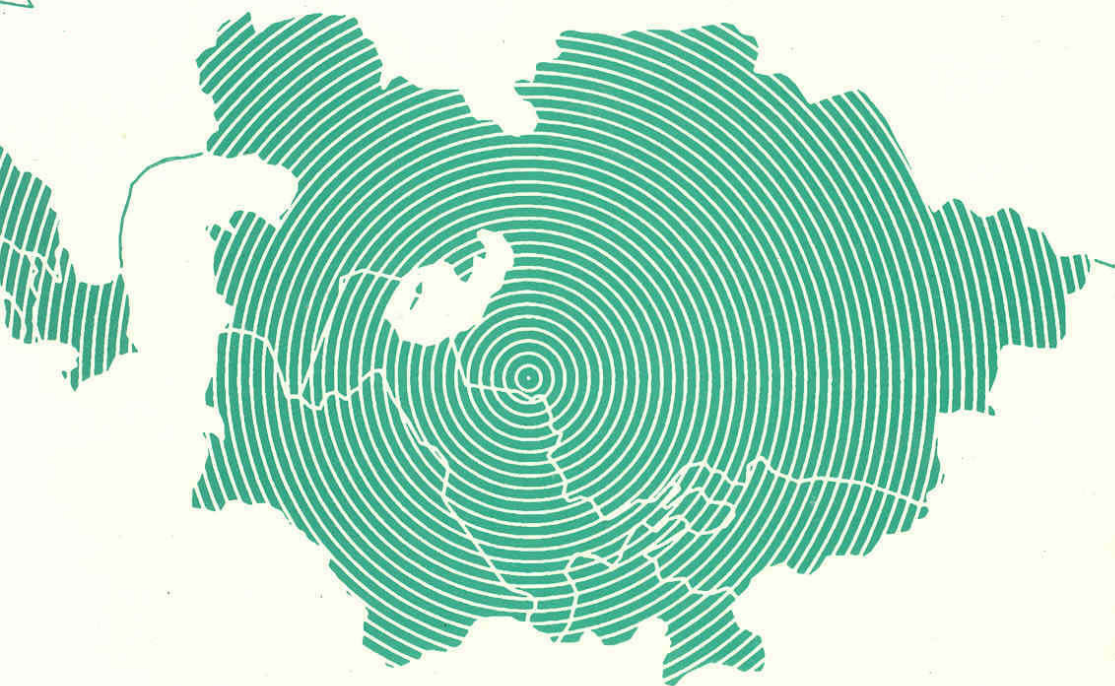


CENTRAL EURASIA

2005

Analytical
ANNUAL



CA&CC Press®
SWEDEN

Contents

<i>Vagn Khachatryan</i>	ECONOMY	79
<i>Vagram Melikian, Egine Mkrtchian</i>	RELIGION	87
<i>Sergey Minasian</i>	INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS	93

AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC

<i>Nazim Imanov</i>	GENERAL OVERVIEW	102
<i>Nazim Imanov</i>	POLITICS	105
<i>Fuad Murshudli</i>	ECONOMY	113
<i>Elmir Kuliev</i>	RELIGION	121
<i>Jannatkhan Eyvazov</i>	INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS	128

GEORGIA

<i>Vladimer Papava</i>	GENERAL OVERVIEW	137
<i>Giya Zhorzholiani</i>	POLITICS	140
<i>Nodar Khaduri</i>	ECONOMY	147
<i>Zaza Piralishvili</i>	RELIGION	152
<i>Archil Gegeshidze</i>	INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS	158

REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

<i>Timur Shaimergenov</i>	GENERAL OVERVIEW	167
<i>Erbulat Seylekhanov</i>	POLITICS	170
<i>Larissa Sidorova</i>	ECONOMY	176
<i>Iakov Trofimov</i>	RELIGION	189
<i>Murat Laumulin</i>	INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS	194

defiance of international legal norms, Armenia has set up a joint venture with India's Sterlite Gold Ltd and has continued to develop this deposit, laying waste 500 hectares of adjacent territory. In view of this, and also because of the forced cessation of rail and road communications with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (blockaded over the past 18 years) and of transit traffic through its territory, Azerbaijan's budget annually loses colossal amounts.

