

AZERBAIJANIS OF IRAN

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Background and Statistics

Iran is however among the countries having big problems with statistics, especially in the past. The reason is that Muslims very negatively felt about the census and tried to conceal the number of women. Besides, many nomads lived in Iran in constant movement after their flocks. The problem of ethnical identity also counted. In past people were grouped by religion or tribe they represented. This remains in Iran even today, thus seriously complicating conduct of the census. For that reason in the past Azerbaijanis were registered either *Shia* Muslims or *Sunni* Muslims (existed but few in Iran), or Turks with subsequent division into *Shakhsevan*, *Qashqai*, *Turkmen* and other Turkic nations and tribes.

Given that, we may speak only about the general size of the population and proceed from the logic: while dividing Azerbaijan between Iran and Russia in 1828 one third of the country became part of Russia, the other two thirds remained in Iran. In 1890 approximately 8.5 million people lived in Iran. Some 850 thousand Azerbaijanis lived in the north of Iran. Respectively, some 1.5 million Azerbaijanis must have lived in the south of the country. Further in 1910 the population of Iran amounted to about 10 million; in 1933 - 13 million. Those years, 1.1 million and 2.3 million Azerbaijanis lived in Northern Azerbaijan, respectively. So, one can assume that a bit over 2 million lived in Iran in 1910 and 1933, at least 4 million Azerbaijanis. The first real census in Iran was conducted in 1976, which reported 34 million population. But the census failed to indicate the population size in terms of ethnicity. According to the 1979 census conducted in Northern Azerbaijan, 4.7 million Azerbaijanis lived in Azerbaijan. Respectively, some 9 million Azerbaijanis must have lived in Iran. Finally, the 1986 census reported some 46 million in Iran, of them, 11.5 million Azerbaijanis (a tad over 25% of the country's population). The 1996 census reported 60 million, of them 16 million Azerbaijanis (some 27% of the population). At last, according to early 2010 data, over 66 million lived in Iran; of them at least 17 million Azerbaijanis (about 26% of the country's population).

Sure, all the above figures are quite conditional and far from being accurate, subject to inaccuracies both objective and subjective. On the one part, the notion of ethnic identity is knotty in Iran, as it is much derived from European culture. This notion has been always debated in the East and not quite understandable to all. So is in many countries for today. The priority was given to religious identity and affiliation to any tribe or clan. In addition to all that, the propaganda of Iranism was marching in Iran during many decades, which meant that all the nations of Iran should belong to the Iranian ethnos as uniting all of them - Persians (Iranians themselves), Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs and others. For many years many Azerbaijanis did and still count themselves Iranians. The growth of ethnic identity in Iran has quite a recent nature.

On the other part, the Iranian authorities deliberately and in an undisguised manner reduce the number of ethnic minorities, first of all, Azerbaijanis. By the way, the same policy is applied in Northern Azerbaijan to the local ethnic minorities.

Iran agrees that the number of Azerbaijanis is not precise as the country's experts over recent years have come with other figures - 20-23 million Azerbaijanis.

Leaders of Iranian Azerbaijanis definitely possess differing data. According to them, there are about 29 million Azerbaijanis in Iran (44% of the country's population), the number of Turks in Iran (together with Azerbaijanis, Turkmen, Qashqai and others) amounts to some 35 million or over 51% of the country's population (see Attachment 1 - map of Turkic nations in Iran).

I am of opinion that actually some 25 million Azerbaijanis live in Iran today, of them some 15 million reside in Southern Azerbaijan, the rest are in the capital and other regions of the country.

In conclusion, I may say that the large part of Iranian Azerbaijanis live in provinces of Western Azerbaijan, Eastern Azerbaijan (actually, Azerbaijan itself which was divided into these two parts), also in Ardabil and Zanjan. Actually, these parts constitute the historic Southern Azerbaijan; but the Iranian authorities deliberately divided the homeland of Southern Azerbaijanis into four provinces.

Azerbaijanis live also in eastern parts of Kurdistan provinces (in villages near Gorvei) and Hamadan, and also northern regions of Kazvin province. Big Azerbaijani communities exist in the capital city of Tehran (Azerbaijanis make here at least 24% of 13 million), in cities of Kerej and Mashhad (see Attachment 2 - ethnical map of Iran and map of Turkic nations residing in Iran) (See: Map)



Map. Ethnoreligious Map of Iran

Azerbaijanis in State Agencies of Iran

In any case, it is clear that the role of Azerbaijanis in Iran is big, and they along with the titular ethnic group - Persians - play a major role in all spheres of the state.

Thanks largely to Azerbaijanis, the Islamic revolution took place in Iran and the shah was overthrown. Those events were largely decided by ethnic Azerbaijani Grand Ayatollah (*Ayatollah al-Ozma*) Mohammed Kazem Shariatmadari, who was Shia head of Iranian

Azerbaijan and popular Shia theologian with many followers in Iran, Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Kuwait, and some other countries of the Persian Gulf

It was Shariatmadari who played a pivotal role in consolidation of Iranian Azerbaijanis to support Khomeini and his followers, as Khomeini promised Shariatmadari that Iranian Azerbaijanis would be granted autonomy within Iran. Initially, school education began in the mother tongue, press, radio and television in Iranian Azerbaijan also used the Azerbaijani language. In return, Shariatmadari called on Azerbaijanis to back up Khomeini and his supporters.

However, after the triumph over the Shah late 1979, it became clear that the new regime of Khomeini was not going to fulfill its promise. Besides, Shariatmadari strongly opposed the establishment of Islamic regime in Iran and believed that the power should belong to secular politicians. His views brought him to the home arrest in Qum. In response, Azerbaijanis rebelled in Tabriz and very soon the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan went under their control. But Shariatmadari thought that the rebellion was doomed to failure and might lead to many deaths and called on his supporters to withdraw. After that, Khomeini gave up the idea of support of culture of ethnic minorities largely in fear of Azerbaijani separatism. Years after these events Shariatmadari died but remained in memory of Azerbaijanis as a first man to raise the issue of Azerbaijani autonomy in the times of Khomeini. Largely thanks to him, the rise of national consciousness of Iranian Azerbaijanis began.

The current spiritual leader of Iran's Grand Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei, and large part of the Iranian clergy are Azerbaijanis. Many key posts in the public service are occupied by Azerbaijanis. For example, Head of Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Yahya Rahim Safavi is an ethnic Azerbaijani. I will add that approximately 60% of today's MPs of the country's parliament are ethnic Azerbaijanis. Finally, there are many Azerbaijanis among the Iranian military; the national air forces are 80% composed of Azerbaijanis. Among businessmen are many Azerbaijanis.

At last, the current leader of the country's opposition Mir Huseyn Musavi is an ethnic Azerbaijani from the same small town Hamanah near the capital of Southern Azerbaijan, Tabriz.

