggle against Iranian efforts to disseminate religion in Azerbaijan. In the last, about the state's measurements there were scored opinions of different scale from democratic actions, laws and regulations to domestic and local affairs. In general they are like minded in one concept that, the state should not let any harmful religious flows, associations and sects to operate in the country.

Consequently, the research found that, Islam is playing no fewer roles in the public life of Azerbaijan but people still observe and perceive it carefully. At least, it is clear enough that, the role and positions of religions, particularly Islam in today's Azerbaijan's social life is subject to hot debates and disagreements, be it among educated young people, intellectuals, media or state organs. Thus, we may surely say that, Islam enjoys such popularity in Azerbaijan, which was never seen in the country since the disintegration of Soviet ruling.

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