C o n c l u s i o n

So, 2005 was a period of active implementation of concrete plans and programs oriented toward sociopolitical and macroeconomic stability, structural reforms, improvement of the business climate, a massive inflow of investment into the oil sector, enhancement of its export potential, faster growth of production in the non-oil industries, and a significant increase in real household income. On the whole, objective conditions have been created in the country for dynamic economic and social development.

In many respects, Azerbaijan remains the most attractive country for investment. Its leadership's strategy of socially oriented market transformation has created prerequisites for accelerating economic development and integrating the republic into the world economy in cooperation with friendly countries and international financial institutions.

RELIGION

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The religious community of Azerbaijan entered 2005 with the hope that all the problems relating to the rights of believers would be resolved in the near future. The economic and administrative changes carried out by the country's new leaders, as well as the measures designed to devel-

op a civil society led the people to expect that religion would become an element of public life. The state still has to create religious stability and raise religious tolerance in order to rule out religious radicalism and extremism, as well as any attempts to turn religion into a political instrument.

The Current Situation

About 96 percent of the country's population are Muslims; while 4 percent are the followers of other religions. There are over 1,500 religious communities in the republic, 29 of them are non-Islam-

ic: 12 are Protestant; four are Christian Orthodox (including Albanian-Udin); six are Judaic; three are Bahai; three are Molokan; and one is Krishnaite. Only 335 of the total number are registered with the State Committee for Religious Organizations (hereinafter, the Committee). Five of the earlier registered were deprived of registration.

Historically, the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus (AMC) is considered the Muslim communities' organizational center; it controls the groups wishing to be registered with the Committee. The AMC also has the following powers: it monitors adherence to the Shari'a; trains the clergy; appoints akhunds to the mosques; and organizes annual pilgrimages to Mecca. There is an Attestation Commission functioning under the AMC which assesses the level of the clerics' religious knowledge.

Most of the local Muslims traditionally follow the Shi'a (the Imamiyya) and Sunni (Shafi'ite and Hanafi) madhabs. While Shi'ites live all over the country, Sunnis mainly live in the capital and in the north. Sufism of the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya Tariqahs is popular among those who follow the Shafi'ite madhab.

Late in the 1980s, followers of non-traditional Islamic trends appeared in Azerbaijan, the most active among them being the radical Shi'ites, Wahhabis, Nursites, and the Sufi Tariqahs.

Radical Shi'ites, who are inspired by the religious and political ideas of Khomeini, live mostly in the south where their mosques are concentrated. They have supporters in Baku and its environs, and in the Guba District.

The loyal Wahhabis live all over the republic, but mostly in Baku, in the north and northwest. Their ideas are preached in about two dozens of mosques. Recently the radical Wahhabis played down their activeness, mainly due to the efforts of the law enforcement bodies. Still, certain incidents in the republic show that religious radicalism is still a serious problem.

The followers of Sayid Nursi live mainly in Baku, Sumqayit, and the Sheki-Shirvan zone. They are actively planting their supporters in education (today they run over 10 lyceums) and state administration. They also have a large share of Turkish business at the local markets concentrated in their hands.

The followers of influential Daghestani Sheikh Avar Sayid-efendi Chirkeevsky are very active in the northwest of the country. His teaching is based on the Tariqahs Naqshbandiyya, Shaziliyya, and Jazuliyya (today, his murids control the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Daghestan). There are about 5,000 of his followers in Azerbaijan, mostly Avars.

Christianity is represented by Orthodoxy (the Russian and Georgian churches), Catholic and Protestant trends, as well as various sects. The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh follows the Armenian Gregorian Church.

The Russian Orthodox churches are united into the Baku-Caspian Eparchy restored on 28 December, 1998; there are 11 Molokan communities which adhere to the Old Believer traditions, yet never promote their religious ideas. There are no more than 500 of them and their numbers are gradually diminishing.

Late in the 20th century, the Albanian Church, which was liquidated by the czarist government in 1836, was restored in Azerbaijan. In the 19th century, its property was transferred to Etchmiadzin: the Karabakh churches were called Armenian and the Christian population was registered as Armenian. Today, the Udins (there are about 6,000 of them) are the followers of the Albanian Church; 4,400 of them live in a compact group in the village of Nidj in the Gabala District. On 10 April, 2003, the Albanian-Udin Christian community was registered.

In 1999, the Roman Catholic community was registered with the Ministry of Justice; later it was re-registered with the Committee. It has two Vatican-appointed priests; in 2001, the Catholics bought a prayer house for local parishioners (there are about 150 of them; up to 200 foreigners also attend the services).