Surely, the above facts play for self-respect of Azerbaijanis and are taken into account by the authorities. For example, when visiting Southern Azerbaijan, especially Tabriz, spiritual leader of Iran's Grand Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei speaks to locals in Azerbaijani but with reservation that Azerbaijanis and Persians are Iranian people, Muslims and brothers, as in many youtube movies:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqSkxgtrjT4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqYS3g9i9Rk>

Noteworthy, President Ahmadinejad (ethnic Talysh) many times spoke in Southern Azerbaijan in Azerbaijani to gain their support:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YfeP9-77fI&NR=1>

The things are getting much more interesting when it comes to Mir Huseyn Musavi, leader of the opposition and ex-presidential candidate. At the height of the presidential campaign on May 25, 2009, Musavi flew to Tabriz, where the jubilant crowd saluted him, "Azerbaijan woke up and supports its son!" This slogan shouted in the Azerbaijani language may seem a bit ambiguous given that Musavi run for presidency of Iran, not Azerbaijan. In his turn, Musavi said to his countrymen in Azerbaijani, "Azerbaijan has always risen against dictators. The destiny of Iran has always been decided by leaders of Azerbaijan". Here are the movies.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQt-BXFjQ8Y>

(here Azerbaijanis openly say that Musavi is Azerbaijani and their representative. Musavi himself states his ethnicity as Azerbaijani and says that he came to his homeland)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAMmaU7Tv8E>

(Musavi speaks in Tabriz in Azerbaijani)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eq1891cCZc>

(Musavi meets with residents of Urmiya city on June 13, 2009, as Azerbaijanis shout, "Azerbaijan is not sleeping and did not left Musavi alone")

Stance of Iranian Azerbaijanis on the Situation in Iran

However, we should not oversimplify the ethnic situation in Iran. Role and significance of Azerbaijanis in Iran is due to rise of their national consciousness but not their presence in state agencies of the country.

Because Iranism propaganda yielded its fruit and many Azerbaijanis in Iran quite frankly consider themselves Iranians understanding it as their citizenship not nationality. Besides, Iran is not an alien country for them. Many Azerbaijanis perceive Iran as the Azerbaijani state where they are, however, ranked not the first. Their task is to take first positions in the country displacing Persians from top positions and seeking not the split of Iran or its federalization. This explains why it was Azerbaijanis who were actively crushing separatism of Kurds and other nations of Iran.

One interesting point: one of these Azerbaijanis, an Iranian MP, in private conversation with one of my acquaintances uttered that he is absolutely against the collapse of Iran and creation of a united state of Azerbaijan:

"I do not understand what reunion it is all about?" We, Azerbaijanis, created this state the name of which is Iran. Why should we wreck it? My ancestors back in times of Shah Ismayil Khatai laid foundations of Iran, and now you on the north shout about the reunification? I do not need it".

There are many of such Azerbaijanis in Iran. And it is they who think that one should speak about regain of North Azerbaijan to Iran but not the reunification. This will make positions of Azerbaijanis in Iran even stronger.

This explains why so many in South Azerbaijan, especially activists with national movements, disregard Azerbaijanis on top posts in state agencies of Iran. This was especially observed early this year when influenced by the Arabic events a new "Green Movement" sprang in Iran headed by Mir Huseyn Musavi and Mehdi Karroubi, key opponents of President Ahmadinejad. In February 2011 took led tens of thousands of people to streets of many Iranian cities and first of all in Tehran. But these actions failed.

Now Musavi and Karroubi want to start a second stage of their struggle and their supporters began calling on people to rallies but with little chance of success. To a large extent, the reason is that the main portion of protest electorate of Iran, Azerbaijanis, stands apart. Many experts quickly noticed that amid disorders in Tehran and other cities, Azerbaijani cities of Tabriz, Ardabil and others stood still. But it does not mean inaction of Azerbaijanis in their demands to the country's authorities.

Azerbaijanis often showed their strength over last period of Iran's history. Suffice to recall the outbreak of May 2006. The governmental "Iran" newspaper then published an article and cartoon insulting for Azerbaijanis. The article compared Azerbaijanis to cockroaches. In a matter of days the entire South Azerbaijan was consumed with mass

disorders; thousands of Persians, especially officials, opted to flee from Azerbaijani cities to other places of Iran in fear of reprisal (Photo 1-2).



Photo 1. Rally in Tabriz, May 2006



Photo 2. Rally in Tabriz, May 2006

The crackdowns of the authorities did not help stop the disorders. The situation was spinning out of control. To retrieve the situation, the authorities shut down the newspaper, dismissed its editor and arrested the author of the article and cartoon and publicly apologized to Azerbaijanis. Grand Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei undertook the mission of reconciler, and visited Azerbaijan and spoke to them in Azerbaijani. Only after that, the movement of Azerbaijanis declined.

Even now Azerbaijanis stand ready for actions and are not loyal citizens. For example, after clashes between the authorities and opposition in Tehran in February 2011, President

of Turkey Abdullah Gul came to Tabriz. In Tabriz he was met with shouts in Azerbaijani "Long live Turkey", "Long live Turkey-Azerbaijan". The presidential cortege was not able to move on as big crowds often stopped it to greet Gul. No-one in Tabriz heard shouts like "Long live Turkey-Iran"; no-one spoke to Gul in Persian.

All this indicates political activeness of South Azerbaijanis despite the police regime of Iran. There are strong reasons why Azerbaijanis do not support the current opposition leaders of Iran. The point is that leaders of South Azerbaijanis' movements do not trust Musavi and Karroubi, and think that the latter fight only for presidency. They believe that after the two come to power, they will forget about democratic reforms, human rights and will be on the same wave with spiritual leader of Iran Ayatollah Khomeini.

Especially bitter Azerbaijanis feel about their countryman Musavi, who has recently made all efforts to avoid the topic of human rights of Azerbaijanis. In addition, some leaders of South Azerbaijanis wanted to meet with him in 2009. But Musavi refused point-blank. Even, those wishing to meet with him were arrested. All this was surely not forgotten. Including the fact that Musavi and Karroubi keep silent all this time and do nothing for thousands of arrested and tortured activists of the Azerbaijani movement. International organizations speak out about it, but Musavi avoids the native topic.

Meantime, we may say about start of a new stage in the movement of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Number of parties and political organizations of Iranian Azerbaijanis is constantly increasing. The process of national consciousness is swelling, totally missing 15 years ago. South Azerbaijanis have their flag. Those who have it are mercilessly arrested and tortured, as the flag symbolizes the independent Azerbaijan. The only difference is that the three colors of it go not one under another in parallel as the one of independent Azerbaijan, but oblique thus symbolizing the unity of the two parts of Azerbaijan. This made the country's authorities not happy. This flag is quite popular and can be seen in hands of an Iranian Azerbaijani and the expatriate Azerbaijanis (Photos 3-6).



Photo 3. Flag of South Azerbaijanis



Photo 4. Flag of South Azerbaijanis in Tabriz



Photo 5. Flag of South Azerbaijanis in Tabriz



Photo 6. Flag of South Azerbaijanis in Amsterdam

Today Iranian Azerbaijanis take any chance to demonstrate their national feelings and express protest. I will notice two new things in this regard.

In 1999 Mohammed Taqi Zehtabi, an Iranian historian and ethnic Azerbaijani, proposed ascent to medieval fortress Bazz located in north of Iran in the vicinity of the border with North Azerbaijan. The fact is that this fortress was the capital of Babak - a warlord covered with legends and deeply respected by all Azerbaijanis. In 816-838 he fought for freedom and independence of Azerbaijan from Arabs. M. T. Zehtabi offered to celebrate Babak's birthday in early July through peaceful procession to Bazz. The zest was that Babak waged a cat-and-dog war with Muslims and the latter perceive him very negatively as a heretic. Of course, Iranian clergy and many Muslims, including Islamists in independent North Azerbaijan, also have negative attitudes to this person. But many Iranian Azerbaijanis today reject Islam. Conversations with many of them, including Azerbaijani journalists and experts in Iran, point to start of crisis in perception of Islam in Iran, especially among Azerbaijanis. They perceive Islam as synonym to the ruling clerical regime. For that reason, Babak became for many of them symbol of fight of Azerbaijanis for independence and against the clergy of Iran.

