

= Azerbaijan =

Azerbaijan (/ ˈæzərbaɪˈdʒən / AZ @-@ ?r @-@ by @-@ JAHN ; Azerbaijani : Azərbaycan [ʔzærbʔjdʔʔn]) , officially the Republic of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijani : Azərbaycan Respublikası) , is a country in the Transcaucasian region , situated at the crossroads of Southwest Asia and Southeastern Europe . It is bounded by the Caspian Sea to the east , Russia to the north , Georgia to the northwest , Armenia to the west and Iran to the south . The exclave of Nakhchivan is bounded by Armenia to the north and east , Iran to the south and west , while having a short border with Turkey in the north west .

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic proclaimed its independence in 1918 . The country was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1920 as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic . The modern Republic of Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence on 30 August 1991 , before the official dissolution of the USSR . In September 1991 , the disputed Armenian @-@ majority Nagorno @-@ Karabakh region re @-@ affirmed its willingness to create a separate state as the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh Republic . The region and seven adjacent districts outside it became de facto independent since the ending of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh War in 1994 , these regions are internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan until a final solution to status of the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh is found through negotiations facilitated by the OSCE .

Azerbaijan is a unitary semi @-@ presidential republic . The country is a member state of the Council of Europe , the OSCE and the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program . It is one of the six independent Turkic states , being an active member of the Turkic Council and the TÜRKSÖY community . Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with 158 countries and holds membership in 38 international organizations . It is one of the founding members of GUAM , the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons . A member of the United Nations since 1992 , Azerbaijan was elected to membership in the newly established Human Rights Council by the United Nations General Assembly on 9 May 2006 (the term of office began on 19 June 2006) . Azerbaijan is also a member state of the Non @-@ Aligned Movement , holds observer status in World Trade Organization and is a correspondent at the International Telecommunication Union .

The Constitution of Azerbaijan does not declare an official religion , and all major political forces in the country are secularist , but the majority of people and some opposition movements adhere to Shia Islam . Azerbaijan has a high level of human development which ranks on par with most Eastern European countries . It has a high rate of economic development and literacy , as well as a low rate of unemployment . However , corruption in Azerbaijan is widespread , especially in the public service . The ruling party , New Azerbaijan Party , has been accused of authoritarianism and human rights abuses .

= = Etymology = =

According to a modern etymology , the name of Azerbaijan derives from that of Atropates , a Persian satrap under the Achaemenid Empire , who was later reinstated as the satrap of Media under Alexander the Great . The original etymology of this name is thought to have its roots in the once @-@ dominant Zoroastrian religion . In the Avesta , Frawardin Yasht (" Hymn to the Guardian Angels ") , there is a mention of âterepâtahe ashaonô fravashîm ýazamaide , which literally translates from Avestan as " we worship the Fravashi of the holy Atropatene . "

Atropates ruled over the region of Atropatene (present Iranian Azerbaijan) . The name " Atropates " itself is the Greek transliteration of an Old Iranian , probably Median , compounded name with the meaning " Protected by the (Holy) Fire " or " The Land of the (Holy) Fire " . The Greek name is mentioned by Diodorus Siculus and Strabo . Over the span of millennia the name evolved to ʔturpʔtʔkʔn (Middle Iranian) then to ʔdharbʔdhagʔn , ʔdharbʔyagʔn , ʔzarbʔyjdʔn (New Persian) and present @-@ day Azerbaijan . In Armenia , the country is called Adrbejan , yet another archaic form . Ultimately , the name Azerbaijan comes from Azar @-@ Payegan . This word is translatable as Guardian of Fire , " The Treasury " and " The Treasurer " of fire or " The Land of Fire " in Modern

Persian . The name was changed to Azerbaijan following the Arab conquest in the 7th century AD ; Arabic lacked the letters G and P , so Arabic speakers modified the spelling of Azer @-@ payegan .

= = History = =

= = = Antiquity = = =

The earliest evidence of human settlement in the territory of Azerbaijan dates back to the late Stone Age and is related to the Guruchay culture of the Azykh Cave . The Upper Paleolithic and late Bronze Age cultures are attested in the caves of Ta??lar , Damc?l? , Zar , Yataq @-@ yeri and in the necropolises of Leylatepe and Saraytepe .

Early settlements included the Scythians in the 9th century BC . Following the Scythians , Iranian Medes came to dominate the area to the south of the Aras . The Medes forged a vast empire between 900 ? 700 BC , which was integrated into the Achaemenid Empire around 550 BC . The area was conquered by the Achaemenids leading to the spread of Zoroastrianism . Later it became part of Alexander the Great 's Empire and its successor , the Seleucid Empire . During this period , Zoroastrianism spread in the Caucasus and Atropatene . Caucasian Albanians , the original inhabitants of northeastern Azerbaijan , ruled that area from around the 4th century BC , and established an independent kingdom that came under the cultural influence of the Armenians .

In the 4th and 3rd centuries BC , following the overthrow of the Achaemenid Empire , the southwestern part of modern Azerbaijan was part of the Kingdom of Armenia ruled by the Orontid Dynasty ; between the years 189 BC and 428 AD the western half of modern Azerbaijan , including the exclave of Nakhchivan , were included into the Kingdom of Greater Armenia ruled by Armenia 's Artaxiad and Arsacid dynasties , the latter itself a branch of the eponymous Arsacid dynasty of Parthia .

After the partition of the Kingdom of Armenia by Persia and Byzantium in 387 AD , the provinces of Artsakh and Utik , which had an ethnically mixed population , passed to Caucasian Albania .

= = = Feudal era = = =

The Persian Sassanids turned Caucasian Albania into a vassal state in AD 252 , while King Urnayr officially adopted Christianity as the state religion in the 4th century . Despite Sassanid rule , Albania remained an entity in the region until the 9th century , while fully subordinate to Sassanid Persia , and retained its monarchy . In the first half of the 7th century AD , the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate repulsed both the Sassanids and Byzantines from the Caucasus region and turned Caucasian Albania into a vassal state after the Christian resistance , led by King Javanshir , was suppressed in 667 . Caucasian Albania however , came already under nominal Muslim rule through the Muslim conquest of Persia , as it made up part of the Sassanid territory upon advent of the Muslim conquest . The power vacuum left by the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate was filled by numerous local dynasties such as the Sallarids , Sajids , Shaddadids , Rawadids and Buyids . At the beginning of the 11th century , the territory was gradually seized by waves of Turkic Oghuz tribes from Central Asia . The first of these Turkic dynasties established was the Seljuqs , which entered the area now known as Azerbaijan by 1067 .

The pre @-@ Turkic population that lived on the territory of modern Azerbaijani Republic spoke several Indo @-@ European and Caucasian languages , among them ? Armenian and an Iranian language called the Old Azari language , which was gradually replaced by a Turkic language , the early precursor of the Azerbaijani language of today . To distinguish it from the Turkic Azerbaijani or Azeri language , this Iranian language , is designated as the Azari language (or Old Azari language) , because the Turkic language and people are also designated as " Azarbaijani " or " Azari " in the Persian language . However some linguists have also designated the Tati dialects of Iranian Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan , like those spoken by the Tats , as a remnant of Azari . Locally , the possessions of the subsequent Seljuq Empire were ruled by Atabegs , who were

technically vassals of the Seljuq sultans , being sometimes de facto rulers themselves . Under the Seljuq Turks , local poets such as Nizami Ganjavi and Khagani Shirvani gave rise to a blossoming of Persian literature on the territory of present @-@ day Azerbaijan . The next ruling state of the Jalayirids was short @-@ lived and fell under the conquests of Timur .