The registered Baptist communities have about 3,000 followers in Baku, Sumqayit, and Ganja; here are also unregistered groups in 17 towns and settlements. In 2004, the Union of the Baptist Churches of Azerbaijan held its constituent congress.

There are several communities of the Seventh Day Adventists, the largest of them are found in Baku, Ganja, Nakhchyvan, and Terter. The Baku and Ganja communities are registered with the Committee. The total membership is about 700. There are three registered Pentecostal communities which actively propagate their teaching and a community of the New Apostolic Church with over 400 followers.

The Evangelical Lutheran community was registered in 1993 with the Ministry of Justice; later a new Lutheran community was registered with the Committee; today there are about 80 parishioners in the Baku church, while there are about 700 Germans (who are supposed to be Lutherans) living in the republic.

The Jehovah's Witnesses were registered with the Ministry of Justice in 1999, yet small groups of missionaries arrived much earlier, in 1983. According to certain sources, today the community is 1,200 strong; the largest of its meetings, however, are attended by no more than 250 people. Not infrequently foreign missionaries help the community to propagate its ideas—this creates tension in the community's relations with the authorities.

The Armenian Gregorian Church enjoys a special status in Armenia-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh. Throughout 2005 some of the human rights organizations followed the changing fortunes of several members of the Protestant sects (Baptists and the Jehovah's Witnesses) who refused to serve in the separatist military forces because of their religious convictions and were sentenced to prison terms. In June 2005, one of them, Armenian citizen Armen Grigorian, was sentenced to two years in prison. From time to time, the Azeri media inform the public of the plans to build new churches on the occupied territories, which is normally interpreted as an attempt to deliberately change the region's ethnic and religious structure. Early in August, the AMC described the intention of Bishop of the Armenian Church Pargev Martirossian to restore the mosque in Shusha as provocative and hypocritical.

According to certain estimates, there are 15,000 to 20,000 Jews in the republic; the Mountain Jews form the majority of the republic's Jewish diaspora, 4,000 of them live in the Guba District; there are 7,000 to 8,000 Ashkenazi Jews, most of them found in Baku and Sumqayit; there are also about 700 Georgian Jews in Azerbaijan. It should be said that the Kransnaia Sloboda settlement of the Guba District is the only place in the post-Soviet expanse where Mountain Jews live in a compact group.

The Bahai community was officially registered with the Ministry of Justice in 1993; in 2002, it was re-registered with the Committee simultaneously with another Bahai community in Sumqayit. The Baku Bahai center holds regular meetings and conferences devoted to historical dates and events. In 1986, the Baku branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) began its activities; the community registered in 1990 has over 200 followers; they hold daily services in the Baku prayer house.

Recently, non-traditional trends stepped up their activities for several reasons: influenced by the ideas of socialism in the past and the ideas of liberalism at present, some of the local people moved away from their spiritual and ethnic roots; there is a lot of mistrust in the mullahs and traditional clerics; the traditional values are poorly explained and promoted; there are many social problems, while some of the foreign companies prefer Christian employees. The nation's historical memory reflects the period of domination of Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and even earlier beliefs. Given the right conditions, it would not be difficult to turn to the systemic values of other religions, the memory of which is stored in the mass consciousness.

At the same time, the number of cases where people changed their faith and joined destructive sects dropped because of improved social conditions and improved religious education.

Today there are about 1,300 mosques functioning in the country, 500 of them supported by the state; 150 mosques were built on foreign and charity money. There are 60 mosques in the capital. The oldest and the largest mosque—the Juma Mosque in Shemakha—was founded in 744.

There are over 50 churches, prayer houses, and synagogues in the republic. Five registered Christian Orthodox churches belong to the Baku-Caspian Eparchy (three of them are found in Baku); Ganja and Hachmas have one each. The Cathedral of the Holy Wives in Baku is the central church, in which the bishop leads the services. The Georgian Orthodox Church has four churches; the Armenian Gregorian Church has five churches (three of them in Nagorno-Karabakh).

In September 2005, the foundation of the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Immaculate Conception was laid in Baku on the plot of land transferred to the community free of charge in 2003 during the visit of Pope John Paul II.

