

# TEAS

M A G A Z I N E



Culture | Public Affairs | Business



(Photo: Omer Zeki Sadullah)

## BAKU – A CITY OF BURGEONING TOURIST POTENTIAL

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Azerbaijani population continues to increase

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## Welcome to the TEAS Magazine

The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS) is a UK-registered pan-European foundation dedicated to raising awareness of Azerbaijan and fostering closer economic, political and cultural links between that country and the nations of Europe.

As well as promoting the positive aspects of Azerbaijan, TEAS also highlights the plight of the 875,000 refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within the country. These people are unable to return to their homes and lands because of the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts by Armenia's armed forces – in defiance of four UN Security Council resolutions.

### TEAS has three main facets to its operations:

- Culture – TEAS raises awareness of Azerbaijan's rich and vibrant culture to a worldwide audience by organising cultural events and operating as a networking centre.
- Business – TEAS supports its membership of European and Azerbaijani businesses. It provides a platform for organisations to establish links and strengthen their existing business relationships via a programme of networking opportunities across the regions.
- Public Affairs – TEAS works to increase awareness about Azerbaijan amongst key opinion-formers, key decision-makers and other political, academic and civil society stakeholders.

### In pursuit of its objectives TEAS:

- Organises meetings with interested parties, opinion-formers and decision-makers
- Arranges roundtables, seminars, lectures and conferences
- Publishes pamphlets, reports, bulletins, books and produces films
- Facilitates fact-finding trips by politicians and business people.

## Facebook

The TEAS Facebook page is your chance to learn about the latest news, events, campaigns and other Azerbaijan-related items. Visit and 'like' our page at: <http://bit.ly/TEASFB>.

## Membership and Sponsorship

TEAS offers a range of corporate and individual membership packages, providing such benefits as advertising, trade missions, networking, business sector advice and hotel discounts.

TEAS also offers numerous sponsorship opportunities throughout the year for its events and conferences. To find out more, e-mail: [membership@teas.eu](mailto:membership@teas.eu).

## Win £100 of Amazon vouchers!

Firstly, our congratulations to Mahammad Aghamirzayev, winner of the competition in the July 2016 edition.

To stand a chance of winning £100 of Amazon vouchers, simply answer the following 10 questions, the answers to which will be found in this issue of the magazine. In the case of a tie, a draw will be made. Previous winners are ineligible to enter, as are TEAS employees and their families. Please send all entries to [editor@teas.eu](mailto:editor@teas.eu) by 17.00hrs (GMT) on 12 September:

1. What is the current population of Azerbaijan, according to the Azerbaijani State Statistics Committee?
2. Who is the Iranian ICT Minister?
3. Who is the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Azerbaijan?
4. Which Michel Legrand composition, made famous by American pianist Bill Evans, was performed by the Elchin Shirinov Trio at the Vortex jazz club in London?
5. Who is the author of *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan 1920–40*?
6. Who composed *The Seven Beauties Ballet*?
7. In which year was Baron Joseph de Baye born?
8. What is the name of the proposed Azerbaijani–Ukrainian oil pipeline?
9. Who is leading the Azerbaijani delegation seeking World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession?
10. Which country will host the OSCE chairmanship in 2017?

## Upcoming Event For full details of all TEAS events, go to [www.teas.eu/upcoming](http://www.teas.eu/upcoming) events

### 18 November: Elchin Shirinov Trio (part of the *London Jazz Festival*)

Pizza Express Jazz Club, 10 Dean Street, London W1D 3RW  
20.30hrs. Call +44 (0)20 74394962

TEAS is pleased to support this performance by the outstanding Azerbaijani pianist Elchin Shirinov. Seamlessly blending pianistic pyrotechnics and mugham into an intoxicating aural ethnojazz experience, these gigs come on the tail of successful performances in Reims, the Festival Jazz à Saint-Germain-des-Prés Paris and the Spice of Life and Vortex Jazz Clubs in London. Other musicians will include Andrea Di Biase (bass) and Dave Hamblett (drums).





Lionel Zetter,  
Director,  
TEAS

## From the TEAS Director

The population of Azerbaijan has now officially risen to 9.75m, rising by 41,800 (0.4 per cent) in just six months. This reflects the optimism in the country, which contrasts starkly with the recession and population shrinkage in neighbouring Armenia.

Despite unrest breaking out on a regular basis in Armenia (culminating in the occupation of a police station in Yerevan and the taking of hostages) President Serzh Sargsyan has remained obdurate over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, saying: “Never. Nagorno-Karabakh will never be part of Azerbaijan. Never. I repeat once again – it is out of the question.”

This month Baku hosted the largest-ever All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Azerbaijan fact-finding mission. Ten Parliamentarians from both Houses and from the three main parties held a series of high-level meetings. There were extensive discussions about the implications of Brexit and the possibility of Azerbaijan forging a bilateral trade deal with the UK.

The Presidents of Azerbaijan, Russia and Iran are now finalising plans for the new North-South transportation corridor, a train line that will enable passengers and freight to travel non-stop from Mumbai to St Petersburg. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Iran signed a Memorandum of Understanding on space and satellite collaboration.

Talks on Azerbaijan joining the World Trade Organisation have been restarted in Geneva. These emphasise the determination of the country to operate at a global, rather than a regional, level.

As terrorist incidents have proliferated in Western Europe and Turkey, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his government have expressed their sympathy for the victims and pledged to help eradicate the scourge of international terrorism.

**Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS**



H.E. Aurelia Bouchez, French Ambassador to Azerbaijan, acknowledged the swift and heartfelt Azerbaijani official response that came in the wake of the Nice attack

## Official Baku supports Nice in its grief

H.E. Aurelia Bouchez, French Ambassador to Azerbaijan, has extended her gratitude to Azerbaijan for its swift condemnation of the terrorist attack that took place in Nice on 14 July, during the Bastille Day celebrations. She acknowledged that such support is emblematic of the close friendship between the two countries.

The comments came soon after the opening of a book of condolence at the French Embassy in Baku. Ambassador Bouchez continued: “Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva, Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and other officials expressed their condolences to France in connection with the terrorist attack in Nice. In such a difficult moment, they expressed their support for us.” A total of 84 people were killed and 303 were injured when a 19-tonne cargo lorry was driven into the crowds on the Promenade des Anglais viewing a firework display.

## Azerbaijan appalled by Turkish military coup

The Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry has voiced its concern over the attempted military coup in Ankara on 15 July and reiterated its support for the Turkish nation, according to Hikmet Hajiyev, Spokesman for the Ministry, speaking to the Russian Sputnik news agency.

Mr Hajiyev commented: “Azerbaijan is

appalled and concerned over developments in Turkey. This is an attempt to overthrow the government, which was elected by the Turkish people in a democratic way.” He stressed his support for the Turkish nation, and expressed a wish for the swift stabilisation of the situation. Mr Hajiyev also urged all Azerbaijanis living in Turkey to remain vigilant.

## Azerbaijani population reaches 9.75m

From January–May this year, the Azerbaijani population increased by 41,800 people, resulting in a population level of 9,747,400 people as of June, according to the Azerbaijani State Statistics Committee. The population density now equates to 112 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. According to official figures, 53.1 per cent of the population is urban, whilst 46.9 per cent live in rural areas. Of this, 49.8 per cent are male, whilst 50.2 per cent are female.

## Iran and Azerbaijan ink MoU on space and satellite co-operation

Iran and Azerbaijan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Baku regarding the reciprocal use of space and satellite co-operation capacities. Mahmoud Vaezi, Iranian ICT Minister and Chairman, Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Commission, held talks with his Azerbaijani counterpart Ramin Guluzade, at which the two sides highlighted the need for expansion of mutual co-operation in the telecommunications and information technologies sectors. He noted the two countries’ joint access to transit routes for data transfer, together with co-ordination regarding the establishment of frequency spectrums in border cities that have served to reduce mobile phone tariffs.