The local dynasty of the Shirvanshahs became a vassal state of Timur 's Empire , and assisted him in his war with the ruler of the Golden Horde Tokhtamysh . Following Timur 's death , two independent and rival states emerged : Kara Koyunlu and Ak Koyunlu . The Shirvanshahs returned , maintaining a high degree of autonomy as local rulers and vassals from 861 until 1539 . During their conquest and persecution by the Iranian Safavids in 1501 , the last dynasty imposed Shia Islam upon the formerly Sunni population , as it did over its territories in modern @-@ day Iran , as it was battling against the Sunni Ottoman Empire . This , in combination with another series of events , the Safavids laid the foundation for the fact that both the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran are the only Shia majority countries ever since . Despite efforts of the Safavids , the Ottomans briefly managed to occupy swaths of present @-@ day Azerbaijan twice over the centuries . Also , Baku and its environs were briefly managed by the Russians in the early 18th century through the consequences of the Russo @-@ Persian War . Despite these very brief intermissions by Safavid Iran 's neighboring rivals , the land of what is nowadays Azerbaijan remained under intermittent Iranian rule from the earliest advent of the Safavids up to the course of the 19th century .

= = = Modern era = = =

After the Safavids , the area was ruled by the Iranian dynasties of Afshar and Zand and briefly by the Qajars , until the latter forced ceding to Russian empire in the course of the 19th century . However self @-@ ruling khanates with various forms of independence emerged in the area , especially following the collapse of the Zand dynasty and in the early Qajar era . These khanates , though often self @-@ ruling , were vassals and subjects of the Iranian shah (King) . The khanates exercised control over their affairs via international trade routes between Central Asia and the West . From the late 18th century and on , Imperial Russia changed to a more aggressive geo @-@ political stance towards its two neighbors (and rivals) to the south , namely Iran and Turkey . Following a chain of events that started with the re @-@ subjugation of Georgia into Iran in 1795 , Russia would now actively contest and battle with the latter over possession of the Caucasus region which was , for most of its part , in the hands of Iran . The successful Russian campaigns in the later stages of the Russo @-@ Persian War (1804 ? 13) were concluded with the Treaty of Gulistan , in which the shah 's claims to some of the Khanates of the Caucasus were dismissed by Russia on the ground that they had been de facto independent long before their Russian occupation .

Following Qajar Iran 's loss in the 1804 ? 1813 war , it was forced to concede suzerainty over most of the khanates (alongside Georgia and Dagestan) to the Russian Empire per the Gulistan treaty . The area to the north of the river Aras , amongst which the territory of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan , was Iranian territory until it was occupied by Russia in the course of the 19th century . Under the Treaty of Turkmenchay which finalised the Russo @-@ Persian War , Qajar Iran was forced to recognize Russian sovereignty over the Erivan Khanate , the Nakhchivan Khanate and the remainder of the Lankaran Khanate , comprising the last parts of the soil of the contemporary Azerbaijani Republic that were still in Iranian hands . After incorporation of all Caucasian territories from Iran into Russia , the new border between the two was set at the Aras River , which , upon the Soviet Union 's disintegration , subsequently became part of the border between Iran and the Azerbaijan Republic .

Qajar Iran was forced to cede its Caucasian territories to Russia in the 19th century , which thus included the territory of the modern @-@ day Azerbaijan Republic , while as a result of that cession , the Azerbaijani ethnic group is nowadays parted between two nations : Iran and Azerbaijan . Furthermore , the number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran far outnumber those in neighbouring Azerbaijan .

After the collapse of the Russian Empire during World War I , Azerbaijan , together with Armenia and Georgia became part of the short @-@ lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic .

It was followed by the March Days massacres that took place between 30 March and 2 April 1918 in the city of Baku and adjacent areas of the Baku Governorate of the Russian Empire . When the republic dissolved in May 1918 , Azerbaijan declared independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) . The ADR was the first modern parliamentary republic in the Muslim world . Among the important accomplishments of the Parliament was the extension of suffrage to women , making Azerbaijan the first Muslim nation to grant women equal political rights with men . Another important accomplishment of ADR was the establishment of Baku State University , which was the first modern @-@ type university founded in Muslim East .

By March 1920 , it was obvious that Soviet Russia would attack the much @-@ needed Baku . Vladimir Lenin said that the invasion was justified as Soviet Russia could not survive without Baku 's oil . Independent Azerbaijan lasted only 23 months until the Bolshevik 11th Soviet Red Army invaded it , establishing the Azerbaijan SSR on 28 April 1920 . Although the bulk of the newly formed Azerbaijani army was engaged in putting down an Armenian revolt that had just broken out in Karabakh , Azerbaijanis did not surrender their brief independence of 1918 ? 20 quickly or easily . As many as 20 @,@ 000 Azerbaijani soldiers died resisting what was effectively a Russian reconquest .

On 13 October 1921 , the Soviet republics of Russia , Armenia , Azerbaijan , and Georgia signed an agreement with Turkey known as the Treaty of Kars . The previously independent Naxicivan SSR would also become an autonomous ASSR within the Azerbaijan SSR by the treaty of Kars . On the other hand , Armenia was awarded the region of Zangezur and Turkey agreed to return Gyumri (then known as Alexandropol) .

During World War II , Azerbaijan played a crucial role in the strategic energy policy of Soviet Union , with most of the Soviet Union 's oil on the Eastern Front being supplied by Baku . By the Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in February 1942 , the commitment of more than 500 workers and employees of the oil industry of Azerbaijan was awarded orders and medals . Operation Edelweiss carried out by the German Wehrmacht targeted Baku because of its importance as the energy (petroleum) dynamo of the USSR . A fifth of all Azerbaijanis fought in the Second World War from 1941 to 1945 . Approximately 681 @,@ 000 people with over 100 @,@ 000 of them women went to the front , while the total population of Azerbaijan was 3 @.@ 4 million at the time . Some 250 @,@ 000 people from Azerbaijan were killed on the front . More than 130 Azerbaijanis were named Heroes of the Soviet Union . Azerbaijani Major @-@ General Azi Aslanov was twice awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union .

= = = Republic era = = =

Following the politics of glasnost , initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev , civil unrest and ethnic strife grew in various regions of the Soviet Union , including Nagorno @-@ Karabakh , an autonomous region of the Azerbaijan SSR . The disturbances in Azerbaijan , in response to Moscow 's indifference to already heated conflict , resulted in calls for independence and secession , which culminated in Black January in Baku . Later in 1990 , the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR dropped the words " Soviet Socialist " from the title , adopted the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic and restored flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic as the state flag . On 18 October 1991 , the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted a Declaration of Independence which was affirmed by a nationwide referendum in December 1991 , when the Soviet Union officially ceased to exist on 26 December 1991 .

The early years of independence were overshadowed by the Nagorno @-@ Karabakh war with the ethnic Armenian majority of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh backed by Armenia . By the end of hostilities in 1994 , Armenians controlled up to 14 ? 16 percent of Azerbaijani territory , including Nagorno @-@ Karabakh itself . During the war many atrocities were committed including the massacre at Malibeyli and Gushchular , the Garadaghly , Agdaban and the Khojaly massacres . Furthermore , an estimated 30 @,@ 000 people had been killed and more than a million people had been displaced . Four United Nations Security Council Resolutions (822 , 853 , 874 , and 884) demand for " the immediate withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan . " Many

Russians and Armenians left Azerbaijan during the 1990s . According to the 1970 census , there were 510 @, @ 000 ethnic Russians and 484 @, @ 000 Armenians in Azerbaijan .

In 1993 , democratically elected president Abulfaz Elchibey was overthrown by a military insurrection led by Colonel Surat Huseynov , which resulted in the rise to power of the former leader of Soviet Azerbaijan , Heydar Aliyev . In 1994 , Surat Huseynov , by that time a prime minister , attempted another military coup against Heydar Aliyev , but Huseynov was arrested and charged with treason . A year later , in 1995 , another coup was attempted against Aliyev , this time by the commander of the OMON special unit , Rovshan Javadov . The coup was averted , resulting in the killing of the latter and disbanding of Azerbaijan 's OMON units . At the same time , the country was tainted by rampant corruption in the governing bureaucracy . In October 1998 , Aliyev was reelected for a second term . Despite the much improved economy , particularly with the exploitations of Azeri @-@ Chirag @-@ Guneshli oil field and Shah Deniz gas field , Aliyev 's presidency was criticized due to suspected vote fraud and corruption .