The Molokan Spiritual Christians own 11 prayer houses; the Baptists have six; the Seventh Day Adventists also have six; and the Pentecostals and the Jehovah's Witnesses have one prayer house each. Four prayer houses belong to other Protestant sects. The Evangelical Lutheran community holds its Sunday services in the Baku Hall of Chamber and Organ Music (formerly a Protestant church). Six synagogues function in Baku, Oguz, and the Guba District. The Baku Krishna Consciousness Association has a two-story prayer house; the Bahai community has two prayer houses—in Baku and Sumqayit.

Over 70 architectural monuments of Muslim and Albanian-Christian culture can be found in five districts of Nagorno-Karabakh; some of them date back to the 4th century; and there are 60 religious monuments in the occupied districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. According to statistics, 44 Albanian-Christian churches, nine mosques, nine palaces, 927 public libraries, and 464 monuments of art and museums were destroyed in the occupied territory; about 40,000 museum exhibits were stolen.

The citizens of Azerbaijan have the right to receive religious education, individually or collectively. The main Muslim religious educational institution in the republic, the Islamic University, was opened in 1991; today it has three regional branches. Since 1992, specialists in Islam have been trained at the Department of Theology of Baku State University. In August 2001, 22 madrasahs, the curricula of which did not correspond to the law, were closed. Today there are four madrasahs in the Sheki, Agdash and Zakataly districts. As of January 2005, there were 16 official courses of Koranic studies, and many more unofficial courses. The non-Islamic communities also run study courses.

Over 500 people are studying abroad with the help of AMC: over 200 of them are educated in Iran and about 160 in Egypt. About 2,000 young Azerbaijani men and women (the figure is unofficial) are studying in religious educational establishments in Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Russia (in Tatarstan and Daghestan), and Malaysia. There is no information about the number of Azeri citizens studying in Christian, Judaic, and Buddhist educational establishments abroad. Judging by the steadily increasing number of missionaries educated abroad, the figure is large. The Committee is supposed to control the process.

The fundamentals of religion are not taught in secondary schools, but this is not banned. In recent years, the issue became a source of discord between the Committee and the Ministry of Education, which objects to this discipline as part of school curricula for want of trained teachers and teaching programs. The public, on the whole, welcomes the idea, yet is doubtful about the Committee-supported idea that the fundamentals of Islam should be taught together with the fundamentals and traditions of other world religions. Schoolchildren might become disoriented, which would negatively affect their national and cultural self-identification. Late in 2005, the president of Azerbaijan endorsed the state program "The Youth of Azerbaijan: 2005-2009," which, in particular, speaks of the need to teach schoolchildren national spiritual values during and after school hours.

There are several religious publications in Azeri: the *Islam Press* and *Nabz* newspapers and the *Kalam* journal. In 2005, a new journal *Fitrat* was started to promote radical Islamic ideas of various types ranging from the views and opinions of Ayatollah Khomeini to the Muslim Brothers' ideas; there are also quarterlies *Manavi Saflyg* and *Irfan*; in the middle of May, a weekly *Eni Hikmet* appeared. In the past, some of the religious publications were discontinued for financial reasons.

Pilgrimage to Mecca is the central annual event of the republic's religious life. It is organized by the AMC, which has a relevant agreement with the Ministry of Hajj of Saudi Arabia. The Administration distributes quotas among tourist companies. Recently, Azerbaijan has been receiving larger quotas: in 2003, it was 2,000 persons; in 2004, 2,200; and in 2005, 2,300. In 2006, the republic received 2,800 places, but in the end, a much larger number, about 3,450 Azeri citizens, performed the hajj. Previously, the number of people wishing to perform the hajj was much lower than the quota.

The local people follow the tradition of visiting the tombs of saints and other local pilgrimage places: there are about 550 of them in Azerbaijan (about 30 are in the Nakhchyvan Autonomous Republic), most of them are AMC-controlled. By the end of 2005, only 14 of them had been registered.

Many of the communities are engaged in humanitarian actions, some of them being connected with Islamic customs: during the Gurban-bayram religious festival, the meat of slaughtered animals is distributed among the needy; meat and other foodstuffs are also distributed during the Ramazan-bayram festival. Missionary organizations also carry out charity work.

Relations Between the State and Religion

The Constitution of Azerbaijan guarantees every citizen freedom of conscience and the right to independently choose a religion and profess it personally or together with other people, or not to profess any religion, as well as to express and promote his convictions related to his attitude toward religion (Art 48). Religion shall be separated from the state; all religions shall be equal before the law; the spread and promulgation of religions which humiliate human dignity and contradict the principles of humanity shall be banned. The state educational system shall be of secular character (Art 18).