He expressed further readiness regarding close co-operation with Azerbaijan in the areas of space and satellite construction, adding: “The two countries also have the potential for co-operation regarding the manufacturing of communications equipment and software development.”

Stressing the significance of the two countries’ private sector participation in joint projects, Mr Vaezi maintained that research and development in the fields of communications and IT by highly skilled specialists and experts would be amongst the priorities for future co-operation. The two sides also called for closer co-operation through international organisations and communities such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

## British Parliamentarians seek closer ties with Azerbaijan

A Parliamentary delegation from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Azerbaijan has paid a visit to Baku to foster closer ties between the nations and to pave the way for greater cultural and trade dialogue.

The trip, supported by TEAS, was led by Conservative Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East and APPG Chairman, and comprised a cross-party delegation from both sides of the House, including Vice-Chairs Mark Menzies MP, Baroness Manzoor, Lord Kilclooney and Group Secretary, Roger Godsiff MP.

The delegation held meetings with numerous senior Azerbaijani politicians, including Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, to discuss the prospects for the further development of ties between Britain and Azerbaijan, particularly in terms of trade partnerships. The nation already has close ties with Britain in the energy sector, due to its longstanding deals with BP, and Mr Mammadyarov briefed the group about the North-South and East-West transportation corridors and the progress of the Southern Energy Corridor, which will see Azerbaijani Caspian Gas come direct to an Italian interconnector and provide supply diversity for much of Europe.

There were also discussions focusing on the values of democracy, equality and multiculturalism – which are shared by Azerbaijan and the UK – and Azerbaijani relations with the neighbouring countries of Iran, Turkey, Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

Making reference to the UK exit from the EU, known as ‘Brexit’, Mr Mammadyarov stated: “The people of the UK made their choice. We do not want our relations with the UK to be hostage to relations with the EU.” He also commented that it will be interesting to witness the influence of the referendum on other member states.

Whilst in Baku, the delegation also met with Ogtay Shiraliyev, Azerbaijani Health Minister and Abulfaz Garayev, Azerbaijani Tourism Minister, to discuss the prospects for shared knowledge and mutual support of the tourism industry. They also exchanged dialogue with H.E. Tahir Taghizadeh, Azerbaijani Ambassador to the UK, and H.E. Dr Carole Crofts, British Ambassador to Azerbaijan. They were honoured to be received in the Milli Majlis (Azerbaijani Parliament) by Professor Samad Seyidov, Chairman, Azerbaijani Committee on Foreign and Interparliamentary Relations and Head of the National Delegation to the PACE, Dr Asim Mollazade MP, Chairman, Democratic Reforms Party and



British and Azerbaijani Parliamentarians stand alongside employees of the TEAS London and Baku offices outside the Milli Majlis (Azerbaijani Parliament)

Javanshir Feyziyev MP, who serves as Chairman of the UK–Azerbaijan Friendship Group.

The delegation visited an ASAN Service Centre in central Baku to observe the successful one-stop-shop e-Government approach to service provision. They also visited an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp on the outskirts of the capital to learn more about the vast housing programme recently completed by the Government to ensure that the estimated 875,000 IDPs, who are the ongoing victims of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, are properly housed whilst awaiting a resolution to the conflict.

Ties between Britain and Azerbaijan go back across a century, and both nations are members of the Council of Europe. During all meetings, there was emphasis on both sides that the UK departure from the EU would facilitate greater flexibility regarding future bilateral trade deals and that the opening up of discussions would be extremely welcome.

## Mariani: Armenia needs to make the first move

Thierry Mariani MP, Deputy, French National Assembly and Co-Chair, Franco-Russian Dialogue, has commented that Official Yerevan needs to take the first step in settling the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, as it is responsible for occupying Azerbaijani lands. Mr Mariani made the comments to *Vestnik Kavkaza* in the wake of a trip to Crimea.

He continued: “Officially, there is an OSCE Minsk Group, but this has been operating for over 20 years. I think it is now time for both peoples to negotiate, but the first steps should be taken by Armenia, as it occupied the Azerbaijani territories.”

Mr Mariani also shared his impressions of Baku, saying: “I have known Azerbaijan for many years, and visited the country on

numerous occasions. I first travelled to the country 15 years ago. I remember what Baku was then, and see what it is now. In my opinion, Baku has significantly changed, but I think that it is one of the most beautiful cities in the Caucasus, along with Tbilisi.”

Making reference to Azerbaijan in its entirety, the MP noted its multiculturalism, which is a distinctive feature of the country. He explained: “This is a very interesting country, as people with various religions live peacefully together. This is an exciting country from the perspective of economic development. Certainly, the economy is currently in a difficult situation, due to the decrease in the oil price, but I hope that the situation will improve and Azerbaijan will continue to follow the correct path.”

## Yerevan hostage crisis – indicative of volatility, intransigence and desperation in Armenian society

After an armed siege at the police headquarters in Erebuni, Yerevan, that lasted two weeks and cost the lives of two police officers, more than 30 gunmen – members of the Daredevils of Sassoun group – finally surrendered. This crisis rocked the Armenian ruling elite, as it was a tangible demonstration of discontent amongst Armenian society, an impoverished population who feel disenfranchised and forgotten amidst the ruins of a failed state.

According to Levon Barseghian, writing in the *Huffington Post*, the crisis began in protest at the jailing in June of Jirair Selfilian, leader of the oppositional Founding Parliament Party, for allegedly plotting a coup. A former military leader during the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, he had been vociferously critical of current Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan – himself a military leader during the conflict – for his apparent willingness to enter into negotiations with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to resolve the conflict, and has repeatedly called for Sargsyan's resignation.

Originally, the armed men took nine people hostage, but released them during the first week. They then took four doctors hostage, but they were also released.

The second killing, on 30 July, was accurate and deliberate. Eyewitness Ashot Aharonyan, writing on Facebook, commented: "A sniper opened fire from inside the police station and killed a police officer who was sitting in a car parked 350–400m away." The first killing occurred during the storming of the police station. OSCE condemned this loss of life, stating: "We are following developments with growing concern."

On 29 July, an ultimatum was issued to the group, following violent clashes that saw the use of truncheons and stun grenades by the police. A 5000-strong rally in support of the gunmen turned nasty, resulting in at least 60 injuries and more than 160 arrests, according to the BBC. The same day, three gunmen were wounded, having been shot in the legs by Armenian police snipers.

This is the fourth successive summer that has seen protests against the Sargsyan regime. According to Barseghian, this is just the tip of the iceberg: "Many Armenians would like to get rid of Sargsyan. The resentment they feel about the regime's corruption and its perceived indifference to the country's widespread poverty has been building for years. It was heightened when Sargsyan pushed through a new constitution in December 2015 that allows him to govern for many more years."

US policy analysts Stratfor treated the standoff as an indication of mass discontent: "Sargsyan is stuck between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, Russia and the West are pushing Yerevan to make progress on finding a political solution to the Nagorno-



The siege rocked Armenia, and demonstrated the malcontent and disillusionment of the impoverished Armenian population

Karabakh issue. But on the other hand, Sargsyan is aware that any major concessions could threaten his position in office, and potentially even topple the government.

"Though the hostage crisis is not driven solely by concerns over Nagorno-Karabakh, it is strongly influenced by them and is proof of the instability that a diplomatic deal on the region could produce. Combined with the population's rising discontent over security crackdowns, and the centralisation of power and corruption that is associated with Sargsyan's rule, the standoff with the Founding Parliament has further weakened the government's grip."

