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# POST-SOVIET DIASPORA- BUILDING PROCESSES AND THE TRANSNATIONALIZATION OF THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

## Abstract

In the last two decades ethnic Azeris living in USA, EU and CIS countries started to organize into a united ethno-national diaspora, with political, ideological and also financial support from the political leadership of the Azerbaijani Republic. A major component of the process of construction of diaspora was the creation by ethnic activists of a large number of diaspora organizations. The Azerbaijani political regime pursues various goals in its aspiration to influence the activity of diaspora organizations and networks. Special place in the policy is given to the holding of collective events on the occasion of various memorable dates and symbolic practices of interstate monument swaps.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Transnationalism, Commemoration.

## Introduction: State Diaspora-Building and Commemorations

In the 1990s, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ethnic Azeris living in France, England, Germany, Russia or any other EU and CIS countries and USA started to organize into a united ethno-national community – a diaspora – with political, ideological and also financial support from the political leadership of the Azerbaijani Republic (i.e., nation state, which, according to Rogers Brubaker, “becomes an external national ‘homeland’” for the all ethnic Azeris, living outside it). A major component of the process of construction of diaspora was the creation by ethnic activists in emigration of a large number of diaspora organizations.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of this policy outside the “historical motherland” special importance is attached to “Azeri diasporas” in those countries which, in the opinion of the authorities in Azerbaijan, play a leading role in the world political arena. For instance, among the EU countries, special significance is attached to Germany and France where currently by official statistics living hundreds of thousands of ethnic Azeris. In addition, in the case with Germany and France, special hopes are pinned on the establishment of close contact with Turkish diaspora too.

The Azerbaijani political regime pursues various goals in its aspiration to influence the activity of diaspora organizations and networks. For example, the regime is trying to use the diaspora as a tool for a wide promotion of the Azerbaijani version of reasons for and results of the Karabakh conflict (1988-1994). Thus, for example, ethnic activists and diaspora organizations in Germany mobilize to inform as widely as possible about ethnic cleansing carried out against Azerbaijani civilians in the course of the conflict. Various collective events are held to this end – rallies, pickets, forums, etc.

Influence is also exerted on diaspora organizations with the aim of getting them actively involved in the movement against recognition by governments of different countries of the events of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Ottoman Empire as Armenian genocide. In this context, Azeris diaspora activity in France, country where located one of the biggest and famous Armenian community, becomes very important for both, Azerbaijanis authorities and ethnic activists in emigration. Here of importance is also the support for the official position of the Turkish authorities, who are Azerbaijan’s key political and military ally. With the aim of holding all these events (and various others), the Azerbaijani authorities provide direct (including financial) support to ethnic organizations of Azeris in France, Germany and many others EU countries.

Special place in the diaspora policy is given to the holding of collective events on the occasion of various memorable dates. These events are described in the context of the diaspora discourse as facts that confirm the invariable unity of the large community of Azeris of the world. It should be stressed that collective events in the “diaspora” that are of interest to the Azerbaijani regime, are also held, in addition to marking events of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation, on the occasion of symbolic dates of the establishment of independent Azerbaijan, and are also connected with the propagation of the activities of the former president (and the father of the incumbent), Heydar Aliyev.

The conflict over control of the Karabakh region (1988-94) resulted to the Azerbaijani-Armenian confrontation becoming retrospectively translated onto many events that had occurred much longer before it. These include the events of March 1918 in Baku, when pogroms took place in Muslim neighbourhoods in the city as a result of a political confrontation between Bolsheviks, who had attracted to their side troops controlled by Armenian nationalists (Dashnaks), and Musavatists (Turkic nationalists). As a result, about 10,000 people were killed. This event has been referred to in the post-Soviet period. After Heydar Aliyev's decree of 1996, the events of March 1918 started to be interpreted as genocide. Currently the authorities call on ethnic activists to hold collective events on 31 March. The idea of this genocide of Azeris also becomes some kind of a counter-theory against the Armenian genocide in Anatolia in 1915-18. The Azerbaijani authorities actively lobby the idea of the need to back the Turkish authorities and Turkish diaspora organizations that deny the genocide.