Ilham Aliyev , the son of Heydar Aliyev , assumed as the chairman of the New Azerbaijan Party as well as the office of presidency when his father died in 2003 . He was reelected to a third term as president in October 2013 . He then launched a crackdown on opposition elements . In November , he put two prominent opponents on trial for inciting riots ten months earlier : Ilgar Mammadov , the chairman of the opposition Republican Alternative (REAL) ; and Ilgar Mammadov , the deputy chairman of the New Equality Party (Musavat) . In addition the dissident Islamic theologian Taleh Bagirzada was sentenced to two years ? imprisonment . The opposition newspaper Azadiq was closed down . Three men were sentenced to life in prison on charges of plotting attacks in Baku in a conspiracy with Iran .

= = Geography = =

Azerbaijan is in the South Caucasus region of Eurasia , straddling Western Asia and Eastern Europe . It lies between latitudes 38 ° and 42 ° N , and longitudes 44 ° and 51 ° E . The total length of Azerbaijan 's land borders is 2 @, @ 648 km (1 @, @ 645 mi) , of which 1007 kilometers are with Armenia , 756 kilometers with Iran , 480 kilometers with Georgia , 390 kilometers with Russia and 15 kilometers with Turkey . The coastline stretches for 800 km (497 mi) , and the length of the widest area of the Azerbaijani section of the Caspian Sea is 456 km (283 mi) . The territory of Azerbaijan extends 400 km (249 mi) from north to south , and 500 km (311 mi) from west to east .

Three physical features dominate Azerbaijan : the Caspian Sea , whose shoreline forms a natural boundary to the east ; the Greater Caucasus mountain range to the north ; and the extensive flatlands at the country 's center . There are also three mountain ranges , the Greater and Lesser Caucasus , and the Talysh Mountains , together covering approximately 40 percent of the country . The highest peak of Azerbaijan is mount Bazardüzü (4 @, @ 466 m) , while the lowest point lies in the Caspian Sea (? 28 m) . Nearly half of all the mud volcanoes on Earth are concentrated in Azerbaijan , these volcanoes were also among nominees for the New7Wonders of Nature .

The main water sources are surface waters . However , only 24 of the 8 @, @ 350 rivers are greater than 100 km (62 mi) in length . All the rivers drain into the Caspian Sea in the east of the country . The largest lake is Sarysu (67 km ²) , and the longest river is Kur (1 @, @ 515 km) , which is transboundary . Azerbaijan 's four main islands in the Caspian Sea have a combined area of over thirty square kilometers .

Since the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991 , the Azerbaijani government has taken drastic measures to preserve the environment of Azerbaijan . But national protection of the environment started to truly improve after 2001 when the state budget increased due to new revenues provided by the Baku @-@ Tbilisi @-@ Ceyhan pipeline . Within four years protected areas doubled and now make up eight percent of the country 's territory . Since 2001 the government has set up seven large reserves and almost doubled the sector of the budget earmarked for environmental protection .

= = = Landscape = = =

Azerbaijan is home to a vast variety of landscapes . Over half of Azerbaijan 's land mass consists of mountain ridges , crests , yailas , and plateaus which rise up to hypsometric levels of 400 ? 1000 meters (including the Middle and Lower lowlands) , in some places (Talis , Jeyranchol @-@ Ajinohur and Langabiz @-@ Alat foreranges) up to 100 ? 120 meters , and others from 0 ? 50 meters and up (Qobustan , Absheron) . The rest of Azerbaijan 's terrain consist of plains and lowlands . Hypsometric marks within the Caucasus region vary from about ? 28 meters at the Caspian Sea shoreline up to 4 @,@ 466 meters (Bazardüzü peak) .

The formation of climate in Azerbaijan is influenced particularly by cold arctic air masses of Scandinavian anticyclone , temperate of Siberian anticyclone , and Central Asian anticyclone . Azerbaijan 's diverse landscape affects the ways air masses enter the country . The Greater Caucasus protects the country from direct influences of cold air masses coming from the north . That leads to the formation of subtropical climate on most foothills and plains of the country . Meanwhile , plains and foothills are characterized by high solar radiation rates .

Nine out of 11 existing climate zones are present in Azerbaijan . Both the absolute minimum temperature (? 33 ° C or ? 27 @.@ 4 ° F) and the absolute maximum temperature (46 ° C or 114 @.@ 8 ° F) were observed in Julfa and Ordubad . The maximum annual precipitation falls in Lankaran (1 @,@ 600 to 1 @,@ 800 mm or 63 to 71 in) and the minimum in Absheron (200 to 350 mm or 7 @.@ 9 to 13 @.@ 8 in) .

Rivers and lakes form the principal part of the water systems of Azerbaijan , they were formed over a long geological timeframe and changed significantly throughout that period . This is particularly evidenced by remnants of ancient rivers found throughout the country . The country 's water systems are continually changing under the influence of natural forces and human introduced industrial activities . Artificial rivers (canals) and ponds are a part of Azerbaijan 's water systems . In terms of water supply , Azerbaijan is below the average in the world with approximately 100 @,@ 000 cubic metres (3 @,@ 531 @,@ 467 cubic feet) per year of water per square kilometer . All big water reservoirs are built on Kur . The hydrography of Azerbaijan basically belongs to the Caspian Sea basin .

There are 8 @,@ 350 rivers of various lengths within Azerbaijan . Only 24 rivers are over 100 kilometers long . The Kura and Aras are the most popular rivers in Azerbaijan , they run through the Kura @-@ Aras Lowland . The rivers that directly flow into the Caspian Sea , originate mainly from the north @-@ eastern slope of the Major Caucasus and Talysh Mountains and run along the Samur ? Devechi and Lankaran lowlands .

Yanar Dag , translated as " burning mountain " , is a natural gas fire which blazes continuously on a hillside on the Absheron Peninsula on the Caspian Sea near Baku , which itself is known as the " land of fire . " Flames jet out into the air from a thin , porous sandstone layer . It is a tourist attraction to visitors to the Baku area .

= = = Biodiversity = = =

The first reports on the richness and diversity of animal life in Azerbaijan can be found in travel notes of Eastern travelers . Animal carvings on architectural monuments , ancient rocks and stones survived up to the present times . The first information on the animal kingdom of Azerbaijan was collected during the visits of naturalists to Azerbaijan in the 17th century . Unlike fauna , the concept of animal kingdom covers not only the types of animals , but also the number of individual species .

There are 106 species of mammals , 97 species of fish , 363 species of birds , 10 species of amphibians and 52 species of reptiles which have been recorded and classified in Azerbaijan . The national animal of Azerbaijan is the Karabakh horse , a mountain @-@ steppe racing and riding horse endemic to Azerbaijan . The Karabakh horse has a reputation for its good temper , speed , elegance and intelligence . It is one of the oldest breeds , with ancestry dating to the ancient world . However today the horse is an endangered species .

Azerbaijan 's flora consists of more than 4 @,@ 500 species of higher plants . Due the unique climate in Azerbaijan , the flora is much richer in the number of species than the flora of the other republics of the South Caucasus . About 67 percent of the species growing in the whole Caucasus

can be found in Azerbaijan .

= = Politics = =

The structural formation of Azerbaijan 's political system was completed by the adoption of the new Constitution on 12 November 1995 . According to the Article 23 of Constitution , the state symbols of the Azerbaijan Republic are the flag , the coat of arms and the national anthem . The state power in Azerbaijan is limited only by law for internal issues , but for international affairs is additionally limited by the provisions of international agreements .