The call of M. T. Zehtabi quickly turned into the protest action against the authorities and a symbol of unity of Azerbaijanis. Since that time on, every year in the beginning of July hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis get together from all parts of the country to Bazz despite obstacles and even arrests. The idea which had more historic-cultural character very soon took a form of regular political demonstration of protest of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Not only do they ascend mountains to the fortress. Staying night in the fortress, Azerbaijanis arrange improvised evenings of culture, recite poetry and sing songs. These activities bear an explicit anti-Iranian character. There are lots of movies on the internet featuring these ascents to Bazz, which are very popular among Azerbaijanis both in Iran and beyond. Here are some of them.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LR7yqXVbKEs>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbeunM-MDdE>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAqmQTrCbXQ>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idVVhDUcrKY>

Not only does steady increase of its participants tell about popularity of these processions. In October 2010 many political and public organizations of Iranian Azerbaijanis

decided to use a red flag in their fight, as did Babak and his supporters in fight against Muslims. And if the three-color-flag is regarded as symbol of statehood of South Azerbaijan, the red flag and broadly the red color are regarded today as symbol of fight of Iranian Azerbaijanis for their independence (Photo 7-8).



Photo 7. Red flag of Iranian Azerbaijanis as symbol of fight for independence



Photo 8. Iranian Azerbaijanis in Bazz fortress with a red flag, balloons and other attributes of red color as symbol of fight for independence and symbol of "Trakhtur" football team.

Over recent years, Iranian Azerbaijanis have frequently used football matches as political protests or expression of their national statements. The most interesting is that established in 1970 "Trakhtur" (Tractor) in main Azerbaijani city of Tabriz is regarded by Azerbaijanis as symbol of fight of the nation. After ascent to Bazz last year, the football club changed its symbols and now the team plays in red shirts. In addition, posters feature Turkic symbols against the name of the team (tractor): grey wolf and two fingers upright (Photo 9):



Photo 9. Poster featuring symbols of football team "Trakhtur" (Tabriz) with Turkic symbols (upright two fingers against the background of grey wolf)

From now on, the stadium to seat about 120 thousand fans constantly has explicit actions of ethnic and political nature. Packed Sahand stadium in Tabriz all in red welcomes the football-players entering the ground with two fingers upright. But the main point is that uninterruptedly during the match Azeri fans shout political slogans. Here are some videos:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDohm6RxdJY>

(Football match in Tabriz, April 2010, Azerbaijanis show a sign of grey wolves)

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjwM1yVGx50&feature=player_embedded

(February 2011, Trakhtur (Tabriz) vs. Isti Azin (Tehran); Azerbaijanis chanted to call for unity of Azerbaijanis. Most chanted "Karabakh is and will be ours!", and "Long Live Azerbaijan!" Fans had posters in hands to read "Khojaly" in memory of killed-in-1992 some thousand residents of this Karabakh town).

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mn444koKPcU>

(March 2010, Trakhtur vs. Steel Azin (Tehran); The fans chanted all the match long "Be happy Azerbaijan, Freedom to Matinpur!", demanding release of journalist and human right defender Said Matinpur arrested in July 2009 on charge of collusion with foreigners and calls to overthrow the Iranian regime; sentenced to 8 years in prison. Many international human rights organizations speak in defense of him. Besides, other slogans were chanted in the stadium, "Open schools to educate in Turkish»)

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORDtjpM.Jfwo>

(March 2010, match in Tabriz; Azeri fans chant, "Open schools to educate in Turkish»)

Main Political Parties and Public Organizations of Iranian Azerbaijanis

National political parties and organizations of Azerbaijanis in Iran have almost century-long history. Long time there dominated ideological parties (communists, social-democrats, liberals, conservatives, democrats) which after the triumph of Khomeini and Islamic Revolution either ceased to exist or lapsed and went unattractive.

A new stage began early 90's with creation of parties and political organizations seeking to fight for future of Azerbaijan. In this fight, Iranian Azerbaijanis went through several stages - from creation of political and public organizations to necessity of preservation of the culture and language of the nation. Afterwards came slogans to fight for cultural autonomy, then ideas to transform Iran into a federative republic and grant a status of an autonomous republic to South Azerbaijan within this state. But the logic of the fight at last brought Iranian Azerbaijanis to necessity to fight for full independence of South Azerbaijan with its subsequent union with North Azerbaijan.

This fight gave birth to rather plural palette of political organizations of Iranian Azerbaijan. Almost all of them have their adherents in Iran and many other countries, mainly in Western Europe and the United States (the countries with sizeable Azerbaijani expatriates from Iran). Below are the most popular parties and public organizations of Iranian Azerbaijanis active over recent years.

1. **National-Liberation Movement of South Azerbaijan** (in Azerbaijani: **Güney Azərbaycan Milli Azadlıq Hərəkatı**, in short - **GAMAH**)

Established in 1991, it was the first political organization of Iranian Azerbaijanis in the times of Khomeini to have an explicit character of national-liberation movement. The movement quickly suffered counteraction of the authorities. This made the movement pass its Program and Charter only at its II Congress held on May 16, 1994. It took much time for the movement to evolve. The first program reads, that if the current regime of Iran acknowledges rights of Azerbaijanis in an amicable way, an autonomous republic status will be demanded for Azerbaijan (with its flag, Constitution, independent judiciary). The Azerbaijani language will be declared official; Islam will be declared an official religion and separated from the state. The Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan will establish cultural and economic relations with all countries.

However, while the authorities tightened policy, GAMAH went radical and new items in the program read, that in case the authorities fail to peacefully accept the above demands, GAMAH will set to a military way and the liberated Azerbaijan will be declared an independent republic.

The official body of the movement is a newspaper "Voice of Azerbaijan" ("*Azerbaycanın Sesi*" in Azerbaijani).

GAMAH's weak point is that it is composed of many organizations. This makes it quite amorphous. For that reason, it is more active in North Azerbaijan and especially in Western Europe.

Last year the organization decided to change much of its program and take a more active line. On June 12-13, 2010 leaders of GAMAH organizations held a special meeting in Brussels (Photo 10). Asad Tagizade was elected Chairman.



Photo 10 GAMAH leaders meet in Brussels, June 12-13, 2010

They approved of the Program consisting of 12 items. According to it, the organization aims to struggle for independent Azerbaijan. Islam will be separated from state. The Azerbaijani language will be declared official; capital punishment and torture will be abolished.

It is the organization that declared a red flag a symbol of fight for the country's independence.

2. Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (SANAM) (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaycan Milli Oyanış Hərəkatı*, in short - *GAMOH*)

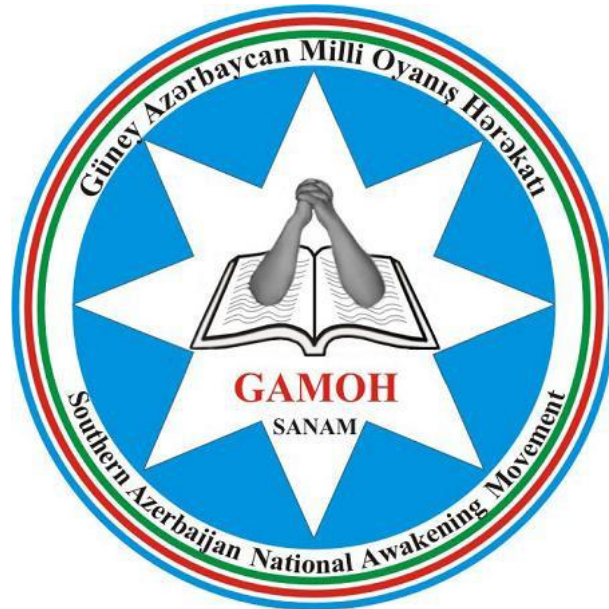
Website: www.gamoh.info

Website of the agency: South Azerbaijan News Agency www.sananews.info

Website of TV: Tabriz TV www.tebriztube.com

Website of the party journal: Araz Dergisi Magazine <http://arazdergisi.org/>

Logo of organization:



At present, the organization enjoys the biggest popularity and activeness of all organizations functioning in South Azerbaijan. Though, established back in 1990 the organization was no different till 1995 and was unpopular. Afterwards the situation changed cardinally. To a large extent, it was attributed to a man who became head of the organization, Mahmudali Chohraganly, PhD in Philology (Photo 11).



Photo 11. SANAM Leader, Prof. Mahmudali Chohraganly

Videos featuring Prof. Chohraganly's speeches:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNKIE4oUQyQ&NR=1>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZVhnp7jyZY>

Professor of Tabriz University, he became famous for his fight to teach the Azerbaijani language in educational institutions. However, that period he and his supporters did not come out with the idea to fight for independence of South Azerbaijan. Moreover, in an interview to BBC radio station in April 1999 Chohraganly openly stated that being Azerbaijani he was proud of his being a citizen of Iran and considered himself to be also an

Iranian. According to him, they fought not for secession of South Azerbaijan from Iran, but exclusively for the right of Azerbaijanis to speak and get education in their native language but only within Iran.

However, even for this the authorities arrested and tortured Chohraganly. Afterwards, he was expelled from the country. Chohraganly moved to North Azerbaijan and then the United States. The circumstances changed Chohraganly in a big way. Yesterday's moderate dissident proud of his being Iranian and citizen of Iran after the expulsion quickly went radical and became a real headache for the authorities. As SANAM leader, he set works of the organization going all around the world, especially in Iran. SANAM set to larger-scaled and more diverse activities. He and his supporters held big rallies and other actions around the globe (Photo 12).



Photo 12. Chohraganly and his supporters protest in New York, May 2002

He was seen now as a real leader of the entire national-liberation movement of South Azerbaijanis. Despite his inability to be personally present in Iran, his supporters in Iran are very active. It is SANAM that staged the procession to Bazz fortress.

The headquarters of the organization is located in Tabriz, branches and committees are located in Iran and abroad. SANAM has at present its representative offices in 24 countries.

Symptomatic is that this conversion told also on his surname. Before 2003 it went as Iranian, Chohragani; now it went as Turkish, Chohraganly.

He was increasingly regarded by many western leaders and politicians as leader of Iranian Azerbaijanis. SANAM is recognized by the UN, EU and European Parliament as an international organization; it is a member of (since 2007) UNPO (the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, staff in the Hague). Chohraganly met with Secretary of EU Council and was several times received in the White House.

According to SANAM Program, the organization strives for restoration of the right of Azerbaijanis to self-determination. At that, SANAM offers a two-option plan of action. The first option: establishment of Iranian Federation or Confederation of Nations. It means that he and his supporters still believe in necessity of Iran's federalization. And only should the plan fail, SANAM will start fight for realization of the second option - establishment of an independent state. In both cases, the territory and boundaries of Azerbaijan must be revised. SANAM holds that Azerbaijan must include the provinces as follows: current Western and Eastern Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zenjan. Kazvin, parts of Khamadan populated with Azerbaijanis, cities of Save, Enzeli, Astara and Kheshtper.

SANAM's main priorities are modernity, Turkism and freedom of ideas. Religion will be separated from state. In 2003 SANAM started "Voice of South Azerbaijan" Radio Station abroad. Iranian security forces systematically conduct operations to curb its activities.

3. World Azerbaijani Congress (WAC) (in Azerbaijani - *Dünya Azərbaycanlıları Konqresi*, in short - *DAK*)

Website: <http://dak.az/>

Logo of organization:



1997-registered in the United States, WAC initially pursued a humble objective - to improve mutual contacts and relations between Azerbaijanis-expatriates and assist in solution of their problems. However, this organization very soon got politicized. And much due to Iranian Azerbaijanis and opposition forces of North Azerbaijan. This attracted the attention of official Baku to the organization. Baku decided to take it under its wing to use for its propaganda and against Iran, relations with which once again had deteriorated. Official Baku put heavily in the organization; intrigues touched those who did not back up Baku. In 2003 WAC split into two independent factions. The forces opposing Baku were headed by Professor Sabri Tabrizi, an Iranian citizen, currently residing in Sweden.

Website of the faction: <http://www.dak.az/view.php?lang=az&menu=0>

Another faction was headed by a citizen of Azerbaijan, close to official Baku writer Sabir Rustamkhanly (Photo 13).



Photo 13. Sabir Rustamkhanly

As a result, the two factions launched a serious anti-Iran campaign. Here they acted likewise. Rustamkhanly's faction is quite active in Baku and holds regular protest rallies at the Iranian Embassy in Baku.

Sabri Tabrizi's faction felt sympathies for the Popular Front of Azerbaijan and its leader Elchibey and did not seek to play up to official Baku. This work was undertaken by Rustamkhanly's faction.

Website of Rustamkhanly's faction: <http://www.d-a-k.org/>

The two factions shared their unpopularity with Iranian Azerbaijanis. Despite considerable financial resources Rustamkhanly's faction possesses due to its links with official Baku. This has made it possible to hold in recent years meetings with leaders of Azerbaijanis and expatriates and leaders of political organizations of Iran (Photo 14-15).



Photo 14. Leaders of Azerbaijani expatriates meet with leaders of political organizations of South Azerbaijan, Baku, October 6, 2009



Photo 15. Leaders of Azerbaijani expatriates meet with leaders of political organizations of South Azerbaijan, Baku, October 06, 2009

4. Congress of South Azerbaijan (CSA) (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaycan Konqresi* , in short - *GAK*)

Website: <http://www.guneyazerbaycankonqresi.com/>

Logo of organization:



Leader of CSA Abdulla Amir Khashimi (Photo 16).