Among other events, the events of 20 January 1990, when, according to official reports, up to 132 people were killed when Soviet troops were deployed to Baku which the USSR authorities were practically not in control of (after 13 January when in the city started Armenians pogroms), have acquired the greatest significance.

Ethnic activists and organizations of Azeris in USA, EU and CIS countries are increasingly intensively joining this activity. More and more often various holidays that have received the status of national ones (the Independence Day, Day of Solidarity of Azeris of the World, etc.) in the post-Soviet Azerbaijan are held in emigration. Including holidays dedicated to the former president Heydar Aliyev (his birthday and death day, different anniversaries, etc.). After 2003, when president of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliev passed away collective events (concerts, conferences, rallies, etc) linked with events of the policy to commemorate the activities of the previous president – Heydar Aliyev – gain an ever-increasing significance. After his death in 2003, he, largely similarly to Atatürk, becomes in the context of the official discourse the symbolic “national leader” (ideal politician and ethnic Azeri) for the entire nation. Therefore, not only anniversaries but even simply the days he was born and died, etc, and dates linked to his rule (“Day of Salvation of the Nation”, etc) are hailed to be marked within the diaspora.

Conditions are created for the holding of various lectures, discussions, conferences, etc., with the participation of emissaries from the political

homeland, and increasingly more actively various kinds of literature are disseminated (for example, history textbooks designed in post-Soviet Azerbaijan for secondary schools and universities gain particular importance).

And here it is important to underline that nearly two decades that have passed since the collapse of the Soviet political bloc allow a researcher to think about the tendency of symbols of the socialist past being superseded from urban space. In addition, a researcher can also talk about the meanings and practices of the post-Soviet policy of commemorations. In my view, the specific features of this tendency do not always constitute only rethinking of the national past or the fact that Soviet symbols and monuments are replaced with national and counter-Soviet symbols. The current policy of commemorations (monuments, street names) reflects, among other things, the specific features of post-Soviet political relations among the states that used to be part of the Soviet bloc.

Thus, exchange of national brands becomes a habitual practice of “policy of reciprocal curtsies”. The political and economic friendship is accompanied by a cultural policy of reciprocal exchange of monuments which fill the public space in the capitals of Eastern European states. However, these kinds of practices of reciprocal exchange of monuments as symbols of “eternal friendship” and cultural and historical closeness of various national communities are neither a Soviet or post-Soviet invention. At the moment one can rather observe the process of re-actualization of these practices.

Within the context of this “policy of reciprocal curtsy” various debates are held from “we are historically and culturally closely connected” to “invasion by monuments” and “we do not need such friends!”. I think that this policy becomes especially topical in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when in Kiev and Sankt Petersburg, for example, monuments are erected to an Azerbaijani national brand – poet Nizami, or in Kiev to a Georgian one – poet Shota Rustaveli, and streets bearing the same names appear, etc. Correspondingly, Pushkins and Taras Shevchenkos made of stone and bronze appear in Baku and Tbilisi.

And here one should understand that this policy is being implemented in a different situation from the Soviet times. The former hierarchy of the status of the capital cities of socialist states has considerably changed. From Baku’s perspective, Moscow – the capital of now “not our” motherland – can still be perceived as a city enjoying a special status. However, Kiev, Chisinau or Tbilisi are now also independent political and cultural capitals

whose status has become much higher. Besides, the status of a city is also determined by the activity of ethno-national “diasporas” which emerged as a result of Soviet and post-Soviet migrations, the collapse of the USSR and the entire Soviet bloc and the fast diasporization of urban population. Ethnic communities become increasingly active actors that independently initiate or actively support the intervention of monuments into the space of the recipient cities.