Following the end of the crisis, President Sargsyan denounced any possibility of compromise, stating: "There will be no unilateral concessions regarding the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Never. Nagorno-Karabakh will never be part of Azerbaijan. Never. I repeat once again – it is out of question. I have given my entire adult life to this. To get to the solution acceptable for my nation, I have always been ready to sacrifice any position, and also my life."

TEAS treats this violence as indicative of the increasing desperation of the Armenian population. Turkey and Azerbaijan closed their borders with Armenia in 1993 due to the Armenian occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding regions. With no natural resources, exclusion from regional energy and trade projects, and a declining, ageing and deskilled population, Armenia remains resolutely the 'poor man' of the South Caucasus, being totally economically reliant on Vladimir Putin's Russia to remain afloat.

## Iranian–Azerbaijani electricity corridor to be implemented

Azerbaijan is preparing to integrate its electricity grid into that of the North–South energy corridor connecting Iran and Russia, stated Natig Aliyev, Azerbaijani Energy Minister, speaking to the Sputnik news agency. He commented: "Azerbaijan is technically fully prepared to join its energy

system with that of Russia and Iran."

Mr Aliyev predicted that global oil prices would soon stabilise at \$80 (£61.2) per barrel, which will be acceptable for all market participants. The sides are currently entering into discussions regarding the

establishment of a trilateral working group that will deal with the technical and organisational aspects of integrating the Russian, Iranian and Azerbaijani power grids. He noted that Iran would receive up to 700MW of energy per year, once the linkup is complete.



## Azerbaijani spirit comes to two leading London jazz clubs

Internationally acclaimed Azerbaijani pianist Elchin Shirinov has brought his unique approach to ethnojazz to two of London's leading jazz venues – The Spice of Life in Soho and The Vortex in Dalston, performing before an international audience of around 170 across both concerts, in which his participation was supported by TEAS. Shirinov – who comes from the Azerbaijani folk tradition – belongs to the new generation of Azerbaijani jazz musicians who combine elements of post-bop jazz with the modes, melodies and microtones of Azerbaijani folk and classical music.

The concert at the Spice of Life on 13 July featured two musicians well-versed in Shirinov's music – Italian bassist Andrea Di Biase and British drummer Jon Scott, with whom he has regularly collaborated for over two years. Headlining after a set by the UK fusion band Alex Munk's Flying Machines, he performed before a rapt audience, his Azerbaijani heritage being evident from the start with his version of the Azerbaijani folk song *Durna*, which began at a furious drum-led pace and was replete with eastern harmonies, microtones and repeated figures, urging on Scott towards increasingly daring and complex drum passages. This, in turn, prompted a staccato response by Shirinov before his pianistic pyrotechnics upped the tempo even further, reaching a new degree of excitement. Throughout the concert, Di Biase demonstrated that the legacy of the great lyric bass player of postbop jazz – Scott LaFaro – remains firmly alive.

Shirinov's own *Waiting*, beginning as a languorous and delicate piece, again demonstrated the strong themes and eastern harmonies that are a hallmark of Shirinov's work, the symbiotic relationship with both western musicians emphasising the infinite understanding and respect that exists between all trio members. Throughout, Shirinov made space for both Scott and Di Biase to improvise as freely as possible, being perfectly content to recede into the background as an accompanist or come to the foreground with his own exciting improvisations whenever necessary, particularly after Scott upped the tempo. Similarly, his composition *Muse* was a thoughtful and delicate eastern-tinged dance-like melody that provided many opportunities for his own extemporisations to reach new heights of ingenuity, accompanied by Scott's hand-drumming.

Arguably the most famous Azerbaijani folk song – the enigmatic *Sari Gelin* – followed, beginning at a stately and reverential pace, laid down by Scott, its melancholic theme captivating all audience members. This led to an empathetically reflective bowed bass passage from Di Biase. The piece concluded with a richly ornamented variation of the main theme accompanied by a bowed bass in its upper register that stunned every member of the audience into silence.

Introducing each song in English, Elchin followed this with a newly self-penned composition – *Chika Chika* – a dynamic and staccato piece, full of repeated figures leading to freeform passages. This provided the groundwork for Scott to apply his full arsenal of percussion and percussive techniques, ranging from straightforward on-the-beat drumming through to a dizzying combination of cymbals, high-hats and bass drums that whipped the multinational audience into a frenzy.

Elchin remains virtually the only jazz pianist to improvise on themes from the Azerbaijani classical repertoire, and he continued his concert by performing his own arrangement of one of the most famous pieces – the *Waltz* from *The Seven Beauties* ballet by Gara Garayev. Beginning quietly, the famous theme accompanied by Scott on brushes, Elchin rapidly found a joyous groove that

gave space for Di Biase to demonstrate his cerebral approach to the bass, before giving way for Elchin's return, which was full of flourishes up and down the keyboard, buoyed by Scott's polyrhythmic drumming. Following its fitful conclusion, one enthused audience member declared the piece to be 'marvellous'.

He also approached a composition by the father of Azerbaijani classical music – an aria from the 1910 operetta *O Olmasin Bu Olsun (If not this one, that one)* by Uzeyir Hajibeyli, which he had reworked into non-standard metrical form. Maintaining the richly ornamented main theme, the piano then entered into interplay with drummer Scott, giving rise to increasingly more daring and successively faster improvisations, propelled by Scott's drumming, before reaching dizzying heights of complexity.

After a rapturous ovation from the jazz cognoscenti in the audience, Shirinov returned to the stage for a version of the folksong *Gul Achdi*, beginning with a single repeated note on the bass that was picked up on the piano, leading to staccato variations on the main theme. The dancelike melody resulted in a trancelike state for all audience members, and prompted them to a standing ovation.



The great musical empathy between Azerbaijani pianist Elchin Shirinov, Andrea Di Biase (bass) and Jon Scott (drums) was evident throughout his set at the Spice of Life

The concert two days later in the intimate surroundings of the Vortex jazz club gave Shirinov and Di Biase even more time to stretch out over two sets – this time collaborating with the drummer Dave Hamblett. The venue is billed as 'London's Listening Jazz Club', and the attentive audience remained transfixed throughout both sets. The extended performance time also gave Shirinov opportunity to approach one of his favourite standard songs – Michel Legrand's pensive *You Must Believe In Spring*, which began with delicate interplay between Shirinov and Di Biase on plucked bass. Shirinov went on to showcase his rhapsodic side, even as he improvised freely around the famous melody, which was much beloved by the late Bill Evans.

The response to both concerts by an international audience bore testament to American pianist Brad Mehldau's testimonial: "Elchin has a really good sense of how to orchestrate for the trio setting. In particular, he finds a distinct place for the piano and the bass in the music – he doesn't play any extraneous stuff that the bass is already doing." Go to [www.elchinshirinov.com](http://www.elchinshirinov.com) to experience the innovative work of Elchin Shirinov, to learn more about his forthcoming debut album, and to read about his concert as part of the London Jazz Festival on 18 November at the Pizza Express Jazz Club (book tickets at +44 (0)20 74394962).

## The crème de la crème of Turkic musicians are heard in London

The International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY) organised an outstanding concert at St. James' Church, Piccadilly, as part of its tour that also took in dates in Oxford, Glasgow and Edinburgh. Featuring the TURKSOY Youth Chamber Orchestra, drawn from young musicians in all the countries encompassed by TURKSOY (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and those republics subject to the Russian Federation – Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Khakassia) the programmes included a rich and varied selection of European and Turkic music, the latter being conducted by the youthful Azerbaijani conductor and composer Mustafa Mehmandarov.