Under the Law on Freedom of Worship, freedom to worship may be limited for considerations of state and national security, as well as to protect the rights and freedoms of citizens (Art 1). The law was adopted in 1992; even though it was amended several times in 1996-2002, the public insists on improving the laws in this sphere. The law does not stipulate that the funding of religious communities should be transparent, which is necessary to fight religious extremism. There is a lot of discussion about the communities' dependence on republican or foreign religious centers (Art 9). It is also expected that in 2006 this law will be amended with respect to the right of individual groups of believers to alternative military service.

The Committee set up in 2001 serves as a link between the state and the religious communities, which means that it implements the ideas of the country's leaders in the religious sphere. The Committee insisted on prohibiting religious propaganda by foreign citizens (since 2005, some European states have been practicing similar policies). The Committee allows or bans the publication, import, and distribution of religious literature in the republic. In 2005, over 500,000 copies of such publications were brought into the republic, 30 percent less than in 2004. It should be said that the Law on Freedom of Worship does not restrict the right of physical persons to bring in books for personal use, yet they, too, sometimes encounter such problems.

Early in October 2005, a Council of Religious Experts was set up under the Committee with the aim of establishing order in the religious education system; it is expected to set up a database on religious communities and to invite the communities to help resolve social problems. The Committee also initiated a Republican Center called Spiritual Health for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Religious Violence.

It should be said that the religious upsurge of the late 1990s was replaced with a better understanding of the meaning of religion and its role in public life. The upper echelons of power have finally realized that religion can and should be used to strengthen national unity and political stability, yet progress in this direction is very slow and cautious.

In 2005, the public continued to discuss the protection of the rights of believers, who are especially displeased with the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs refused to issue identity cards and passports to Muslim women who were photographed for these documents wearing hijabs. In December 2004, a group of Muslim women complained about this to the European Human Rights Court. In some places, Muslim women who worked in schools and state offices were told not to appear at their work places with covered heads. On 30 March, a teacher at the Istedad Lyceum in Sumqayit was fired for this reason. In June, the city court confirmed her right to wear hijab during work hours, and the school was obligated to pay her the salary for the entire period she was out of work. This fact demonstrates that understanding is gradually forming between the authorities and the faithful, even if slowly and not without setbacks.

In 2005, another debatable issue was resolved, this time contrary to what the believers wanted. I have in mind alternative service for those who refuse to serve in the army for religious convictions. On 4 February, the Supreme Court ruled that every young man who is a member of a religious community should serve in the army like every other young male citizen of the Azerbaijan Republic, irrespective of his religious ideas. The Constitution registered the right to alternative service for religious convictions in Art 76, yet after several months of court proceedings in lower instances, the Supreme Court ruled that alternative military service was not applicable to everybody subject to conscription while Azerbaijan remained in the state of war with Armenia. As distinct from the public feelings aroused by the case of the hijabs, this time the public supported the authorities.

The state does its best to stem any attempt to use religion as a political tool: recently several Islamic humanitarian organizations lost their registration, including on the charge of their ties with terrorist structures; and several foreigners who tried to promote religious extremism and destructive ideas were deported. The Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA) and the Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) are still waiting to be registered with the Ministry of Justice. Back in 1992 when the Popular Front was in power, the IPA was registered; its registration was annulled on the eve of the 1995 parliamentary election.

In 2005, many of the Muslim leaders were involved in political activities in connection with the parliamentary election of 6 November. Several of them intended to run for the Milli Mejlis, yet the Central Election Commission rejected most of them. The Constitutional Court only allowed IPA Chairman G. Nuri to run for parliament; E. Abramov, a member of the Krasnaia Sloboda community of the Mountain Jews, was also elected to become the first ever representative of the Jewish community in the parliament.

In Azerbaijan all religions are equal: the state defends the rights of the Muslims to the same extent as the rights of the followers of all the traditional confessions present in the republic. Throughout the year, the authorities regularly met heads of religious communities at seminars and other events, which improved mutual understanding and strengthened their ties. The organizations which joined the Alliance of Religious Communities "For the Sake of Peace and Harmony" were extremely active. Set up late in 2004, the structure unites over 40 communities of various confessions; some of the local and foreign NGOs and international organizations contribute to the religious dialog.