This intervention in the case with, for example, the Azerbaijani diaspora, is quite often some kind of *deja vu* from the Soviet past. In the post-Soviet situation, Heydar Aliyev, formerly a KGB general, the secretary-general of the Azerbaijani Communist Party etc, came to be not only president but also the founder of a dynasty which is still in power, and after he passed away he was transformed into national leader too. As a result, a new national brand has come into being in post-Soviet Azerbaijan. This brand contains a very significant Soviet background. However, this does not prevent ideal images of Heydar Aliyev as the national leader of all Azerbaijanis from being currently exported into the space of the capitals of neighbouring countries. These countries may claim the role of forwards of democratic changes or even be members of the EU. However, this does not interfere with their active participation in the policy aimed at idealizing the memory of the authoritarian ruler, a known Soviet political figure in the past.

As a result of this policy, monuments of Heydar Aliyev are appearing in many cities of Eastern Europe (Moscow, Kiev, Chisinau, Bucharest, etc). These monuments, around which various events take place, may also become symbols of the ambiguity of the process of democratization. Presidents who declare themselves democrats are the sponsors of and personally welcome the appearance in many countries of such symbols of post-Soviet “friendship of peoples”. At the same time, radical nationalists, who are a typical element of many post-Soviet cities – are quite often the only group that protests against those monuments appearing.

### **Diaspora as a Political Project**

Prior to embarking on this analysis, it should be noted that the most widespread criteria for defining the phenomenon of the (ethno-national) diaspora do not appear relevant when describing the social networks and ethnic organizations of Azerbaijanis in emigration. Thus, one of the

best-known researchers into diaspora communities, William Safran (1991: 83-84) in identifying six major features that define a diaspora, pays great attention to the concept of the homeland.<sup>2</sup>

Robin Cohen expands the list of criteria which define a diaspora to nine. Among these he includes movement away from the homeland in search of work, in view of commercial interests or with colonial ambitions; a strong ethnic group consciousness; etc. (Cohen 2008: 17). Based on these criteria, he puts forward his own typology of diaspora communities. In his opinion, it is possible to talk of the existence of victim, labour, imperial, trade and deterritorialized diasporas. However, Cohen himself emphasizes that, in this instance, he is, in the spirit of Weber, indicating ideal types of diaspora communities (*Ibid.*: 16). Cohen's cautious stipulation is undoubtedly important in the case under consideration here. If just the first type is excluded: the victim diaspora (*Ibid.*: 17), which Cohen labels as the classical type (*Ibid.*: 2), then many traits shared by the other four types and by the post-Soviet Azerbaijani diaspora can be found, as well as contrasts between them. For example, when dealing with Azerbaijani migration, there is value in talking of a possible nature which is determined within the contexts of both colonial and postcolonial (post-imperial) worlds.<sup>3</sup> This will be discussed in more detail below. At this point, it should be noted that the territory on which Azerbaijani Turks made their primary compact settlement was located at the point where two empires met: the Persian empire (and, later, its direct descendant the Islamic Republic of Iran) and the Russian/Soviet empire. The migration into which Azerbaijani Turks were drawn in the twentieth century was undoubtedly determined both by their location in the composition of these empires and by the absence of an independent nation-state.

However, even if this article leaves to one side the justifiable mistrust aroused by an excessively elastic interpretation of the term diaspora,<sup>4</sup> it is nevertheless useful to approach the very possibility of applying the term to Azerbaijanis in emigration with great scepticism. At this point it is worth remembering yet another famous definition, offered by Gabriel Sheffer. Instead of criteria for describing diaspora communities or defining their types, he suggested his own version of the term:

An ethno-national diaspora is a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries. Members of such

entities maintain regular or occasional contacts with what they regard as their homelands and with individuals and groups of the same background residing in other host countries, etc. (Sheffer 2003: 9-10).