The programme included the lilting *Aisha's Dance* from *The Seven Beauties* ballet by Gara Garayev and the driving *Dance of the Passionate Girl* from his *The Path of Thunder* ballet. The evening concluded with three majestic strings-led arrangements by Mr Mehmandarov of three sections from the *Rural Suite* by Agshin Alizadeh (1937–2014), formerly Head of the Azerbaijani Composers' Union – the rhythmic folk dance *Jangi*; the evocative



Mustafa Mehmandarov and the TURKSOY Youth Chamber Orchestra take their bows after performing the arrangement by the conductor of the lilting *Folk Dance* by Agshin Alizadeh

*Mugham*, where the strings took the role of the khanande; and the lilting and effervescent *Folk Dance*.

## French TourMag acclaims Baku sightseeing

The French TourMag website – aimed at tourism professionals – has published an article entitled *Azerbaijan – a changing destination that deserves to be better known* (*Azerbaïdjan : une destination décalée qui gagne à être connue*) (see <http://bit.ly/bakoutourisme>). Michèle Laget-Herbaut, President, Travel Agencies Union, Ile-de-France region, penned the comments after their convention was hosted in Baku. She goes on to describe the city as “a great opportunity and new destination for tourism, meetings, incentive travel and business”, going on to say that “Azerbaijan possesses all the characteristics of a great destination.”

She then goes on to explain the reasons behind ‘the wow effect’, including its history, nature, winter sports, trekking, gastronomy, beaches and health tourism, specifically in relation to naphthalene

medicinal oil treatment. Mrs Laget-Herbaut also explains how indigenous winemaking is of the highest quality, and that French viticulturalists were previously invited to participate in the Ganja Wine Festival. She quotes Roch Guilabert, Prony Voyages Agency, who commented: “Everyone responds the same way: with astonishment and surprise over the exoticism of the place, as this destination is truly different and original... all my colleagues are of the same opinion as myself and that is ‘wow!’ All were agreeably surprised.”

She goes on to write very warmly of the tourism possibilities of the country, whilst admitting that the industry is very recent and that quality hotels are less common outside of Baku. Of the capital, she writes: “Do not be afraid of these words: Baku is a magnificent capital. Its neoclassical European architecture goes towards the

baroque, and its stonework from the end of the 19th–early 20th centuries leaves the visitor dumbfounded. Imagine the Rock of Monaco at Force 1000!” She speaks warmly of the various parks, wide avenues, great buildings, cleanliness, safety and secularism of the city.

Following this, Mrs Laget-Herbaut goes on to lay the Baku/Dubai comparison to rest, as the city combines the ancient and modern, particularly in the Old City. She also writes of the petroglyphs in Gobustan and concludes by explaining the importance of the tourism industry to the Azerbaijani government in terms of diversifying the economy, and that French tourists are a main target sector. She states: “What are the keywords to describe this destination? It is impossible to decide what is best to include in the search engine. In fact, we should not put the plough before the cattle...”

## Pushing against the tide of repression

The new book *The Politics of Culture in Soviet Azerbaijan 1920–40* by Dr Audrey Altstadt, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts, examines the “cultural war” between the Azerbaijani elites and the Communist Party during the early years of Soviet rule. Initially describing the cultural–enlightenment movement of the 19th century, Dr Altstadt describes and analyses such cultural topics as alphabet and language reforms, the modernisation and expansion of elementary education, and the appropriation of scholarship and literature for political purposes by the Soviet regime.

Although the ‘accepted’ overarching Soviet culture assumed the hierarchy of importance in the Soviet consciousness, the essence of indigenous Azerbaijani culture could not be crushed. Writers, scholars, composers, and later archivists, librarians, historians, poets and others preserved the creative work of those who continued to work in the face of adversity, keeping alive the memories of the victims of those who fell foul of the Stalinist purges.

The book also examines the ideological conflict between the research mission that Azerbaijan State University was meant to pursue when founded under the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) and the Soviet drive to rapidly produce technicians through narrow technical training. In the final chapter, she explores the crushing of indigenous Azerbaijani literature and writers in favour of proletarian literature. The chapter culminates in the use of Writers’ Union meetings in 1937 as a tribunal to accuse and condemn those authors who were accused of ‘formalism’ for their failure to conform to Stalinist guidelines of Socialist Realism. The conclusion traces the rehabilitation of Stalinist purge victims from the Khrushchev era to the post-Soviet period.

The book particularly examines the legacy of such prominent authors and poets as Huseyn Cavid, Salman Mumtaz, Bekir Chobanzade, Jafar Jabbarly, Samed Vurgun, Dadash Buniyatzade and Nariman Narimanov. This Routledge book is available from <http://bit.ly/culturalpoliticsaz> and a 20 per cent discount is available when quoting code FLR40 at checkout.

## Ana Cheishvili – face-to-face with the past

The Paris-based Georgian-born Ana Cheishvili is a leading researcher into those collections related to the Caucasus housed in French museums. Until recently, she was employed at the Musée Cernuschi in Paris, which focuses on Asian art, and previously worked for the National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Georgia and spent over nine years in the archaeological department of the National Museum of Georgia. Ana is currently working on her PhD thesis at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS).

It was during her time at the latter that she came across the work of Baron Joseph de Baye (1853–1931), a pioneering archaeologist and photographer who regularly led missions to the Tsarist Russian Empire from the 1890s until the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. His travels took him to the Caucasus, which he photographed extensively and charted in his journals. He also wrote numerous monographs on the South Caucasus, particularly focusing on Georgia. Since then, Ana has been unearthing his writings and photographs in various museums in France.

More recently, Ana has been investigating the work of Hugues Krafft (1853–1935), a contemporary and friend of Baron de Baye, who pioneered the use of instant gelatine-silver glass plate photography. During 20 years of touring the world at the behest of the Société de Géographie and the Académie française, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia became aware of his work. The Tsar enabled him to visit all parts of the Russian Empire, including the South Caucasus, and his findings and observations were recorded in his 1902 publication *A travers de Turkestan russe* (*Crossing Russian*

*Turkestan*). Neil Watson spoke to Ana in Paris about these men, their work and its significance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### What prompted Hugues Krafft and Joseph de Baye to visit the Caucasus during the 1890s?

During the 19th century, many anthropological societies were created across Europe, and the 1850s saw one of the foremost societies of this type being established in Paris. They began research into origins of mankind and there were many anthropological missions that visited various countries during the early years of photography. The missions came soon after the scientific developments of photographic pioneer Louis Daguerre.

Throughout this period, archaeology and anthropology were interrelated, as was ethnography. The members of the anthropological society included archaeologists, anthropologists and ethnographers – they were studying everything. The Caucasus was known to have been home to one of the first Iron Age settlements, predating such settlements in Europe by three or four centuries.

In 1870s, two huge cemeteries – necropolises – were discovered in the Caucasus. One of these was the Samtavro Necropolis, located near Tbilisi in Georgia, and the other is near Vladikavkaz in the North Caucasus, called Koban Necropolis. When these archaeologists and anthropologists came to Tsarist Russia, there was a major archaeological congress. Thereafter, this was held triennially, being attended by leading Russian and European archaeologists and anthropologists, who unveiled and discussed their latest discoveries. The



Ana Cheishvili has singlehandedly spearheaded the rediscovery of the Caucasus oeuvres of pioneering photographers Baron Joseph de Baye and Hugues Krafft

European Society of Archaeologists and Anthropologists met in Tbilisi in 1881 for its fifth congress, and saw the latest findings. These were late Bronze Age/early Iron Age artefacts, and the experts were amazed, as one or two decades earlier the Hallstatt Necropolis had been found in Europe and the archaeologists tried to find the similarities between these two cultures.

At this time, the experts began to realise that the Caucasus was the place where the Iron Age began in the 12th–11th Century BC, whereas in Europe it was around the 9th Century BC. This led many scientists to undertake missions to the Caucasus. Furthermore, this region is very rich in minerals, and mines were established for various metals, in addition to oil and gas. The explorations were not purely scientific, but also commercial and industrial in nature. Interests in oil, commercial endeavours and science all united to create an enthusiasm for the Caucasus, and provided the finance for missions.