The government of Azerbaijan is based on the separation of powers among the legislative , executive and judicial branches . The legislative power is held by the unicameral National Assembly and the Supreme National Assembly in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic . Parliamentary elections are held every five years , on the first Sunday of November . The Yeni Azerbaijan Party , and independents loyal to the ruling government , currently hold almost all of the Parliament 's 125 seats . During the 2010 Parliamentary election , the opposition parties , Musavat and Azerbaijani Popular Front Party , failed to win a single seat . European observers found numerous irregularities in the run @-@ up to the election and on election day .

The executive power is held by the president , who is elected for a five @-@ year term by direct elections , and the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan . The president is authorized to form the Cabinet , a collective executive body , accountable to both the President and the National Assembly . The Cabinet of Azerbaijan consists primarily of the Prime Minister , his Deputies and Ministers . The president does not have the right to dissolve the National Assembly , but he has the right to veto its decisions . To override the presidential veto , the parliament must have a majority of 95 votes . The judicial power is vested in the Constitutional Court , Supreme Court and the Economic Court . The President nominates the judges in these courts .

The Security Council is the deliberative body under the president , and he organizes it according to the Constitution . It was established on 10 April 1997 . The administrative department is not a part of the president 's office but manages the financial , technical and pecuniary activities of both the president and his office .

Although Azerbaijan has held several elections since regaining its independence and it has many of the formal institutions of democracy , it remains classified as " not free " (on border with " partly free ") by Freedom House . In recent years , large numbers of Azerbaijani journalists , bloggers , lawyers , human rights activists have been rounded up and jailed for their criticism of President Aliyev and government authorities . A resolution adopted by the European Parliament in September 2015 described Azerbaijan as " having suffered the greatest decline in democratic governance in all of Eurasia over the past ten years , " noting as well that its dialogue with the country on human rights has " not made any substantial progress . "

Azerbaijan has been harshly criticized for bribing foreign officials and diplomats for promoting its causes abroad and legitimizing its elections at home , a practice which has been termed as ' caviar diplomacy ' .

= = = Foreign relations = = =

The short @-@ lived Azerbaijan Democratic Republic succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with six countries , sending diplomatic representatives to Germany and Finland . The process of international recognition of Azerbaijan 's independence from the collapsing Soviet Union lasted roughly one year . The most recent country to recognize Azerbaijan was Bahrain , on 6 November 1996 . Full diplomatic relations , including mutual exchanges of missions , were first established with Turkey , Pakistan , the United States , Iran and Israel . Azerbaijan has placed a particular emphasis on its " Special Relationship " with Turkey .

Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with 158 countries so far and holds membership in 38 international organizations . It holds observer status in the Non @-@ Aligned Movement and World Trade Organization and is a correspondent at the International Telecommunication Union . On 9

May 2006 Azerbaijan was elected to membership in the newly established Human Rights Council by the United Nations General Assembly . The term of office began on 19 June 2006 .

Foreign policy priorities of Azerbaijan include , first of all , the restoration of its territorial integrity ; elimination of the consequences of the loss of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh and seven other regions of Azerbaijan ; integration into European and Euro @-@ Atlantic structure ; contribution to international security ; cooperation with international organizations ; regional cooperation and bilateral relations ; strengthening of defense capability ; promotion of security by domestic policy means ; strengthening of democracy ; preservation of the ethnic and religious tolerance ; scientific , educational , and cultural policy and preservation of moral values ; economic and social development ; enhancing internal and border security ; and migration , energy , and transportation security policy .

The Azerbaijani government , in late 2007 , stated that the long @-@ standing dispute over the Armenian @-@ occupied territory of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh is almost certain to spark a new war if it remains unresolved . The Government is in the process of increasing its military budget . Furthermore , an attack by the Azerbaijani military in 2016 on Armenian villages in Nagorno @-@ Karabakh has caused physical damage and raised controversy over the future of peaceful relations between Azerbaijan and its neighbor , Armenia .

Azerbaijan is an active member of international coalitions fighting international terrorism . The country is contributing to peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo , Afghanistan and Iraq . Azerbaijan is an active member of NATO 's Partnership for Peace program . It also maintains good relations with the European Union and could potentially one day apply for membership .

= = = Administrative divisions = = =

Azerbaijan is divided into 10 economic regions ; 66 rayons (rayonlar , singular rayon) and 77 cities (??h?rl?r , singular ??h?r) of which 12 are under the direct authority of the republic . Moreover , Azerbaijan includes the Autonomous Republic (muxtar respublika) of Nakhchivan . The President of Azerbaijan appoints the governors of these units , while the government of Nakhchivan is elected and approved by the parliament of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic .

Note : The cities under the direct authority of the republic in italics .

= = Military = =

The history of the modern Azerbaijan army dates back to Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918 , when the National Army of the newly formed Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was created on 26 June 1918 . When Azerbaijan gained independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union , the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan were created according to the Law on the Armed Forces of 9 October 1991 . The original date of the establishment of the short @-@ lived National Army is celebrated as Army Day (26 June) in today 's Azerbaijan . As of 2002 , Azerbaijan had 95 @,@ 000 active personnel in its armed forces . There are also 17 @,@ 000 paramilitary troops . The armed forces have three branches : the Land Forces , the Air Forces and the Navy . Additionally the armed forces embrace several military sub @-@ groups that can be involved in state defense when needed . These are the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Border Service , which includes the Coast Guard as well . The Azerbaijan National Guard is a further paramilitary force . It operates as a semi @-@ independent entity of the Special State Protection Service , an agency subordinate to the President .

Azerbaijan adheres to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and has signed all major international arms and weapons treaties . Azerbaijan closely cooperates with NATO in programs such as Partnership for Peace and Individual Partnership Action Plan . Azerbaijan has deployed 151 of its Peacekeeping Forces in Iraq and another 184 in Afghanistan .

The defense budget of Azerbaijan for 2011 was set at US \$ 3 @.@ 1 billion . In addition to that , \$ 1 @.@ 36 billion was planned to be used for the needs of the defense industry , which bring up the total military spending to billion . Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said on 26 June 2011 that the defence spending reached \$ 3 @.@ 3 billion that year .

Azerbaijan 's defense budget for 2013 is \$ 3 @. @ 7 billion .

Azerbaijani defense industry manufactures small arms , artillery systems , tanks , armors and noctovision devices , aviation bombs , pilotless vehicles , various military vehicles and military planes and helicopters .

= = Economy = =

After gaining independence in 1991 , Azerbaijan became a member of the International Monetary Fund , the World Bank , the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development , the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank . The banking system of Azerbaijan consists of the Central Bank of Azerbaijan , commercial banks and non @-@ banking credit organizations . The National (now Central) Bank was created in 1992 based on the Azerbaijan State Savings Bank , an affiliate of the former State Savings Bank of the USSR . The Central Bank serves as Azerbaijan 's central bank , empowered to issue the national currency , the Azerbaijani manat , and to supervise all commercial banks . Two major commercial banks are UniBank and the state @-@ owned International Bank of Azerbaijan , run by Dr. Jahangir Hajiyev .

Pushed up by spending and demand growth , the 2007 Q1 inflation rate reached 16 @. @ 6 % . Nominal incomes and monthly wages climbed 29 % and 25 % respectively against this figure , but price increases in non @-@ oil industry encouraged inflation in the country . Azerbaijan shows some signs of the so @-@ called " Dutch disease " because of the fast @-@ growing energy sector , which causes inflation and makes non @-@ energy exports more expensive .

In the early years of this century the chronically high inflation was brought under control and this led to the launch of a new currency , the new Azerbaijani manat , on 1 January 2006 , to cement the acquisition of the economic reforms and erase the vestiges of an unstable economy .