Religious Revival: Today and Tomorrow

By the early 21st century, the process of religious revival dating back to the latter half of the 1980s accelerated. More and more people embrace religious practices; in the south, closer to Iran, religious identity predominates. The secular nature of Azerbaijan, however, makes religious affiliation strictly private.

The events of 2005 have confirmed that there are three large groups in the country's Muslim community. The traditional clergy united under the AMC forms one group, which is opposed by two other groups of believers: the renovationists and the sectarians. The former are the socially and politically passive majority of the nation's religious population, which studies and practices Islam in search of spiritual purification. The latter form an active minority supported by foreign missionaries and structures pursuing political aims.

Today, the two groups have much in common: both suppress the individuality of their followers, while some of their ideas do not let people develop as individuals; they preach simplified religious ideas and seek purely formal relations. As opponents of the secular state, they both want to move Islam to the center of public life in Azerbaijan.

Under these conditions, it was necessary to let everyone know that the state was not merely responsible for the country's social and economic development, but also for the nation's spiritual health, its ethnic and cultural traditions, humanistic principles, morals and ethics.

The local intelligentsia, the academic community in particular, has pointed out that the faithful should not be isolated from the rest of society and should be involved in public, political, economic, and cultural developments. To cope with this task, the communities were invited to present social programs of their own to channel their energy into social activities and social ethics. This process might consolidate and develop the relations between the state and religious organizations and will help to counteract attempts to make religion a political tool and to proliferate extremism.

Religious communities can help to strengthen national unity, and support orphans, refugees, and forced migrants; they can help the sexes to better understand their roles in order to diminish violence at home. They can help families and society as a whole to preserve and develop cultural traditions; they can also fight smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, and help to raise the level of spiritual culture and education of the faithful and non-believers.

On the other hand, social tension is still preserved because civil society is undeveloped and the communities still lack the proper mechanisms to function. Most religious figures have not yet realized the need to form full-blooded communities as centers of spiritual assistance to society, rather than being mere groups of co-religionists. Their consumer psychology still keeps the communities dependent on the local authorities or foreign sponsors and does not allow them to fulfill their social mission.

The laws do not allow the communities to fully tap their religious potential to fortify their social base. This is primarily true of non-alienable (*wakuf*) property in Islam similar to church property in Christianity. Today, a law on such property is overdue, while some clerics are still against it.

The country also needs measures which will allow it to use the religious factor to attain firmer stability. Globalization has made preservation and promulgation of spiritual and ethical values a national priority; at the same time, social consciousness must be reformed to allow acceptance of the values of liberalism and an open society together with traditional culture. It has become more important to maintain a balance between secular and religious principles in society rather than setting them against each other. To achieve this, the graduates of theological departments should also obtain an obligatory secular higher education.

Certain religious leaders interpreted the defeat of the opposition at the parliamentary election as the beginning of an ideological shift in the country, which would finally arrive, they hoped, with Islam as the central value. They obviously overestimated political Islam's potential in Azerbaijan—today, supporters of political Islam in the republic are few and far between, but no one can exclude the possibility that under certain conditions they will be able to persuade not only the loyal part of the faithful, but also that part of the opposition which does not profess Islam.

The low level of spiritual culture is a feature of the present stage of religious revival. In most cases, a religious lifestyle and its promulgation are divorced from the moral education and spiritual traditions handed down from one generation to another. This adds to the axiological crisis and contributes to the spread of false religious ideas. Aware of the gravity of this problem, religious intellectuals are spending much time studying the philosophy and history of religion in an effort to supply the ethical norms with artistic form to create new spiritual and moral images.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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Agenda of the Year

2005 was not a year in which Azerbaijan did any serious rethinking about its relations with the outside world. The country's leadership retained its main foreign political priorities, and efforts were largely directed toward resolving the following issues: settling the conflict with Armenia, implementing transregional energy and transportation projects and

reinforcing the republic's international position in this respect, integrating into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, and establishing relations with its closest neighbors. What is more, in this context, the parliamentary election held on 6 November should be singled out in particular. It had an unprecedented influence both on Azerbaijan's domestic political situation and on its international contacts.

International Activity

At the end of 2004-beginning of 2005, relations with Iran underwent a perceptible upswing. In December 2004, high-ranking Iranian officials, including Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani and Security Minister Ali Yunisi, visited Azerbaijan. Many analysts assessed these visits, as well as the partici-