At this time, the French Education Minister organised a scientific mission to the Caucasus to find objects and artefacts. These were distributed between various museums, including the Louvre, the Sèvres City of Ceramics (Cité de la Céramique), and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero, which latterly became the Musée de l'Homme. Hugues Krafft was particularly interested in the Caucasus, but also travelled to Central Asia to fulfil the request of his benefactors.

To visit Central Asia, he initially travelled from Marseille by boat to Constantinople (now Istanbul) and from Constantinople to Batumi in Georgia. Thereafter, he took the railway to Tbilisi, where he stayed a few days, thereafter travelling to Baku, before crossing the Caspian Sea and going to Central Asia. Baku was a point on their itinerary, which is why Mr Krafft visited the



Baron Joseph de Baye recognised the need to photographically capture ways of life in the Caucasus before they were submerged by the first wave of globalisation





A Lezgin manufactures arms in Tbilisi Bazaar  
(Photo: Baron Joseph de Baye)

Caucasus three times altogether, with his first visit taking place in 1896, and I am currently researching the reason for this. His second visit took place in 1898, when he was en-route for Central Asia, and he returned a year later when returning to France.

When they were travelling, both Hugues Krafft and Baron de Baye had passports and recommendation letters, so when they arrived in Tbilisi, they initially visited the French consulate, and thereafter it was very easy to travel. At the time, there were excellent relations between France and the Russian Empire, the Franco-Russian Alliance being the predominant manifestation of this. Baron Joseph de Baye often claimed that Russia was his second motherland, and he frequently travelled to the Caucasus.

Baron de Baye had many friends in Tbilisi (where he was given the nickname Sosiko de Baye) and also travelled to Baku and Yerevan. He was initially an archaeologist, although he focused more on France than Russia. By the time he travelled to the Caucasus, he already had health problems and was more interested in ethnography and ethnographic research. He wrote a great deal on the Caucasus and the mosaic of peoples found there.

He was very interested in the peoples he saw during his visits to the North and South Caucasus and in recording the characteristics of the various ethnic groups before they disappeared. During his travels in the Caucasus, he often noted that many people had taken on European clothes. He regretted the displacement of their indigenous culture and civilisation, one manifestation of which was the foundation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which existed from 1918–20. He lamented

this very much, and felt it was necessary to photograph the people as a memory of their culture, and to file these photographs so these memories were not lost.

In the 1890s, Baron de Baye was one of the first users of the newly-developed Kodak Eastman roll film cameras. This was much easier than using photographic plates, which are very heavy and fragile, despite the film he used only having 12 exposures. However, Hugues Krafft only used glass plates. The Kodak Eastman cameras were both cheaper than the plate cameras and easier to transport, making them ideal for travellers. The camera used by the Baron de Baye has been lost, but I assume it was similar to a box camera. Of course, we have the Kodak films that he used and the boxes for those films, which date from 1897–98. On the other hand, plate cameras had bellows and were large and cumbersome, and always needed a tripod, as a comparatively long exposure time was required.

Baron de Baye frequently went to markets in the places he visited, as they were full of people, and he was able to capture candid photos of people going about their everyday lives, due to his comparatively unobtrusive equipment. Both Hugues Krafft and Baron de Baye were amongst the first photographers to work in the street, rather than in studios where every element of the image could be controlled. In Baku, Hugues Krafft photographed people carrying their briefcases, going about their daily business, and you get a snapshot of their lives, which has an ethnographic dimension. In these photos, we can see the history of the country, architecture and culture. Many of the photos of Georgia show buildings that no longer exist.

This is also the case for the photos of Baku, where there are small streets of wooden houses that were destroyed during the Soviet period. In both cities, there was much destruction during Soviet times to



A Muslim Sheikh in Tbilisi (Photo: Baron Joseph de Baye)

make grand avenues and to accommodate high-rise apartment blocks. The approach of both photographers was akin to that of the short actualités shot by the Lumière Brothers, who developed cinema in 1895, and were content to let action develop before their eyes. For example, sometimes there are several photos of the same situation, which is very similar to a Lumière Brothers actualité, as three or four photos taken within a few seconds can be put together and have a sense of narrative.

Baron de Baye's collection is mainly at the Musée du quai Branly, where we are collaborating on this photo collection. My paper on his work may well be published this year. We are also undertaking a project with the Georgian Embassy to publish the photos that show Georgia.

The Hugues Krafft collection is in Reims, as his house is located there, and comprises around 600 photos on plates. These were transported by various methods, and they remain in excellent condition. They came from slightly different perspectives – Hugues Krafft was a photographer, above all, whereas Baron de Baye was an archaeologist or anthropologist.

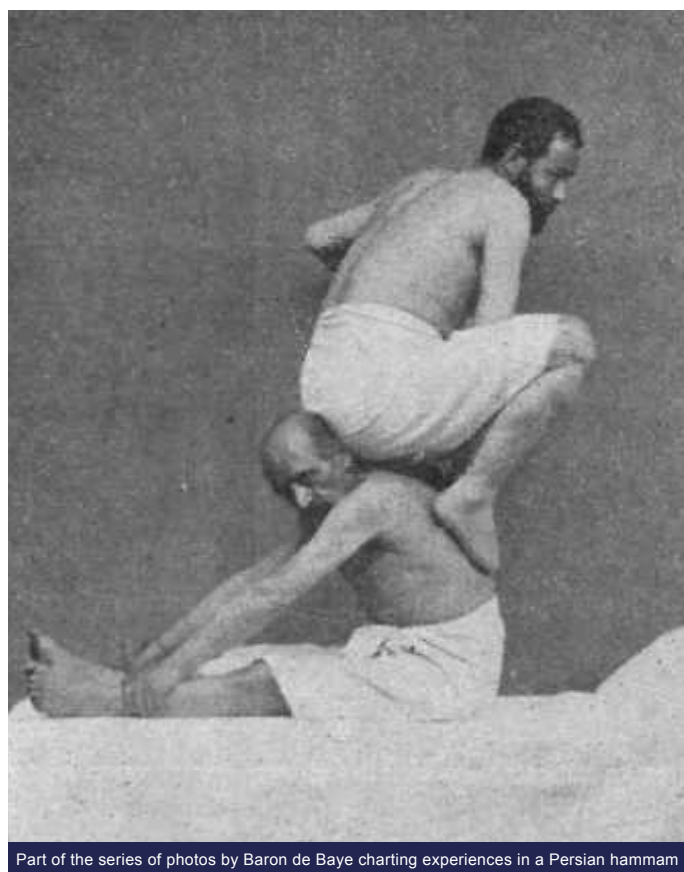
**Did they actually have a different approach to the composition within the photographs? For example, did Baron de Baye undertake a noticeably anthropological approach or are there any distinct differences regarding the treatment of their subjects?**

This is a really interesting question – I have been working with the Baron de Baye collection since 2008 and discovered the Hugues Krafft collection last year. In my view, Baron de Baye was the more profound photographer, although this is probably only apparent after viewing the photographs several times. He was certainly the more ethnographic photographer, and really tells a story through his photos. He travelled extensively, and was particularly interested in the Jewish people of the Caucasus. He travelled to Quba in Azerbaijan to see the Jewish community there, where he recorded their way of life in many photos. Usually, he focused on one aspect or area of the Caucasus during his visits.

He was fascinated by Baku, described the city in his book and pursued his interest in the Jewish people. He photographed the Jewish Quarter in Kutaisi, Western Georgia, and then went to Quba before visiting the North Caucasus. He wrote about his experiences in a book that was published in Paris entitled *The Mountain Jews and the Georgian Jews*.