In 2008 , Azerbaijan was cited as one of the top 10 reformers by the World Bank 's Doing Business Report .

Azerbaijan led the world as the top reformer in 2007 / 08 , with improvements on seven out of 10 indicators of regulatory reform . Azerbaijan started operating a one @-@ stop shop in January 2008 that halved the time , cost and number of procedures to start a business . Business registrations increased by 40 % in the first six months . Azerbaijan also eliminated the minimum loan cutoff of \$ 1 @, @ 100 , more than doubling the number of borrowers covered by the credit registry . Also , taxpayers can now file forms and pay their taxes online . Azerbaijan 's extensive reforms moved it far up the ranks , from 97 to 33 in the overall ease of doing business .

Azerbaijan is also ranked 57th in the Global Competitiveness Report for 2010 ? 2011 , which is above other CIS countries . By 2012 the GDP of Azerbaijan increased 20 @-@ fold relative to its 1995 level .

= = = Energy = = =

Two @-@ thirds of Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas . The region of the Lesser Caucasus accounts for most of the country 's gold , silver , iron , copper , titanium , chromium , manganese , cobalt , molybdenum , complex ore and antimony . In September 1994 , a 30 @-@ year contract was signed between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and 13 oil companies , among them Amoco , BP , ExxonMobil , Lukoil and Statoil . As Western oil companies are able to tap deepwater oilfields untouched by the Soviet exploitation , Azerbaijan is considered one of the most important spots in the world for oil exploration and development . Meanwhile , the State Oil Fund of Azerbaijan was established as an extra @-@ budgetary fund to ensure the macroeconomic stability , transparency in the management of oil revenue , and the safeguarding of resources for future generations .

Azeriqaz , a sub @-@ company of SOCAR , intends to ensure full gasification of the country by 2021 .

= = = Agriculture = = =

Azerbaijan has the largest agricultural basin in the region . About 54 % 9 percent of Azerbaijan is agricultural lands . At the beginning of 2007 there were 4 , 755 , 100 hectares of utilized agricultural area . In the same year the total wood resources counted 136 million m³ . Azerbaijan 's agricultural scientific research institutes are focused on meadows and pastures , horticulture and subtropical crops , green vegetables , viticulture and wine making , cotton growing and medicinal plants . In some lands it is profitable to grow grain , potatoes , sugar beets , cotton and tobacco . Livestock , dairy products , and wine and spirits are also important farm products . The Caspian fishing industry is concentrated on the dwindling stocks of sturgeon and beluga . In 2002 the Azerbaijani merchant marine had 54 ships .

Some portions of most products that were previously imported from abroad have begun to be produced locally (among them are Coca Cola by Coca Cola Bottlers LTD , beer by Baki - Kastel , parquet by Nehir and oil pipes by EUPEC Pipe Coating Azerbaijan) .

== Tourism ==

Tourism is an important part of the economy of Azerbaijan . The country was a well known tourist spot in the 1980s . However , the fall of the Soviet Union , and the Nagorno - Karabakh War during the 1990s , damaged the tourist industry and the image of Azerbaijan as a tourist destination .

It was not until the 2000s that the tourism industry began to recover , and the country has since experienced a high rate of growth in the number of tourist visits and overnight stays . In the recent years , Azerbaijan has also becoming a popular destination for religious , spa , and health care tourism . During winter , the Shahdag Mountain Resort offers skiing with state of the art facilities .

The government of Azerbaijan has set the development of Azerbaijan as an elite tourist destination as a top priority . It is a national strategy to make tourism a major , if not the single largest , contributor to the Azerbaijani economy . These activities are regulated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan .

== Transportation ==

The convenient location of Azerbaijan on the crossroad of major international traffic arteries , such as the Silk Road and the south - north corridor , highlights the strategic importance of transportation sector for the country 's economy . The transport sector in the country includes roads , railways , aviation , and maritime transport .

Azerbaijan is also an important economic hub in the transportation of raw materials . The Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) became operational in May 2006 and extends more than 1 , 774 kilometers through the territories of Azerbaijan , Georgia and Turkey . The BTC is designed to transport up to 50 million tons of crude oil annually and carries oil from the Caspian Sea oilfields to global markets . The South Caucasus Pipeline , also stretching through the territory of Azerbaijan , Georgia and Turkey , became operational at the end of 2006 and offers additional gas supplies to the European market from the Shah Deniz gas field . Shah Deniz is expected to produce up to 296 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year . Azerbaijan also plays a major role in the EU - sponsored Silk Road Project .

In 2002 , the Azerbaijani government established the Ministry of Transport with a broad range of policy and regulatory functions . In the same year , the country became a member of the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic . The highest priority being ; upgrading the transport network and transforming transportation services into one of the key comparative advantages of the country , as this would be highly conducive to the development of other sectors of the economy .

In 2012 , the construction of Kars - Tbilisi - Baku railway expected to provide transportation between Asia and Europe through connecting the railways of China and Kazakhstan in the east with Turkey 's Marmaray to the European railway system in the west . Broad gauge railways in 2010 stretched for 2 , 918 km (1 , 813 mi) and electrified railways numbered 1 , 278

km (794 mi) . By 2010 , there were 35 airports and one heliport .

== Science and technology ==

In the 21st century , a new oil and gas boom helped to improve the situation in Azerbaijan 's science and technology sectors , and the government launched a campaign aimed at modernization and innovation . The government estimates that profits from the information technology and communication industry will grow and become comparable with those from oil production .

Azerbaijan has a large and steadily growing Internet sector , mostly uninfluenced by the global financial crisis ; rapid growth is forecast for at least five more years .

The country has also been making progress in developing its telecoms sector . The Ministry of Communications & Information Technologies (MCIT) , as well as being an operator through its role in Aztelekom , is both a policy @-@ maker and regulator . Public pay phones are available for local calls and require the purchase of a token from the telephone exchange or some shops and kiosks . Tokens allow a call of indefinite duration . As of 2009 , there were 1 @,@ 397 @,@ 000 main telephone lines and 1 @,@ 485 @,@ 000 internet users . There are four GSM providers : Azercell , Bakcell , Azerfon (Nar Mobile) , Nakhtel mobile network operators and one CDMA .

In the 21st century a number of prominent Azerbaijani geodynamics and geotectonics scientists , inspired by the fundamental works of Elchin Khalilov and others , designed hundreds of earthquake prediction stations and earthquake @-@ resistant buildings that now constitute the bulk of The Republican Center of Seismic Service .

The Azerbaijan National Aerospace Agency launched its first satellite AzerSat 1 into orbit on 7 February 2013 from Guiana Space Centre in French Guiana at orbital positions 46 ° East . The satellite will cover Europe and significant part of Asian countries and Africa and will have transmission for TV , radio broadcasting and the internet . The launch of its own satellite on orbit is Azerbaijan 's first action in realizing prospective projects to turn itself into a country with a space industry .

== Demographics ==

From the total population of 9 @,@ 165 @,@ 000 people as of July 2011 , nearly 52 % was urban population , the remaining 48 % was the rural population . 51 % of the total population were female . The sex ratio for total population in that year was therefore 0 @.@ 97 males per female .

The 2011 population growth @-@ rate was 0 @.@ 85 % , compared to 1 @.@ 09 % worldwide . A significant factor restricting the population growth is rather a high level of migration . In 2011 Azerbaijan saw migration of ? 1 @.@ 14 / 1 @,@ 000 people .

The Azerbaijani diaspora is found in 42 countries and in turn there are many centers for ethnic minorities inside Azerbaijan , including the German cultural society " Karelhaus " , Slavic cultural center , Azerbaijani @-@ Israeli community , Kurdish cultural center , International Talysh Association , Lezgin national center " Samur " , Azerbaijani @-@ Tatar community , Crimean Tatars society , etc .