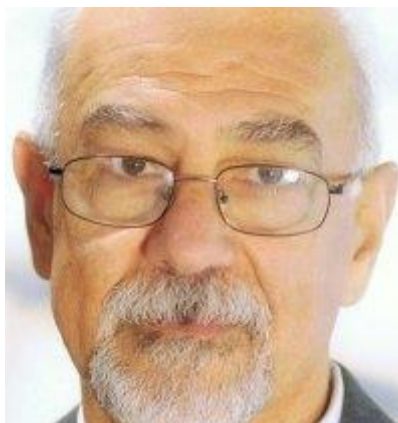


Photo 16. Leader of CSA Abdulla Amir Khashimi

South Azerbaijan-born famous writer, 61-year-old Khashimi launched much work among Iranian Azerbaijanis after his move to Stockholm (Sweden) in 1998. He is one of WAC leaders in 2001-2006. The split in this organization had a big impact on Khashimi. To protest it, he abandoned the organization in 2006 and established CSA the same year. The Central Committee (headquarters is located in Stockholm) included 16 members, one from each country. Three representatives figure prominently: Mustafa Orujoglu (France), Javidan Elbars (Azerbaijan) and Seyfeddin Altayly (Turkey).

According to the program, CSA's key objective was fight against Iranian nationalism, revival and salvation of the Azerbaijani culture and language. The program keeps silent about forms of the fight and prospects, but it says that it strives for establishment of a state of Iranian Azerbaijanis. To put it differently, CSA advocates establishment, though not in near-term perspective, of an independent state of Iranian Azerbaijanis.

Meantime, CSA treats the fight of North Azerbaijanis as close and brotherly. For that reason, the program much speaks about necessity to consolidate efforts of all Azerbaijanis to beat off Armenian aggression and liberate occupied territories in Karabakh.

CSA featured much in May unrests in 2006 and has supporters in many cities of Iranian Azerbaijan.

5. South Azerbaijan National Unity Council (SANUC) (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaycan Milli Birlik Şurası*, in short - *GAMBS*)

Website: <http://www.millishura.com/>

Logo of organization:



Leader of SANUC Dr. Akbar Alami (Photo 17)



Photo 17. Leader of SANUC Dr. Akbar Alami

One of the active participants of the May 2006 unrests Alami had to flee Iran the same year. He moved to Germany and in June 2006 in Köln he established this political organization. According to the Program, the key objective is to prevent assimilation of Iranian Azerbaijanis as they are deprived of the possibility to get education in their language. To this end, the organization seeks a campaign for a referendum among the population of South Azerbaijan necessary to make the Azerbaijani language official and establish national administration in this territory.

After that, the media of Iran and Azerbaijan reported some attempts of this organization to launch a campaign for the referendum. They have not been success yet given low popularity with the majority of Iranian Azerbaijanis.

6. Azerbaijan National Front (ANF) (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Milli Cəbhəsi*, in short - *AMC*)

Website: <http://www.aznf.org/>

Logo of organization:



Chief of ANF Mirmusa Khashimi (Photo 18).



Picture 18. Chief of ANF Mirmusa Khashimi

The party was founded in Stockholm on March 21, 2003. The party has its chapters in South Azerbaijan. The program sets two main objectives: necessity to form national-state bodies in South Azerbaijan (political system, parliament, executive authority and judiciary system); preservation of the Azerbaijani language, history and culture.

Further, the program reads, that these objectives pursue prevention and prohibition of assimilation of Azerbaijanis. To achieve it, besides creation of their state with all attributes, it is necessary to grant an official status to the Azerbaijani language. The organization is put under serious pressure by Iranian authorities for their demands.

7. *United Independent Azerbaijan Front (UIAF)* (in Azerbaijani - *Vahid Müstəqil Azərbaycan Cəbhəsi*, in short - *VMAC*)

Website: <http://www.jarchi.de/>

"Carçı" newspaper is being distributed underground.

Logo of organization:



UIAF began in 1978-1979, in the days of Islamic revolution, but suffered crackdown and went underground for some years. There was no information about it after 1982. But in 1993 the organization showed itself again, and in 1996 it convened a congress in Tabriz. Since February 18, 1997 it has been publishing "Jarchy" newspaper.

UIAF's main objective is establishment of an independent South Azerbaijan within its historic boundaries in Iran. But given many provinces of South Azerbaijan, the future independent Azerbaijan Republic is designed to be Federative Republic of South Azerbaijan to include 9 provinces, each with its parliament and government: Urmiya, Sulduz, Tabriz, Maraga, Ardebil, Zenjan, Kazvin, Khamadan and Erak. This idea is reflected in UIAF logo featuring 9 octagons.

The idea of federalism is fraught with accumulation of power in one hand. For that reason, UIAF is ruled on a collegial basis, and the chairman is rotated.

8. South Azerbaijan Democrate Party (SADP) (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaýcan Demokrat Partiyası*, in short - *GADP*)

Website: <http://www.anayurd.com/>

Logo of organization:



One of the oldest Azerbaijani parties established back in 1920 by Sheikh Khiyabani, who in 1920 established an independent state in South Azerbaijan "Azadystan" ("Country of Freedom"). The authorities soon smashed this state, Khiyabani was executed by shooting; his party suffered repressions but survived and went underground. Supported by the Soviet Union in 1945 the party emerged from the underground and set to guide the process of establishment of independent South Azerbaijan. Afterwards, the party was anew smashed and went underground. The party revived in early 90's. Repressions and persecutions resulted in headquarters and leaders of the party now located in Goteborg (Sweden). Leader Mahmud Bilgi also lives there. He is quite active and holds many meetings with European politicians. The party supporters in South Azerbaijan quite actively participate in various anti-Iranian actions.

9. South Azerbaijani Independence Party (SAIP) (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaycan İstiqlal Partisi*, in short - *GAIP*)

Website: <http://www.gaip.org/>

Disseminates information through its underground newspaper "Independent South Azerbaijan"

Logo of organization and picture of its leader Saleh Ildırım:



Established on December 5, 2004 the party's constitution states that the Iranian authorities pursue a policy of great-power chauvinism against ethnic minorities. Their last recourse will be fight for their independence. Based on this, the primary objective of SAIP will be fight for independence and creation of Democratic Republic of South Azerbaijan. The territory of this independent state must include current provinces of Eastern and Western Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Kazvin, Khamadan, central province of Erak, Anzali and Astara. SAIP does not recognize central authorities of Iran under any circumstances and offers at this stage establishment of a Union of Iranian Nations with Persians as one of the nations of the country.

SAIP proclaims that it will fight for its aim around the world through all legal and illegal, diplomatic and revolutionary methods. It stands for capitalist economic system.

By SAIP, after overthrow of the central administration of Iran, a Provisional Government must be established to form the National Army. Then, a referendum will be carried out in next three months and the Constitution will be adopted. After 3 more months parliamentary and presidential elections will be held.

The party does not ignore Azerbaijanis living outside the Republic of South Azerbaijan. To this end, SAIP stands to declare the current capital of Iran Tehran and its suburbs a separate bilingual (Iranian-Azerbaijani) republic. Besides, it stands for establishment of an autonomous state for Turkish nation of Qashqai.

The party was among active participants of the march to Bazz fortress. This resulted in many repressions against the party activists.

The party and its leader are quite active beyond Iran. The party regularly stage rallies in Baku and many European cities to protest the policy of Iran against Azerbaijanis and Turkish world:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84iUp5LhJ8I>
(Video of a SAIP rally in Amsterdam, May 30, 2009)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEga44iy5wM>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ComzzfZtgiw&feature=player_embedded

(videos with party leader Saleh Ildyrym speaking against federalization of Iran and explaining necessity for South Azerbaijanis to fight for establishment of an independent state).