Tartars, as captured by the lens of Baron de Baye in 1897



Part of the series of photos by Baron de Baye charting experiences in a Persian hammam

Every time he returned to Paris, he published a monograph, illustrated with photos. Altogether, he published seven or eight small books about the Caucasus, each containing around 30–40 photos. He selected these for publication himself, but in fact he took many other photos. In 2006, the Musée du quai Branly acquired 14 albums of photos, equating to around 1200 images, of which around 700 are from the Caucasus. Only a very small selection had been published. He also never published photos of his friends because he was focusing on the indigenous peoples.

He was an archaeologist and anthropologist, and adopted a resolutely scientific approach for all his subjects. I have been fortunate enough to see the other photos in the private collection of Baron de Baye, along with his correspondence and journals. His approach is very modern, as it is actualité and reportage, heralding the way towards Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Capa and all the famous photographers of the 20th century.

However, that is not to say that the photos taken by Hugues Krafft are uninteresting. He captured an enormous range of subjects, and we can find a great deal of information about the history of the region, the city, its architecture and national dress. It is amazing that such a personal approach is evident so early in the history of photography, and that they captured such naturalistic images.

**How widely were their photographs shown and distributed at the time?**

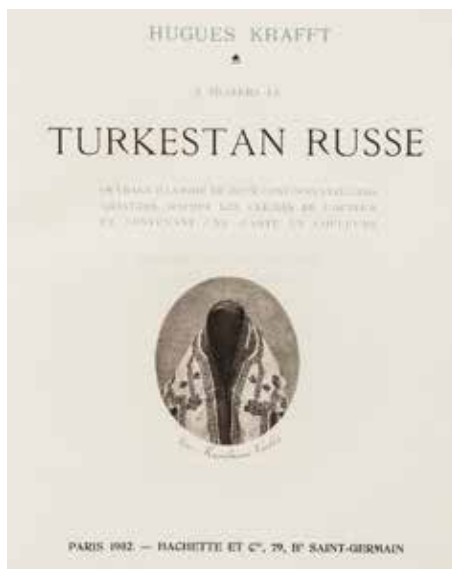
Both photographers were members of the Société de Géographie. After their return to Paris, they led a meeting and would present their findings, and slides of their photographs would be projected using a magic lantern.

Some photographs were published in various revues, but it was not straightforward to print photos directly at this time, so the photogravure process had to be used. This is where the





A young Tajik woman in Samarkand plays the dutar – akin to an Azerbaijani saz (Photo: Hugues Krafft)



Hugues Krafft's findings from Central Asia and the Caucasus were published in *A travers de Turkestan russe* (1902)



Photographer Hugues Krafft spent 20 years travelling the world

photographs were directly reproduced on copper plates in negative for printing.

The photographs of Baron de Baye were published in his monographs and elsewhere, but the views of the Caucasus by Hugues Krafft were never published. Both photographers knew each other and travelled together to Georgia in 1898. Baron de Baye actually published two photos of Georgia taken by Hugues Krafft.

I have been unable to establish why the approximately 600 views of the Caucasus by Hugues Krafft were left unpublished, as those of his trips to Central Asia, Japan, and his first world tour most certainly were. He was a member of the same scientific organisations as Baron de Baye and it seems very strange that they published one extensively and not the other. It is possible that he was just more interested in other countries.

**Why have these collections and photographers effectively been forgotten?**

Firstly, there are more ethnographic and archaeological collections in museums than photographic collections. These collections arrived in France between the 1880s and the early years of the 20th century. At the time, there were many exhibitions, and these collections and artefacts from the Caucasus were presented at these.

During and after the First World War, many French museums were closed, and all these collections were put in storage. By the time the war ended, the Bolshevik Revolution had occurred, and the Soviet Union was born during the 1920s. Frontiers were closed, and there were no further exchanges between the

Soviet Union and France. It became very difficult for any westerner to travel to the Caucasus, and there was very little interest in Caucasian archaeology or ethnography for many years. These collections were consequently forgotten. My objective is to catalogue these collections.

**Baron de Baye shot on film, rather than photographic plates. Do you actually have the original film or just the prints?**

We only have negatives for three photos – other than that, they are all photographic prints in Kodak albums, and in excellent condition. The main collection is in Paris and the others – of Georgia – are in the Marne regional archives. This contains around 100 photos, and there are also some in a private collection. The Château de Baye is near Reims, and during the First World War, German soldiers stole many items when they occupied the castle. That is why some of his possessions sometimes appear at auction. His camera may have been lost this way.

The Château became slightly abandoned during the 1930s, when his daughter had no finance for maintenance, and other items were destroyed when parts of the roof collapsed. Only a small part of his collection has survived, and his remaining photos are very impressive and imaginative. We have almost all his photographs from 1895–1904, which is why there are so many. All the photos are being stored in a climatically controlled environment so they will not degrade.

**What is the current state of the Hugues Krafft collection?**

The majority of the photos by Hugues Krafft are on photographic plates, and around 50 or 60 are prints. Photographic plates are

large format, and give excellent resolution when scanned. He must have used two different cameras, as the photographic plates are in two sizes, so presumably he switched to a lighter weight camera.

**Why are these photos important today?**

These are views of a vanished world. Both photographers were fully aware of the impact of what we now call globalisation, and sought to capture the everyday lives of the peoples in all the countries they visited. In particular, the views of Azerbaijan show a time that predates the dominance of Soviet culture, and the photos of Jewish life demonstrate that multiculturalism and tolerance have always been hallmarks of Azerbaijani life.

It is now time for both photographers' views of the Caucasus to be re-evaluated and, in most cases, exhibited and published for the first time.



The vestibule of a rich merchant in Tashkent, as featured in *A travers de Turkestan russe* (Photo: Hugues Krafft)

## Gunay Kazimzade: IT – the future of Azerbaijan



Gunay Kazimzade recognised that IT studies need to begin at the earliest possible age

### Tell us about yourself

I am Gunay Kazimzade, and I graduated in Applied Mathematics from the Baku branch of the Lomonosov Moscow State University and Computer Science department at Bonn University, Germany. Until January 2015, I worked and studied, and, after returning to Azerbaijan, was employed by several public and private information technologies (IT) companies. Since 2016, I have been an ICT Instructor at the British School in Baku and Mathematics Lecturer at Khazar University.

Furthermore, I have been managing a project called WoWoman Tech Tech Xanim that aims to promote IT and programming amongst women. During the course of a year, its team trained over 400 young ladies, and organised more than ten long- and short-term training sessions in such disciplines as software development, network fundamentals, and Java web development. In Summer 2016, we launched the Tech Summer School, where we focused on students, graduates and schoolgirls aged 9–16 years. During this, I also served as a trainer of both school and 17+ groups, where we delivered workshops on robotic programming, cyber-security, algorithms, data structures and other topics. We are continuing the project, and accepting applications for the August session.

### Tell us about the Barama Junior Coding Kids Project

The Barama Junior Coding Kids Project focuses on both schoolboys and girls in order to deliver express training in coding and programming. For these projects, I have developed a special programme and syllabus that teaches coding, using interactive methods. The project sees 9–13-year-old schoolchildren gather together at the Barama Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre to learn programming concepts, technology design and game development.

### How will this project make the world a better place?

I have always wished to organise initiatives focused on IT and programming for youths and children, as I believe that the future of Azerbaijan will be entirely based on technology, and we have to develop our children today in order to make them successful tomorrow. In 30 years, only 35 per cent of today's jobs will exist. New technologies will be created and developed, and I have a dream to see as many Azerbaijani workers as possible participating in this transformation and development. The future is being created by the youth of today, who are being directed and developed in an organised way. My aim is to make a positive change and to help children grow in an effective manner that is to the greater good of society.