The ethnic composition of the population according to the 2009 population census : 91 @.@ 60 % Azerbaijanis , 2 @.@ 02 % Lezgians , 1 @.@ 35 % Armenians (almost all Armenians live in the break @-@ away region of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh) , 1 @.@ 34 % Russians , 1 @.@ 26 % Talysh , 0 @.@ 56 % Avars , 0 @.@ 43 % Turks , 0 @.@ 29 % Tatars , 0 @.@ 28 % Tats , 0 @.@ 24 % Ukrainians , 0 @.@ 14 % Tsakhurs , 0 @.@ 11 % Georgians , 0 @.@ 10 % Jews , 0 @.@ 07 % Kurds , other 0 @.@ 21 % .

Iranian Azerbaijanis are by far the largest minority in Iran . The number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran furthermore far outnumber those in neighboring Azerbaijan . The CIA World Factbook estimates Iranian Azerbaijanis as comprising at least 16 % of Iran 's population .

== Urbanization ==

In total , Azerbaijan has 77 cities , 64 smaller rayon @-@ class cities , and one special legal status city . These are followed by 257 urban @-@ type settlements and 4 @,@ 620 villages .

= = = Language = = =

The official language is Azerbaijani , which is spoken by approximately 92 % of the population as a mother tongue . It belongs to the Turkic language family . Russian and English play significant roles as second or third languages of education and communication . There are a dozen other languages spoken natively in the country . Armenian , Avar , Budukh , Georgian , Juhuri , Khinalug , Kryts , Lezgian , Rutul , Talysh , Tat , Tsakhur , and Udi are all spoken by minorities . Some of these language communities are very small and their numbers are decreasing . Armenian is almost exclusively spoken in the break @-@ away Nagorno @-@ Karabakh region .

= = = Religion = = =

Around 98 % of the population are Muslims . 92 % of the Muslims are Shia Muslims and 8 % Sunni Muslims , and the Republic of Azerbaijan has the second highest Shia population percentage after Iran . Other faiths are practised by the country 's various ethnic groups . Under article 48 of its Constitution , Azerbaijan is a secular state and ensures religious freedom . In a 2006 ? 2008 Gallup poll , only 21 % of respondents from Azerbaijan stated that religion is an important part of their daily lives .

Of the nation 's religious minorities , Christians who estimated 280 @,@ 000 (3 @.@ 1 %) are mostly Russian and Georgian Orthodox and Armenian Apostolic (almost all Armenians live in the break @-@ away region of Nagorno @-@ Karabakh) . In 2003 , there were 250 Roman Catholics . Other Christian denominations as of 2002 include Lutherans , Baptists and Molokans . There is also a small ethnic Azerbaijani Protestant community . Azerbaijan also has an ancient Jewish population with a 2 @,@ 500 @-@ year history ; Jewish organizations estimate that 10 @,@ 000 ? 20 @,@ 000 Jews remain in Azerbaijan . Azerbaijan also is home to members of the Bahá 'í , Hare Krishna and Jehovah 's Witnesses communities , as well as adherents of the other religious communities . Some religious communities have been unofficially restricted from religious freedom . A U.S. State Department report on the matter mentions detention of members of certain Muslim and Christian groups , and many groups have difficulty registering with the SCWRA .

= = = Education = = =

A relatively high percentage of Azerbaijanis have obtained some form of higher education , most notably in scientific and technical subjects . In the Soviet era , literacy and average education levels rose dramatically from their very low starting point , despite two changes in the standard alphabet , from Perso @-@ Arabic script to Latin in the 1920s and from Roman to Cyrillic in the 1930s . According to Soviet data , 100 percent of males and females (ages nine to forty @-@ nine) were literate in 1970 . According to the United Nations Development Program Report 2009 , the literacy rate in Azerbaijan is 99 @.@ 5 percent .

Since independence , one of the first laws that Azerbaijan 's Parliament passed to disassociate itself from the Soviet Union was to adopt a modified @-@ Latin alphabet to replace Cyrillic . Other than that the Azerbaijani system has undergone little structural change . Initial alterations have included the reestablishment of religious education (banned during the Soviet period) and curriculum changes that have reemphasized the use of the Azerbaijani language and have eliminated ideological content . In addition to elementary schools , the education institutions include thousands of preschools , general secondary schools , and vocational schools , including specialized secondary schools and technical schools . Education through the eighth grade is compulsory .

= = = Culture = = =

The culture of Azerbaijan has developed as a result of many influences . Today , national traditions are well preserved in the country despite Western influences , including globalized on consumer culture . Some of the main elements of the Azerbaijani culture are : music , literature , folk dances and art , cuisine , architecture , cinematography and Novruz Bayram . The latter is derived from the traditional celebration of the New Year in the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism . Novruz is a family holiday .

Azerbaijan folk consists of Azerbaijanis , the representative part of society , as well as of nations and ethnic groups , compactly living in various areas of the country . Azerbaijani national and traditional dresses are the Chokha and Papakhi . There are radio broadcasts in Russian , Armenian , Georgian , Kurdish , Lezgian and Talysh languages , which are financed from the state budget . Some local radio stations in Balakan and Khachmaz organize broadcasts in Avar and Tat . In Baku several newspapers are published in Russian , Kurdish (Dengi Kurd) , Lezgian (Samur) and Talysh languages . Jewish society " Sokhnut " publishes the newspaper Aziz .

= = = Music and folk dances = = =

Music of Azerbaijan builds on folk traditions that reach back nearly a thousand years . For centuries Azerbaijani music has evolved under the badge of monody , producing rhythmically diverse melodies . Azerbaijani music has a branchy mode system , where chromaticization of major and minor scales is of great importance . Among national musical instruments there are 14 string instruments , eight percussion instruments and six wind instruments . According to The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians , " in terms of ethnicity , culture and religion the Azerbaijani are musically much closer to Iran than Turkey . "

Mugham , meykhana and ashig art are among the many musical traditions of Azerbaijan . Mugham is usually a suite with poetry and instrumental interludes . When performing mugham , the singers have to transform their emotions into singing and music . In contrast to the mugham traditions of Central Asian countries , Azerbaijani mugham is more free @-@ form and less rigid ; it is often compared to the improvised field of jazz . UNESCO proclaimed the Azerbaijani mugham tradition a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity on 7 November 2003 . Meykhana is a kind of traditional Azerbaijani distinctive folk unaccompanied song , usually performed by several people improvising on a particular subject .

Ashiq combines poetry , storytelling , dance and vocal and instrumental music into a traditional performance art that stands as a symbol of Azerbaijani culture . It is a mystic troubadour or traveling bard who sings and plays the saz . This tradition has its origin in the Shamanistic beliefs of ancient Turkic peoples . Ashiqs ' songs are semi @-@ improvised around common bases . Azerbaijan 's ashig art was included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by the UNESCO on 30 September 2009 .

Since the mid @-@ 1960s , Western @-@ influenced Azerbaijani pop music , in its various forms , that has been growing in popularity in Azerbaijan , while genres as rock and hip hop of alternative music genres are encouraged . Azerbaijani pop and Azerbaijani folk music arose with the international popularity of performers like Alim Qasimov , Rashid Behbudov , Vagif Mustafazadeh , Muslim Magomayev , Shovkat Alakbarova and Rubaba Muradova . Azerbaijan is an enthusiastic participant in the Eurovision Song Contest . Azerbaijan made its debut appearance at the 2008 Eurovision Song Contest . The country 's entry gained the third place in 2009 and fifth the following year . Ell and Nikki won the first place at the Eurovision Song Contest 2011 with the song " Running Scared " , entitling Azerbaijan to host the contest in 2012 , in Baku . They have never missed a Grand Final .

There are dozens of Azerbaijani folk dances . They are performed at formal celebrations and the dancers wear national clothes like the Chokha , which is well @-@ preserved within the national dances . Most dances have a very fast rhythm . The national dance shows the characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation .

== = Literature == =

Among the medieval authors born within the territorial limits of modern Azerbaijani Republic was Persian poet and philosopher Nizami , called Ganjavi after his place of birth , Ganja , who was the author of the Khamseh (" The Quintuplet ") , composed of five romantic poems , including " The Treasure of Mysteries , " " Khosrow and Shahrn , " and " Leyli and Mejn . "

The earliest known figure in Azerbaijani literature was Izzeddin Hasanoglu , who composed a divan consisting of Persian and Turkic ghazals . In Persian ghazals he used his pen @-@ name , while his Turkic ghazals were composed under his own name of Hasanoghlu .

Classical literature in Azerbaijani was formed in 14th century based on the various dialect Early Middle Ages dialects of Tabriz and Shirvan . Among the poets of this period were Gazi Burhanaddin , Haqiqi (pen @-@ name of Jahan @-@ shah Qara Qoyunlu) , and Habibi . The end of the 14th century was also the period of starting literary activity of Imadaddin Nesimi , one of the greatest Turkic Hurufi mystical poets of the late 14th and early 15th centuries and one of the most prominent early divan masters in Turkic literary history , who also composed poetry in Persian and Arabic . The divan and ghazal styles were further developed by poets Qasim al @-@ Anvar , Fuzuli and Khatai (pen @-@ name of Safavid Shah Ismail I) .

The Book of Dede Korkut consists of two manuscripts copied in the 16th century , was not written earlier than the 15th century . It is a collection of 12 stories reflecting the oral tradition of Oghuz nomads . The 16th @-@ century poet , Muhammed Fuzuli produced his timeless philosophical and lyrical Qazals in Arabic , Persian , and Azerbaijani . Benefiting immensely from the fine literary traditions of his environment , and building upon the legacy of his predecessors , Fizuli was destined to become the leading literary figure of his society . His major works include The Divan of Ghazals and The Qasidas . In the same century , Azerbaijani literature further flourished with the development of Ashik (Azerbaijani : A??q) poetic genre of bards . During the same period , under the pen @-@ name of Khat?? (Arabic : ?????? for sinner) Shah Ismail I wrote about 1400 verses in Azerbaijani , which were later published as his Divan . A unique literary style known as qoshma (Azerbaijani : qo?ma for improvization) was introduced in this period , and developed by Shah Ismail and later by his son and successor , Shah Tahmasp I .

In the span of the 17th and 18th centuries , Fizuli 's unique genres as well Ashik poetry were taken up by prominent poets and writers such as Qovsi of Tabriz , Shah Abbas Sani , Agha Mesih Shirvani , Nishat , Molla Vali Vidadi , Molla Panah Vagif , Amani , Zafar and others . Along with Turks , Turkmens and Uzbeks , Azerbaijanis also celebrate the Epic of Koroglu (from Azerbaijani : kor o?lu for blind man 's son) , a legendary folk hero . Several documented versions of Koroglu epic remain at the Institute for Manuscripts of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan .

Modern literature in Azerbaijan is based on the Shirvani dialect mainly , while in Iran it is based on the Tabrizi one . The first newspaper in Azerbaijani , Akinchi was published in 1875 . In the mid @-@ 19th century , it was taught in the schools of Baku , Ganja , Shaki , Tbilisi , and Yerevan . Since 1845 , it has also been taught in the University of Saint Petersburg in Russia .

== = Folk art == =

Azerbaijanis have a rich and distinctive culture , a major part of which is decorative and applied art . This form of art is represented by a wide range of handicrafts , such as chasing , jeweler , engraving in metal , carving in wood , stone and bone , carpet @-@ making , lasing , pattern weaving and printing , knitting and embroidery . Each of these types of decorative art , evidence of the and endowments of the Azerbaijan nation , is very much in favor here . Many interesting facts pertaining to the development of arts and crafts in Azerbaijan were reported by numerous merchants , travelers and diplomats who had visited these places at different times .

The Azerbaijani carpet is a traditional handmade textile of various sizes , with dense texture and a pile or pile @-@ less surface , whose patterns are characteristic of Azerbaijan 's many carpet @-@ making regions . In November 2010 the Azerbaijani carpet was proclaimed a Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage by UNESCO .

Azerbaijan has been since the ancient times known as a center of a large variety of crafts . The archeological dig on the territory of Azerbaijan testifies to the well developed agriculture , stock raising , metal working , pottery , ceramics , and carpet @-@ weaving that date as far back as to the 2nd millennium BC . Archeological sites in Dashbulaq , Hasansu , Zayamchai , and Tovuzchai uncovered from the BTC pipeline have revealed early Iron Age artifacts .

Azerbaijani carpets can be categorized under several large groups and a multitude of subgroups . Scientific research of the Azerbaijani carpet is connected with the name of Latif Kerimov , a prominent scientist and artist . It was his classification that related the four large groups of carpets with the four geographical zones of Azerbaijan , Guba @-@ Shirvan , Ganja @-@ Kazakh , Karabakh and Tabriz .

= = = Cuisine = = =

The traditional cuisine is famous for an abundance of vegetables and greens used seasonally in the dishes . Fresh herbs , including mint , cilantro (coriander) , dill , basil , parsley , tarragon , leeks , chives , thyme , marjoram , green onion , and watercress , are very popular and often accompany main dishes on the table . Climatic diversity and fertility of the land are reflected in the national dishes , which are based on fish from the Caspian Sea , local meat (mainly mutton and beef) , and an abundance of seasonal vegetables and greens . Saffron @-@ rice plov is the flagship food in Azerbaijan and black tea is the national beverage . Azerbaijanis often use traditional armudu (pear @-@ shaped) glass as they have very strong tea culture . Popular traditional dishes include bozbash (lamb soup that exists in several regional varieties with the addition of different vegetables) , qutab (fried turnover with a filling of greens or minced meat) and dushbara (sort of dumplings of dough filled with ground meat and flavor) .

= = = Architecture = = =

Azerbaijani architecture typically combines elements of East and West . Many ancient architectural treasures such as the Maiden Tower and Palace of the Shirvanshahs in the Walled City of Baku survive in modern Azerbaijan . Entries submitted on the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list include the Ateshgah of Baku , Momine Khatun Mausoleum , Hirkan National Park , Binegadi National Park , Lökbatan Mud Volcano , Baku Stage Mountain , Caspian Shore Defensive Constructions , Shusha National Reserve , Ordubad National Reserve and the Palace of Shaki Khans .

Among other architectural treasures are Quadrangular Castle in Mardakan , Parigala in Yukhary Chardaglar , a number of bridges spanning the Aras River , and several mausoleums . In the 19th and early 20th centuries , little monumental architecture was created , but distinctive residences were built in Baku and elsewhere . Among the most recent architectural monuments , the Baku subways are noted for their lavish decor .

The task for modern Azerbaijani architecture is diverse application of modern aesthetics , the search for an architect 's own artistic style and inclusion of the existing historico @-@ cultural environment . Major projects such as Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center , Flame Towers , Baku Crystal Hall , Baku White City and SOCAR Tower have transformed the country 's skyline and promotes its contemporary identity .

= = = Visual art = = =

Azerbaijani art includes one of the oldest art objects in the world , which were discovered as Gamigaya Petroglyphs in the territory of Ordubad Rayon are dated back to the 1st to 4th centuries BC . About 1500 dislodged and carved rock paintings with images of deer , goats , bulls , dogs , snakes , birds , fantastic beings and also people , carriages and various symbols had been found out on basalt rocks . Norwegian ethnographer and adventurer Thor Heyerdahl was convinced that people from the area went to Scandinavia in about 100 AD and took their boat building skills with

them , and transmuted them into the Viking boats in Northern Europe .