10. Azerbaijani Democratic Board of National Unity (in Azerbaijani – *Azərbaycan Demokratik Milli Şura Birliyi*, in short - *ADMŞB*)

In 2004 in Tabriz emerged "Birlik" (Unity) pressure group; after two-years-campaign in 2006 this organization was established on the basis of this group and includes mainly the intelligentsia. It stands for self-determination of Azerbaijanis. It is possible, according to the organization, through establishment of an independent state or Federative Republic of Iran. With a view of that, the Board deems it necessary to seek a referendum, use of the native language in radio and TV, and to declare the Azerbaijani language official. There is no extra information regarding its website, the newspaper and fight methods, as well as leader of the organization.

11. Azerbaijan National Democratic Organisation (ANDO) (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Milli Azadlıq Təşkilatı*, in short - *GAIP*)

Website: <http://www.amat-az.com/index.html>

Logo of organization:



Chief of ANDO Chingiz Goyturk (Photo 19).



Photo 19. Chief of ANDO Chingiz Goyturk

There is not much information on this political organization. Many time visited Baku. Often visits European countries; in 2008 he addressed the EU Parliamentary Assembly on the situation in Iran as ANDO leader.

According to its website, the party was established in 2008. The program states that the party stands for establishment of independent and democratic South Azerbaijan and calls on all countrymen to participate in this struggle. The party is ready to establish allied relations with all political forces in Iran for the sake of its goal.

Of course, its goal is to unite with North Azerbaijan and create a united Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.

This propaganda was met with repressions by the country's authorities and now its leader and headquarters are in Sweden, in the city of Bromma.

12. Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan (FDMA) (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Federal Demokrat Hərəkəti*, in short - *AFDH*)

Website of the party: <http://www.achiq.org/>

The party publishes a newspaper "Achyq soz" (Frank word)

Chief of FDMA Muhammad Azadgar (Photo 20).



Photo 20. Chief of FDMA Muhammad Azadgar

FDMA was established in 1945, but after suppression of the uprising in 1946 was banned. In the times of anti-Shah movement in 1978 the party resumed headed by young writer Muhammad Azadgar. FDMA took an active part in the uprising of Azerbaijanis in Tebriz in 1979. It was in 1980 when the party leader for the first time visited Baku on the invitation of Heydar Aliyev. In 1983 the new regime of Iran crackdown on FDMA activists, many were executed or sentenced to different terms in prison. Muhammad Azadgar and some of his supporters fled to Baku and then to Germany. He long walked off politics, but two decades after in Germany on May 28-30 2005 he convened a constituent congress which declared revival of the party. And again Muhammad Azadgar became a chairman.

The congress adopted a program to read that the party seeks establishment of a federative state of Iranian Turks or officially "Federative state of Azerbaijani people and local self-government of Iranian Turks". It will be the only way, in the opinion of FDMA, to establish democracy in Iran and create Federative Republic of Iran.

In opinion of FDMA, Federative Republic of Iran (FRI) must be a state with a two-chamber parliament. This state must voluntarily include federative state establishments of nations living in Iran, as well as a separate Tehran city government. As a result, FRI will include states of 6 nations living in Iran: Azerbaijani, Persians, Kurds, Arabs, Beludjis and Turkmens. FRI must be established on a national (ethnic) federative basis.

Tehran will be governed separately. In multi-ethnic cities places must be separated on ethnic principle. The central authorities will use 6 official languages.

The central administration will be in charge of foreign policy, the army, long-term economic policy, finances, planning, communications and ecology.

Speaking about Azerbaijan, it implies traditional places of inhabitation of Azerbaijanis. Naturally, all executive and judicial bodies in Azerbaijan must use the Azerbaijani language in their work. The language will be granted an official status.

Interestingly, the program advocates the right of Turkic nations, particularly Turks of Khorasan and Qashqai, to establish local self-government.

The program concludes once more, that the primary objective of the party is establishment of a federative state of Azerbaijani people and local self-government of Iranian Turkic nations as a part of Federative Republic of Iran.

13. Organization of National Revival of Azerbaijan (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Milli Dirəniş Təşkilatı*, in short - *AMDT*)

Website of organization: <http://diranish.org>

Logo of organization:



A political organization established in South Azerbaijan on March 19, 2006, which actively functions in South Azerbaijan. Its last actions included support to a "Trakhtur" (Tabriz) football team, which is seen in South Azerbaijan as a symbol of fight of Iranian Azerbaijanis. Another action included support to Azerbaijan which protested the policy of dewatering Lake Urmiya. This creates serious economic and social problems for Azerbaijanis in this region.

Many statements made by the party testify that it advocates the language and culture of Azerbaijanis and integration of both parts of Azerbaijan into one independent state.

The party is constantly under attacks of the authorities. This makes not possible to get enough information on its composition and even its leader. The party website posts only its statements on behalf of its Central Committee.

14. Azerbaijan National Party (ANP) (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Milli Partiyası*, in short - AMP)

Website of organization: <http://www.milliparty.com/>

Logo of organization:



The party was established in 1945 but in 1946 banned. The party revitalized in 2004. It runs its website, a newspaper, which is secretly disseminated in South Azerbaijan. As the website or elsewhere provide no detailed information on the party, its structure, headquarters, leader and other activists, one can conclude only this. The party is underground in South Azerbaijan, under attacks. For that reason it restrains from publishing any info on its activists.

The party program posted on the website sets two main goals:

1. Defense of territorial integrity and independence of Azerbaijan.
2. Broad autonomy to Azerbaijan.

As we can see, the party does not favor disintegration of Iran and creation of independent Azerbaijan. It means that the party mainly consists of Azerbaijanis who consider Iran to be an Azerbaijani state and object its disintegration.

The program also states necessity to establish a parliament in South Azerbaijan (in Azerbaijani: Milli Mejlis) and permit free operation of different political and public parties and organizations. The program also touches the most painful issue for Iranian Azerbaijanis

- their language. The program states, that the Azerbaijani language must be declared official in South Azerbaijan, and Persian a language of inter-ethnic communication.

15. Azerbaijan Democratic Party "21 Azer" (in Azerbaijani - "21 Azər" Azərbaycan Demokratik Firqəsi)

Websites of organization: <http://21azer.azersayt.com/>; <http://www.adf-mk.org/indexl.html>

Logo of organization:



Leader - Yadulla Kanani.

The political party began in 2001 as an organization-successor of independent state of South Azerbaijan which existed in 1945-1946 under Seyid Jafar Peshawari (1892-1947). This explains why it chose the name of "21 Azer", the name of an Iranian calendar called "Azer", on 21 Azer or by the European calendar on December 12, 1945 they established the government headed by Peshawari. It is also no coincidence that the party website has a picture of Peshawari and the logo of the government.

The party encountered soon big problems in South Azerbaijan; the authorities tried to ban the party with explicitly separatist intentions. Nevertheless, in 2004 the party activists convened a congress and adopted the program. The ultimate goal of the party, according to the program, is restoration of the Azerbaijani national government. To this end, Iran must be turned into the society of nations with equal rights or, according to the program, the Union of National States and divided on ethnic-territorial basis. Further, the program sets short-(tactical) and long-term (strategic) goals. The strategic goal is an official recognition of the right of nations to creation of a national state, the nations living in specific regions of Iran and making majority. The program points to the right to autonomy for small nations living in specific regions and the right to culture autonomy for nations living together with other nations.