### What are the challenges on this path?

The main challenges relate to stereotypes regarding the IT field. Most people regard programming and IT as being extremely complex and beyond their capability. My aim is to develop an interesting and effective education and development plan so everyone will be able to learn coding, in the same way as speaking and writing. We need to increase awareness of the importance of coding in society so that parents will encourage their children to follow this path and not feel that coding is alien to them.

### What advice would you give to fellow organisations or tutors?

My main advice to all teachers of information and communications technologies (ICT) is to develop in a manner that is commensurate with the latest technological progressions. As we determine the strategy for the future, we must be aware of the technological trends, interactive teaching methods and effective teaching strategies. My main strength, as a teacher, is that I aim to become friends with each of my students and understand what they really want, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and establish their aptitudes so these can be applied and developed.



The Barama Junior Coding Kids Project is serving to create an important knowledge base for the future

Visit the Barama Junior Coding Kids Project Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/barama.az](http://www.facebook.com/barama.az)





The new SOCAR–Total agreement will herald the exploration of the Absheron field, with the first well being sunk in 2019

## SOCAR and Total begin Absheron field exploration

The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic (SOCAR) and French Total have begun work on the development project for the Absheron gas field in the Caspian Sea. Speaking to *Trend News*, a SOCAR source explained: “The parties are completely satisfied with the negotiations. The signing of a large number of contracts is currently being prepared, and that will

make it feasible to create an operating company to become the technical operator for development of the Absheron field. It’s premature to talk about the timing of its establishment, but there is a chance that this will happen in Autumn 2016.”

It is expected that the first gas from the Absheron field will be received in late

2021–early 2022. The final investment decision on the project will be adopted during the fourth quarter of 2017, whilst the first well at the field will be sunk during the third quarter of 2019. The discovery of the Absheron field was announced in 2011, and SOCAR geologists estimate that it holds 350bn m<sup>3</sup> (bcm) of gas and 45m tonnes of condensate.

## Azerbaijan spends over \$600m on BTK’s Georgian section

Azerbaijan allocated \$611.5m (£467.9m) towards the construction of the Georgian section of the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (BTK) railway on 1 July, following the start of financing by the State Oil Fund of the Azerbaijani Republic (SOFAZ).

According to the agreement signed between the Azerbaijani and Georgian governments, the funds are being transferred to the Marabda–Kartsakhi Railway via the International Bank of Azerbaijan. The project involves the construction and rehabilitation of the Marabda–Turkish border railway section and

relevant infrastructure. Altogether, Azerbaijan has allocated a loan of \$775m (£593m) for construction of the BTK Georgian section.

The BTK railway is being constructed on the basis of a Georgian–Azerbaijani–Turkish intergovernmental agreement, and will be commissioned in late 2016. It is anticipated that the optimal capacity of the railway will amount to 17m tonnes of cargo per annum, although it will initially carry 1m passengers and 6.5m tonnes of cargo.

## Trans-Caspian Pipeline back on the agenda

A high-level meeting expected to take place later this year in Turkmenistan could put talk of building the Trans-Caspian Pipeline back on the agenda. According to the *Associated Press* on 23 July, H.E. Mustafa Kapucu, Turkish Ambassador to Turkmenistan, revealed that Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, his Turkmen counterpart, will meet to discuss the issue. The talks pick up from the EU-brokered Ashgabat Declaration of May 2015, which was signed by the energy

ministries of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Turkey. This specified such objectives as the creation of a legal framework for gas sales by Turkmenistan to Europe and “[developing] constructive dialogue” regarding construction of the required infrastructure.

The resurgence of interest in the Trans-Caspian Pipeline would be most timely for Turkmenistan, which currently sells most of its gas to China, with small and growing

amounts going to neighbouring Iran. Formerly, Russia was its main customer, purchasing 45bn m<sup>3</sup> (bcm) of gas in 2008, but that has now dwindled to nothing. The pipeline is also relevant to the Southern Energy Corridor, aimed at reducing Russian dominance over the European gas market. Turkmen gas could flow through the Corridor, augmenting supplies from the Azerbaijani Shah Deniz 2 field, potentially alongside those from Iran, Kazakhstan and Iraq, amongst other sources.

## President Aliyev: Odessa–Brody pipeline project to be revived

Speaking to press on 14 July, following a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has revealed that the Odessa–Brody oil pipeline project is to be revived. He continued by explaining the potential for the expansion of Azerbaijani–Ukrainian economic relations, saying: “There are opportunities for the expansion of bilateral trade. We have agreed that Azerbaijan will consider Ukrainian companies whilst importing products. Azerbaijan has great export opportunities and Ukraine has a big market, which is very interesting for us. Concrete instructions have been given.

“Relevant directions have been given regarding the expansion of investment opportunities in both countries, as there is great interest in this sphere. With regard to the energy sector, it was noted that SOCAR is already active in Ukraine, where

it has invested over \$200m (£153.1m) and operates 60 filling stations. The SOCAR operation in Ukraine is very successful, and serves to further unite our countries.”

Commenting on the Odessa–Brody project, President Ilham Aliyev remarked: “Azerbaijan exports large volumes of oil to world markets, including those in Europe. Meanwhile, it plays a transit role for the countries located on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea. Oil is exported to world markets from Azerbaijani territory, and I believe there are opportunities for reviving the Odessa–Brody project.

“In general, I believe that co-operation in the Caspian Sea–Black Sea–Mediterranean Sea–Baltic Sea format has great potential. Undoubtedly, the operation of a transportation corridor is very important. Today, we agreed that in

order to make this corridor more attractive from the economic perspective, we should review the tariffs, as these should be reasonable for shippers, so that more cargo is transported in both directions.”

President Ilham Aliyev stressed that the BTK railway would soon be commissioned and continued: “This route implies the restoration of the Silk Road, and new opportunities are opening up for Ukrainian companies in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, efforts are being jointly made with partner countries to create the North–South Corridor. Ukraine will be able to use this route in the future.

“There was also an exchange of views on creating joint industrial activities. These include heavy industry, and we also discussed the potential for developing the military and technical sectors.”

## WTO accession talks recommence in Geneva

On 19 July, it was announced that another round of talks on the Azerbaijani accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) had begun in Geneva, according to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry. Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister, is heading the Azerbaijani delegation.

Speaking to *Trend News*, Chidu Osakwe, Director, WTO Office of Accession, commented that the changes taking place in the Azerbaijani economy and the ongoing reforms, particularly in the agricultural sector, were positive. Mr Osakwe explained that meetings would be held between representatives of Azerbaijan and the WTO member states, and the Azerbaijani side will respond to those questions submitted during a meeting in 2015.

Mr Osakwe expanded by saying that meeting participants would be seeking to assess the strength of the Azerbaijani economy, given the current low oil prices, establishing whether Baku has implemented an economic development strategic plan to face the current situation.

To date, Norway, Russia and Saudi Arabia have expressed the intention to hold bilateral talks with Azerbaijan on the issue. However, Mr Mammad-Guliyev stressed that he expects the number of participating countries to increase. Azerbaijan has held 'observer' status at the WTO since 1997, and began negotiations with WTO member states in 2004. It currently negotiates with 19 countries, and has signed protocols with Turkey, Oman, the UAE, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. It is currently at the stage of signing protocols with China and Moldova.



The Azerbaijani WTO accession delegation is led by Mahmud Mammad-Guliyev, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister

## ACG block revenues total \$120bn

According to the State Oil Fund of the Azerbaijani Republic (SOFAZ), revenues from the Azeri–Chirag–Guneshli (ACG) block of fields reached \$119.3bn (£91.3bn) from 2001–16. Of this, SOFAZ stated that its revenues amounted to \$2.3bn (£1.8bn) during the first half of 2016, of which \$504m (£385.9m) was accounted for in June alone. The *Contract of the Century*, signed between SOCAR and a BP-led consortium, was finalised in 1994. The proven oil reserves of the ACG block amount to nearly 1bn tonnes.