Over the centuries , Azerbaijani art has gone through many stylistic changes . Azerbaijani painting is traditionally characterized by a warmth of colour and light , as exemplified in the works of Azim Azimzade and Bahruz Kangarli , and a preoccupation with religious figures and cultural motifs . Azerbaijani painting enjoyed preeminence in Caucasus for hundreds of years , from the Romanesque and Ottoman periods , and through the Soviet and Baroque periods , the latter two of which saw fruition in Azerbaijan . Other notable artists who fall within these periods include Sattar Bahlulzade , Togrul Narimanbekov , Tahir Salahov , Alakbar Rezaguliyev , Mirza Gadim Irvani , Mikayil Abdullayev and Boyukagha Mirzazade .

= = = Cinema = = =

The film industry in Azerbaijan dates back to 1898 . In fact , Azerbaijan was among the first countries involved in cinematography . Therefore , it 's not surprising that this apparatus soon showed up in Baku ? at the start of the 20th century , this bay town on the Caspian was producing more than 50 percent of the world 's supply of oil . Just like today , the oil industry attracted foreigners eager to invest and to work . In 1919 , during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic , a documentary The Celebration of the Anniversary of Azerbaijani Independence was filmed on Azerbaijan 's independence day , 28 May , and premiered in June 1919 at several theatres in Baku . After the Soviet power was established in 1920 , Nariman Narimanov , Chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan , signed a decree nationalizing Azerbaijan 's cinema . This also influenced the creation of Azerbaijani animation .

In 1991 , after Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union , the first Baku International Film Festival East @-@ West was held in Baku . In December 2000 , the former President of Azerbaijan , Heydar Aliyev , signed a decree proclaiming 2 August to be the professional holiday of filmmakers of Azerbaijan . Today Azerbaijani filmmakers are again dealing with issues similar to those faced by cinematographers prior to the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1920 . Once again , both choice of content and sponsorship of films are largely left up to the initiative of the filmmaker .

= = = Media and media freedom = = =

There are three state @-@ owned television channels : AzTV , Idman TV and Medeniyyet TV . One public channel and 6 private channels : ?ctimai Television , ANS TV , Space TV , Lider TV , Azad Azerbaijan TV , Xazar TV and Region TV .

Print and broadcast media in Azerbaijan are almost wholly under control of the ruling Aliyev family , eventually through friendly intermediaries . Ownership opacity is backed by law . Azerbaijan hosts 9 national TV stations (of which a public service broadcaster and 3 more state @-@ run channels) , over 12 regional TV stations , 25 radio channels , over 30 daily newspapers . Opposition media manages to work on the perpetual brink of survival .

= = = Human rights in Azerbaijan = = =

The Constitution of Azerbaijan claims to guarantee freedom of speech , but this is denied in practice . After several years of decline in press and media freedom , in 2014 the media environment in Azerbaijan deteriorated fast under a governmental campaign to silence any opposition and criticism , even while the country led the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (May ? November 2014) . Spurious legal charges and impunity in violence against journalists have remained the norm . All foreign broadcasts are banned in the country .

According to the 2013 Freedom House Freedom of the Press report , Azerbaijan 's press freedom status is " not free , " and Azerbaijan ranks 177th out of 196 countries .

BBC , Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty and Voice of America are banned in Azerbaijan .

During the last few years , three journalists were killed and several prosecuted in trials described as

unfair by international human rights organizations . Azerbaijan has the biggest number of journalists imprisoned in Europe and Central Asia in 2015 , according to the Committee to Protect Journalists , and is the 5th most censored country in the world , ahead of Iran and China .

A report by an Amnesty International researcher in October 2015 points to ' ... the severe deterioration of human rights in Azerbaijan over the past few years . Sadly Azerbaijan has been allowed to get away with unprecedented levels of repression and in the process almost wipe out its civil society ' . Amnesty 's 2015 / 16 annual report on the country stated ' ... persecution of political dissent continued . Human rights organizations remained unable to resume their work . At least 18 prisoners of conscience remained in detention at the end of the year . Reprisals against independent journalists and activists persisted both in the country and abroad , while their family members also faced harassment and arrests . International human rights monitors were barred and expelled from the country . Reports of torture and other ill @-@ treatment persisted.'

= = = Sports = = =

Sport in Azerbaijan has ancient roots , and even now , both traditional and modern sports are still practiced . Freestyle wrestling has been traditionally regarded as Azerbaijan 's national sport , in which Azerbaijan won up to fourteen medals , including four golds since joining the National Olympic Committee . Currently , the most popular sports include football and chess .

Football is the most popular sport in Azerbaijan , and the Association of Football Federations of Azerbaijan with 9 @,@ 122 registered players , is the largest sporting association in the country . The national football team of Azerbaijan demonstrates relatively low performance in the international arena compared to the nation football clubs . The most successful Azerbaijani football clubs are Neftchi Baku , Inter Baku , Qaraba? , and Khazar Lankaran . In 2012 , Neftchi Baku became the first Azerbaijani team to advance to the group stage of a European competition , beating APOEL of Cyprus 4 @-@ 2 on aggregate in the play @-@ off round of the 2012 @-@ 13 UEFA Europa League . In 2014 , Qaraba? became the second Azerbaijani club advancing to the group stage of UEFA Europa League . Futsal is another popular sport in Azerbaijan . The Azerbaijan national futsal team reached fourth place in the 2010 UEFA Futsal Championship , while domestic club Araz Naxçivan clinched bronze medals at the 2009 ? 10 UEFA Futsal Cup and 2013 ? 14 UEFA Futsal Cup . Azerbaijan is the main sponsor of Spanish football club Atlético de Madrid , a partnership that the club describes should ' promote the image of Azerbaijan in the world ' .

Azerbaijan is one of the traditional powerhouses of world chess , having hosted many international chess tournaments and competitions and became European Team Chess Championship winners in 2009 and 2013 . Notable chess players from country 's chess schools that made a great impact on the game in world , includes Teimour Radjabov , Shahriyar Mammadyarov , Vladimir Makogonov , Vugar Gashimov and former World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov . As of 2014 , country 's home of Shamkir Chess a category 22 event and one of the highest rated tournaments of all time . Backgammon also plays a major role in Azerbaijani culture . The game is very popular in Azerbaijan and is widely played among the local public . There are also different variations of backgammon developed and analyzed by Azerbaijani experts .

Azerbaijan is one of the leading volleyball countries in the world and its Azerbaijan Women 's Volleyball Super League is one of strongest women leagues in world . Its women 's national team came fourth at the 2005 European Championship . Over the last years , clubs like Rabita Baku and Azerrail Baku achieved great success at European cups . Azerbaijani volleyball players include likes of Valeriya Korotenko , Oksana Parkhomenko , Inessa Korkmaz , Natalya Mammadova and Alla Hasanova .

Azerbaijan has a Formula One race @-@ track and country hosted its first Formula One Grand Prix on 19 June 2016 .

Other well @-@ known Azerbaijani athletes are Namig Abdullayev , Toghrul Asgarov , Rovshan Bayramov , Sharif Sharifov , Mariya Stadnik and Farid Mansurov in wrestling , Elnur Mammadli , Elkhan Mammadov and Nazim Huseynov in judo , Rafael Aghayev in karate , Magomedrasul Majidov and Aghasi Mammadov in boxing , Nizami Pashayev in Olympic weightlifting , Azad

Asgarov in pankration , Eduard Mammadov in kickboxing , and K @-@ 1 fighter Zabit Samedov .

Azerbaijan hosted several major sport competitions in last decade , including the 2013 F1 Powerboat World Championship , 2012 FIFA U @-@ 17 Women 's World Cup , 2011 AIBA World Boxing Championships , 2010 European Wrestling Championships , 2009 Rhythmic Gymnastics European Championships , 2014 European Taekwondo Championships . On 8 December 2012 , Baku was selected to host the 2015 European Games , the first to be held in competition 's history . The most important annual sporting events held in the country are Baku Cup and Tour d 'Azerbaïdjan cycling race .