The concept of homeland in this definition is of somewhat less importance. The more important features of this definition are the shared sense of ethno-national identity and also Sheffer's addition (albeit cautiously accentuated) of the preservation of group solidarity, i.e. in this case the diaspora is understood as a real, united group which, once formed, subsequently stays to a greater or lesser degree unchanged. This is an approach which Valerii Tishkov has rightly criticized:

The main weakness in the interpretations in contemporary literature of the historical phenomenon of the diaspora lies in an essentialist reification of the diaspora as collective bodies ('stable populations'); moreover, not only as statistical sets but also as culturally homogenous groups, which is almost impossible to sustain in a more sensitive analysis (Tishkov 2003: 440).

Putting to one side the question of how it might be possible to measure degrees of group solidarity, in the definitions set forth so far there are no perceptible attempts to describe the diaspora phenomenon as a process; a process during which there may be rises and falls in the political, cultural and/or other activities of ethnic entrepreneurs in emigration. Or there may be varying degrees of intensity in implementing a policy of diaspora building that is supported or even directly sponsored by the country of origin (assuming any such policy exists). This was what happened when many Azerbaijani emigrés began to take an interest in the political situation in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, for example, which interest rapidly declined towards the end of that decade and the start of the next. Or what happened in the case of the gradual rise in interest in the process of diaspora building within the political regime which took power in 1993 in Azerbaijan, which then adopted an energetic and determined state policy at the start of the new millennium.

And still, despite such a wide interpretation of the term, there is value in talking of a "new" Azerbaijani diaspora.<sup>5</sup> According to Valerii Tishkov, who is very often sceptically inclined towards the relevance of the term diaspora in describing new emigrant communities:

It is, of course, difficult to call the one million Azerbaijanis or the 500 thousand Georgians who circulate between Russia and Azerbaijan, or between Russia and Georgia (I do not include the long-standing populations of Azerbaijanis and Georgians in Russia) a diaspora; there is, however, indisputably a certain flavour of the diaspora in their culture and social practice, especially among those who have been residing in Russia for some considerable time. [...] this is a diaspora very new in its nature, which, perhaps, deserves a new name (Tishkov, *Ibid*: 464).

It should be emphasized that even if many of the criteria suggested by Safran, Cohen and Sheffer can indeed be applied to describe the social networks and structures of the ethnic organizations created by Azerbaijanis in emigration, none of these definitions are capable of assisting in explaining the diaspora building policy being pursued by the political regime in Azerbaijan. But it is specifically the content of this policy, along with the practices incorporated within it, that to a significant extent determines the exact nature of the social, political and cultural phenomenon that the authorities in Azerbaijan themselves label as the "Azerbaijani diaspora".

This article will attempt to argue the case that the main distinguishing feature of the Azerbaijani diaspora is the attitude of the Azerbaijani ruling regime towards its existence. To be precise, that it is the regime which in fact is creating the diaspora. In turn, the attitude of the majority of ethnic activists in emigration should be described as varying degrees of expectation aimed at the regime which rules the political homeland of all Azerbaijani Turks. These relationships between the state and the emigrés makes it possible to talk of a post-Soviet bureaucratic diaspora.

Key factors in the relatively rapid appearance of this diaspora were determined by the fact that the territory of present-day Azerbaijan was part of the Russian Empire and the USSR. Both of these empires regarded what is now Azerbaijan as their Orient.<sup>6</sup> With varying degrees of intensity, they sought to modernize it (which was understood to mean making it more European), sponsoring a process of constructing a "European" (i.e. in the context of imperial discourse, a "modern") national elite (Altstadt 1992: 50-73; Swietochowski 1985: 23-36; Baberowski 2003: 316-348).

The representatives of this new European elite in the Russian imperial era received their education in Petersburg and Moscow, or in Paris and Berlin. Later on, of course, in Soviet times, to a large extent they did so only in Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and other Soviet cities. Frequently (and

especially in the USSR years), once they had completed their studies, they ceased to return to the republic at all. Another route for emigration from the republic was offered by the development of the oil extraction industry in Siberia in the second half of the twentieth century: many Azerbaijani oil workers, both novice and experienced, departed in this direction.