The tactic goal of the party is fight to oppose the policy of assimilation of Azerbaijanis and fight for their right to get education in the native language.

In 2006-2007 the party published a journal "21 Azer", but there is no info on any updates in years following.

16. Communist Party of Azerbaijan (in Azerbaijani - Azərbaycan Komunistlik Partiyası)

Website of organization: <http://www.azkob.blogspot.com/>

Logo of organization:



Newspaper: “*Azerbaijan Komunistlik Bildilireli*” (Bulletin of Azerbaijani Communists)

Communists of South Azerbaijan hole up (since 2006). They are not popular among the population, but quite active. They offered to delete the ruling Ahmadinejad and his opponents Musavi and Karroubi from the list of candidates running for presidency in last elections. Interestingly, texts are given in Latin in their website for Azerbaijanis in North Azerbaijan to read them. Unfortunately, there is no more information about them.

17. Party of Sun (in Azerbaijani - *Gunesh Partisi*)

The party emerged in Tabriz in 1999 and was officially registered early 2000, but existed till 2005 when its registration was denied. The reason was its propaganda of the Azerbaijani language, and the Azerbaijani name of the party. Nevertheless, the party continues its activities but illegally. It has the Program of 9 items and the Charter of 22 items. Unfortunately, there is no more information about the party. According to sources, the party leaders decided to expand their activity but now beyond Iran. To achieve this goal, they intend to open a 24-hour-TV channel "Gunesh" in a European country (most probably, in Germany). There are no reports on its opening.

18. Azerbaijani National Society (in Azerbaijani - *Azərbaycan Milli Cəmiyyəti*)

The notification disseminated by the society on February 18, 2005, reads, that it was founded by some people and functions secretly. The society promises to soon participate in political life and calls on all national forces for consolidation. The main target of the society is fight for preservation of ethnic identity and culture of Azerbaijanis.

19. Association for Defense of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran

Website: <http://adapp.info/en/>

The public human rights organization of Iranian Azerbaijanis emerged in 2006 amid repressions against activists of the national-liberation movement. The organization runs its website, enjoys good contacts with international human rights organizations.

20. South Azerbaijan Student Movement (in Azerbaijani - *Güney Azərbaycan Öyrənci Hərəkatı*)

Website: <http://oyrenci.com/>

Public organization of students from South Azerbaijan Its website posts information on student life and the national-liberation movement of Iranian Azerbaijanis. It enjoys big popularity among Azerbaijani youth.

North Azerbaijanis' Support to South Azerbaijanis

Yes, from the outset of independence, the destiny of Iranian Azerbaijanis is constantly in the focus of their nationals in the north. They do not confine themselves to only moral support. Over last two decades they many time attempted to build contacts with ordinary people and political figures. Back in 1992 then President Abulfaz Elchibey publicly stated necessity of unity of North and South Azerbaijan. This triggered anger of Iran and had long adverse impact on the relations between the countries. However, Elchibey and many activists of the national movement in North Azerbaijan continued to morally and materially support their nationals in the south. There emerged numerous political and human rights organizations of Azerbaijanis from both parts of Azerbaijan. The most famous was Association "United Azerbaijan" in 1996 established by ex-president Elchibey. After death of Elchibey, this organization was headed by Adil Samadbeyli. On March 3, 2006, the headquarters of the movement of National Revival of Azerbaijan decided to create a movement "Way of United Azerbaijan", which included about ten parties and public organizations of North Azerbaijan. The movement was headed by Ulvi Khakim. The goal of the organization is propaganda and fight for unity of North and South Azerbaijan.

Committee to defend national movement of South Azerbaijan (chaired by Jahandar Beyoglu) is also active. Very active is Agry Garadagly, representative of the Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement in Azerbaijan.

Besides, Baku is turning into a place where Iranian Azerbaijanis hold their actions. They constantly hold conferences on the situation in Iran. Visits of South Azerbaijan politicians do not get anyone surprised. Of the last actions taken I will dwell on the congress in Baku on March 16, 2011 attended by leaders of many political parties and organizations from South Azerbaijan (Photo 21).



Photo 21 Congress of leaders of Iranian Azerbaijanis in Baku, March 16, 2011

The Congress decided to consolidate opposition forces of South Azerbaijan into one movement.

There are many websites to propagandize these ideas. One interesting point: almost all websites of political parties and organizations of South Azerbaijan use Latin for all Azerbaijanis to read (North Azerbaijanis cannot read texts in Arabic). In their turn, websites of North Azerbaijanis on the problem of South Azerbaijan use Latin and sometimes Russian for a big army of Russian-speaking Azerbaijanis with vivid interest in the situation of their nationals in Iran. I will point to the most popular website: "United Azerbaijan", entirely dealing with these problems (<http://vahid-azerbaycan.blogspot.com/>)

Iran-Azerbaijan Relations

Azerbaijan-Iran relations have from the very outset been ambiguous. I wrote much about it before. When meeting the leaders of the two countries declare friendship and co-operation. They conclude agreements and utter many good words for friendship of the two nations. Meantime, it is clear that the current state of affairs necessitates this. To put it differently, there is understanding that the two sides need good relations but badly lack trust in each other. This was also reflected in Wikileaks docs, where Ilham Aliyev says to the US Ambassador to Azerbaijan quite unpleasant words about Iran's President.

The sides increasingly accuse each other of instigation. Azerbaijan blames Iran for stirring up separatism and Islamic radicalism; Iran comes out with separatism Azerbaijan pursues, good relations with the US and Israel, and persecution of Islamists. There are constant protest rallies in both countries, which are ordered by the authorities.

Though, the leaders of the countries try to leave a space for maneuver. This explains why some actions by leaders of Iranian Azerbaijanis in Baku are not supported by the country's authorities. In 2006 Ilham Aliyev denied entry of M. Chohraganly to Baku. Since that time on, the latter has not been able to visit Azerbaijan. In addition, in 2006 and 2008 Azerbaijan's representative in the UN two times voted against the resolution on violation of rights of ethnic minorities in Iran. In other words, Baku delivered a blow on statements of South Azerbaijanis to claim discrimination against Azerbaijanis living in Iran. To put it differently, Baku does not support its southern brothers even verbally. Independent Azerbaijan fluctuates between sympathy to nationals and reluctance to aggravate relations with the Islamic Republic. De-facto, Baku opted not to notice the current situation with nationals. This, however, does not put obstacles for Ilham Aliyev to introduce himself as leader of all Azerbaijanis of the world; this even led to short aggravation in the relations between the countries.

Over last years Iran has held the initiative. Earlier in the 90's Azerbaijan advocated the lift of a visa regime and establishment of broad contacts between the peoples (for almost 10 years Baku sought to open its consulate in Tabriz). This got Iran frightened. But now the situation is quite different. Iran desperately needs as many its supporters in South Caucasus, especially in Azerbaijan, as possible. Iran has already set to demand visa lift. Now it is Baku's turn to apprehend increase of Iran in Azerbaijan as a result. Iran then unilaterally lifted the visa regime; Baku did not shift refusing to respond the same.

Iran-Azerbaijan Economic Relations and Role of Businessmen from South Azerbaijan

This topic is the most intricate and involved in relations between the countries. Business, and subsequent influence on politics, is being marching in several directions:

1. Official

Commodity turnover at the state level between the countries is not big. According to last year's data, it totaled approx. USD 500 million. Iran offered Azerbaijan to expand economic cooperation and bring trade turnover to USD 10 billion.