## SOCAR puts new Guneshli well into action

SOCAR has commissioned well No.43 on offshore platform No.10 of the Guneshli field. According to SOCAR, this is the first well to be put into operation since the platform fire on 4 December 2015. It is anticipated that the new well will produce

an additional 36,500 tonnes of oil per annum.

Gas and condensate are extracted from the wellbore at a depth of 2929–2888m, and the Guneshli field will continue to play

an important role in the Azerbaijani oil and gas industry. The shallow part of the ACG field is being developed solely by SOCAR, whereas the deepwater section is being developed jointly with a BP-led consortium of foreign partners.

## Financial stability body established amidst fears of further bank defaults

According to the Fineko news agency, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has established a Financial Stability Council, amidst fears of further bank defaults, chaired by Artur Rasizade, Azerbaijani Prime Minister. In addition to supporting – or closing – weak banks, Official Baku has sought to stabilise the situation through institutional reforms.

The new council will be overseen by Natig Amirov, Azerbaijani

Presidential Aide for Economic Reforms; Samir Sharifov, Azerbaijani Finance Minister; Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijani Economy Minister; Elman Rustamov, Governor, Central Bank of Azerbaijan; Rufat Aslanli, Chair, Azerbaijani Financial Markets Supervisory Authority; and Shahmar Movsumov, Executive Director, SOFAZ. The council will be required to submit a quarterly report to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev regarding the measures taken to ensure macroeconomic and financial stability.

## Banking overhaul claims four more victims

The Azerbaijani Financial Markets Supervisory Authority has closed down four of its remaining 45 banks by revoking the licenses of Dekabank, Kredobank, Parabank and Zaminbank. According to Rufat Aslanli, Chair, Azerbaijani Financial Markets Supervisory Authority, speaking at a press conference, this will serve to “reduce risks in the banking sector, ensure financial sustainability and increase trust.” The Authority was established in mid-January to take over as the banking regulator from the Central Bank of Azerbaijan.

He went on to comment that the lenders had failed to “classify their assets in

accordance with law” and “set aside sufficient reserves to prevent possible damages.” Mr Aslanli also explained that the banks were failing to meet the minimum capital requirements and presenting false reports about their activities.

Since the devaluation of the Azerbaijani Manat (AZN) last year, Azerbaijan has rushed to purge weak lenders and consolidate the remainder of the financial industry, revoking the licenses of seven banks in a matter of weeks.

Vugar Bayramov, Head, Azerbaijani Centre for Economic and Social Development, predicted: “These aren’t

going to be the last banks to be shut down. The banks that profited hugely thanks to high interest rates during the oil boom weren’t prepared for the post-oil period.”

According to Mr Aslanli, the Azerbaijani Deposit Insurance Fund will repay more than AZN140m (£66.4m) to account holders after the lenders’ closure. The deposit insurer also plans to borrow about AZN100m (£47.4m) from the Central Bank of Azerbaijan to compensate savers at the four failed banks, according to Interfax. Despite this, Mr Aslanli called for calm, saying: “The banking sector operates as normal.”



## Euroactiv portal publishes Stratfor article on Nagorno-Karabakh

The Euroactiv site has published an article prepared by the Texas-based global intelligence company Stratfor entitled *Talking around the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh* by Georgi Gotev (<http://bit.ly/stratforkarabakh>). Mr Gotev writes: "Diplomatic talks over the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute are proceeding apace. These unusually positive accounts could bode well for talks over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which have been at a stalemate for more than two decades. In April, dozens of soldiers on both sides of the dispute were killed, and hundreds more injured, when fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia briefly escalated to levels

not seen since the ceasefire was reached in 1994. The flare-up sparked fears that another large-scale military conflict between the two countries could erupt.

"That said, continuing to hold talks that produce no significant change to the status quo may not be tenable in the long-term. After all, a lack of progress in negotiations precipitated the April skirmish in the first place, and Azerbaijan is unlikely to stand by indefinitely for the current round of talks. If diplomacy does not produce tangible results, a similar or more serious military escalation by Azerbaijan cannot be ruled out. But, ultimately, resolving the Nagorno-



Russian President Vladimir Putin leads his Azerbaijani and Armenian counterparts Ilham Aliyev and Serzh Sargsyan to talks in St Petersburg on 20 June (Photo: AP/Dmitry Lovetsky)

Karabakh conflict will require actions more than words."

## Bryza gives his verdict on Vienna and St Petersburg

Speaking to reporters on 22 July, H.E. Matthew Bryza, former US Assistant Secretary for the South Caucasus and former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan, commented that the summits in Vienna and St Petersburg were ultimately positive in nature. He said: "The talks have not only reduced tension on the 'contact line', but have also led to the beginning of discussions on the political points of the conflict."

Mr Bryza went on to cite statements by Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, who commented that the Vienna and St Petersburg meetings had also achieved some progress. Coming in the

wake of an outbreak of violence in April, a Presidential Summit was held between Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Serzh Sargsyan, his Armenian counterpart, in the 3+2 format with the OSCE Minsk Group. This was followed on 20 June by a Presidential Summit in St Petersburg chaired by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Making reference to the Russian role in achieving conflict resolution, Mr Bryza explained that President Putin is extremely concerned about the April crisis, which indicated that a war, which is unfavourable for Russia, would be possible. The diplomat

also noted that President Putin could play a role of a peacemaker in this conflict.

Mr Bryza dispelled some of the statements from some political analysts that five of the Armenian-occupied districts could be returned to Azerbaijan by late 2016, stating that this would be too soon, and that such statements place pressure on the process. He added that the recent events in Erevani, Yerevan – where the police headquarters were seized by supporters of a jailed opposition leader whose party is against negotiations with Official Baku and at odds with the current regime in Armenia – were aimed at disrupting the negotiation process.

## Karabakh conflict among priorities of Austrian OSCE chairmanship

Sebastian Kurz, Austrian Foreign Minister, has pledged that settlement of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh will rank amongst the priorities of the Austrian OSCE chairmanship in 2017. He stressed the need for continuous dialogue in order to achieve progress in a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Mr Kurz added that the war in Eastern Ukraine, the Transnistrian conflict and the conflicts in Georgia would also rank amongst the priorities of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship.

## Switzerland ready to mediate Karabakh conflict settlement

Switzerland has expressed a wish to play a mediating role in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict by inviting the Azerbaijani and Armenian delegations to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA). Filippo Lombardi, Head, Swiss delegation to the OSCE PA, made the statement, saying: "We all are very concerned at the possible escalation of the conflict. It is often erroneously referred to as a so-called 'frozen' conflict, but such conflicts, unfortunately, sometimes become 'hot spots'. Both sides suffer

casualties, and with no international monitoring, it is impossible to say who is responsible for the murders.

"Our position is that both countries and peoples, and the Armenian and Azerbaijani Presidents, need to meet and come to new dialogue in order to overcome this impasse. We can also involve the Georgian delegation. Switzerland wants to play a mediating role, but will not take sides in its search for peace."

## More Armenian UXOs discovered in Agdam and Terter

The Azerbaijani National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) detected several unexploded ordnance (UXOs) in the Azerbaijani regions of Agdam and Terter on 21 July. Altogether, ANAMA inspected an area covering 2800m<sup>2</sup> in the Makhrizli village of the Agdam region and removed pieces of exploded ammunition.

Furthermore, they inspected three explosion locations and detected pieces of unexploded ordnance in the Hasangaya village of the Terter region. Elsewhere in Terter, ANAMA examined a crater in the countryside that resulted in the detection of a 152mm OF-530 artillery shell. ANAMA teams, using minesweeper dogs, are continuing operations to detect UXOs in the settlements near the 'contact line'.

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