But there exists hidden side the public get to know about only from scandals in the media. For example, it has recently been reported, that the US Department of State stated imposition of sanctions against "Belarusneft" enterprise. It emerged that the oil-gas conflict with Russia compelled Lukashenko to search alternative suppliers. Late 2006 he met with Iran's President Ahmedinejad. Following this, in 2007 Belarusian state oil company "Belarusneft" concluded a 500-million-contract with Iranian state NaftIran Intertrade Company to develop oil field Jofeyr in Iran. Belorussia and Iran do not confine themselves to only production of raw materials. In 2007 "Belarusneft" also inked a service buy-back contract with an Iranian company. The contract meant refund of invested assets through oil supplies.

Leader of Venezuela Hugo Chavez joined the Iran-Belorussia duet. Transportation of Venezuela oil was too costly. Lukashenko did not venture to officially pump Iranian stuff. There emerged one more participant as a cover - Azerbaijan. Further, Lukashenko induced unofficially the Ukrainian authorities for good money. At last, the stuff was pumped to Belorussia via the following route. Iranian oil as if Azerbaijani goes through "Baku-Supsa" pipeline, further by tanker to Odessa and via the oil pipeline to Brod. Then it reaches Belarusian oil refineries.

It was necessary to convince the international community of the need to supply the Caspian oil to Belorussia. The stakeholders stopped at swap supplies. It implies purchase of Venezuela's oil by Belorussia and its further swap to Azerbaijani black gold. As a result, Azerbaijan gets Venezuela's oil, which gives it access to the US market. In return, Baku undertakes to guarantee the similar oil volumes to be supplied to Belorussia. As Azerbaijani authorities gain much from this transaction, they are interested in maintaining the status quo with Iran as a rogue state. This makes it possible for Azerbaijan to make much profit.

2. Contacts with Oligarchs

There exists another aspect in the mutual relations of the countries. It concerns personal business of Azerbaijani oligarchs. First of all, one should mention Kamalladdin Heydarov and his sons Nijat and Taleh. They run business in aviation, purchase of airplanes and their maintenance. To this end, "Gulfstream" company was set up. The company is equally owned by "Shams al Sahra FZCO" Company (registered in Dubai for Taleh and Nijat Heydarov) and Manuchehr Ahadpur Khangan, a citizen of Iran and ethnic Azerbaijani. As was found, Khangan illegally enjoys double citizenship of Iran and Azerbaijan (the law prohibits this, but many de-facto have two or even more passports). Furthermore, Khangan actually represents business of the Heydarovs in Middle East. Meantime, there are evidences of his close ties with Iranian intelligence service. In any event, the business at this level could hardly exist beyond Iran's secret service.

The second top minister is Ziya Mammadov, Transport Minister. Late 90's he was contacted by Kamal Dervish, an ethnic Azerbaijani. Dervish and his three brothers came to Azerbaijan in 1999 and are still working here. Some years ago the opposition of Azerbaijan learnt from Iranian Azerbaijanis that Dervish is a general of the Revolutionary Guard of Iran and is connected with Iranian intelligence. Thanks to close relations with Ziya Mammadov, Dervish was awarded contracts to construct at least 8 roads in Azerbaijan (Baku-Astara, Baku-Guba, etc.).

Later, it was reported on another business-project. Late 90's Turkish citizen, Iranian Azerbaijani Jamshid Mahmudoglu came to Baku. It was again the opposition of Azerbaijan which got to know that Mahmudoglu is a business partner of son of former Iran's President Rafsanjani. In Baku Jamshid Mahmudoglu became business partner of Farhad Aliyev, Economic Development Minister of Azerbaijan. This helped him soon turn into major shareholder of Bank of Baku. In 2003 Mahmudoglu invited Shahram Oromi, Turkish citizen

and Iranian Azerbaijani, to business in Azerbaijan. Oromi runs his trade company, actively operates in Middle East and Russia. He is a Hyundai distributor in Azerbaijan (since 1995). Leaders of Iranian Azerbaijanis also pointed to ties of Oromi with Iranian authorities.

After arrest in 2005 of Farhad Aliyev, the latter's share in Bank of Baku was divided between Ziya Mammadov and General Vagif Akhundov, Chief Presidential Security Service. The joint business included four: two from Azerbaijan (Ziya Mammadov and Vaqif Akhundov) and two from Iran (Jamshid Mahmudoglu and Shahram Oromi). Though, in 2008 Oromi directed by Iran's authorities sold Mahmudoglu a considerable part of his share in Bank of Baku and now the business in Azerbaijan is run through Bank of Baku by three: Jamshid Mahmudoglu, Ziya Mammadov and Vaqif Akhundov.

The media regularly reports on business in Azerbaijan run by other Iranian businessmen of Azerbaijani origin. It was also reflected in dispatches of the US Embassy in Baku recently emerged in Wikileaks. So, one of the secret dispatches dated March 6, 2009 reads that many citizens of Iran, mainly of Azerbaijani origin, launder money of the Iranian authorities through registered private business in Baku. This "private" business includes plants and factories, firms and companies, trade assets. As a result, they purchase equipment for the Revolutionary Guard of Iran. Among them are rich trader Jamal Alavi (close relative of President Ahmadinejad), who heads "Tavaneh Marzneshinan Fedayan" Company, has a house in Baku and make often tours in Azerbaijan, Russia, China and Kazakhstan. His assistant Lotfi is an officer with the Revolutionary Guard. He collects intelligence and purchases equipment in Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, Dubai, etc.

The secret US dispatches mention also Adil Sharabani, former Manager of Iran Melli Bank in Baku. This bank has close business relations with Xalq Bank in Baku. Sharabani closely cooperates with Iranian Banyadeh Mostazafan (Foundation for the Oppressed).

Below is information on other Azerbaijani businessmen from Iran enjoying good relations with Azerbaijani authorities and running business in Azerbaijan:

Agai Asker, owner of a private company. His official business includes sale of timber from Russia to Iran via Azerbaijan. He closely cooperates with the Culture Mission of Iranian Baku regarding political matters. His wife is Irada Afetgyzy, an Azerbaijani and cousin to Misir Mardanov, Education Minister of Azerbaijan. She helped to arrange an anti-Israeli conference "Islamic World" in the Media Center (Baku). Agai Asker owns two houses in Baku and often receives Iranian clergy and relatives of Iranian officials and senior officers with the Revolutionary Guard. He has close ties with the Iranian authorities.

Jabrayil Naved is a rich trader with commercial ties with SOCAR and is busy with illegal sale of materials for oil well drilling. He facilitates import of goods from Russia to Iran via Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic. He is a crony of Husseinia Ojagnejad, head of an Iranian Mosque in Baku. The latter is a son of Iranian Ayatollah Meskini and personal envoy of Ayatollah Khomeini in Azerbaijan.

Safa Naved is a son of Jabrayil Naved and Qafqaz University (Baku) graduate. Works in the Iranian Embassy and is an officer with the Revolutionary Guard. He is in charge of Iranian students in Azerbaijan and shadows them.

Asger Jabbari officially exports marble to Azerbaijan from Isfahan, where it is produced in a plant owned by the Revolutionary Guard.

April 22, 2011