These were just the two most important exit routes from the republic. In reality, many Soviet institutions (for example, the army, or the appearance of an informal economy in the 'era of stagnation') provided the first steps up and out of the Azerbaijani Soviet republic. In this way, as the result of a long-standing and deliberate policy, many ethnic Azerbaijanis were to be found outside Azerbaijan by the time of the Union's collapse.

But of yet more importance is the fact that, by the time the USSR collapsed, Azerbaijanis had had what Rogers Brubaker terms a 'quasi-nation-state' (Brubaker 2000: 41-42) for over seventy years – the Azerbaijani Soviet republic, which very soon began to lay claim to the title of political homeland for all the world's Azerbaijanis.

Of course, active political emigration by Azerbaijani Turks<sup>7</sup> in the twentieth century occurred for a whole host of other reasons as well. But these reasons were likewise determined by the nature of imperial influence on the region. During the period when Soviet power was being established in Azerbaijan (April 1920), many members of the anti-Bolshevik section of the elite were forced to leave the country. Prior to the Second World War, emigré organizations were active in a number of European countries (France, Poland, and certain others) and also in Turkey. Political parties had in some sense survived, and these united many emigrés, particularly the party *Musavat* (Equality).

During the Second World War, the ranks of the emigrés who had fled Sovietization were swollen by prisoners-of-war: Azerbaijani Turks who had collaborated with the Nazis and had served in the foreign legions of the SS. A few of these emigrés lived to see the collapse of the USSR. However, by this stage, the emigré organizations and, still more, the political parties in emigration had long since ceased to exist. In practice, they did not outlive their founding fathers. The potential interest of a few descendants of political emigrés in events in Soviet Azerbaijan did not provide sufficient stimulus for the preservation or formation of any sort of new diasporic structures,<sup>8</sup> as had been the case, for example, with the second or third generations of Russian or Georgian emigrés who were living abroad for the same reasons of enforced flight from the Bolsheviks.

The reasons why the first wave of Azerbaijani political emigrés were unable to found a long-lived diaspora community require further examination and research. Although even at this stage it is possible to cite the relatively low numbers of emigrés in the first wave as one such reason. Another reason is the fear and unwillingness of the majority of former Nazi foreign legionaries to engage in any form of active public life, considering that fascism had lost the war and deportation to the USSR might be awaiting many of their number. Finally, belief in the durability of the Soviet regime played no small role. However, it is more important to emphasize that, precisely as a result of this absence of any diaspora community prior to the collapse of the USSR and the appearance of the independent Azerbaijani republic in 1991, it is necessary to talk in terms of a “post-Soviet diaspora”.<sup>9</sup> Although this is only one of the reasons. Another, still more important reason for this label should be sought in the nature of the ruling regime in Azerbaijan. But this will be discussed later.

Here, it should be underlined that, in view of everything mentioned so far, when studying the phenomenon of the Azerbaijani post-Soviet bureaucratic diaspora it seems most constructive to proceed from the perspective offered by Rogers Brubaker:

Rather than speak of ‘a diaspora’ or ‘the diaspora’ as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on (Brubaker 2005: 13).

Proceeding from this position, this article takes the diaspora to be first and foremost the result of a political project. The results of this diaspora building project should be analysed from the perspective of the practices and styles of its implementation, which shape the present condition of the Azerbaijani diaspora.<sup>10</sup> The diaspora itself – and this idea is lodged at the heart of the construction project – is represented as a community that unites all the ethnic Azerbaijanis who live outside the historical homeland. This article’s central research question can be formulated thus: how, through which practices, does the political regime in Azerbaijan create this imagined vision of a united and populous diaspora? Furthermore, the practices and styles of the construction of this community owe much in terms of their design to the biographies of the people who began and are implementing the project. These practices and styles lend a further specific – bureaucratic – nature to the Azerbaijani diaspora.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the most important factor driving the interest of the Azerbaijani political regime in its policy of diaspora building is the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. As often happens, the conflict led to the mobilization of many Azerbaijanis who had emigrated from what by this stage was already formerly Soviet Azerbaijan<sup>11</sup> and were living in Russia, Germany or the USA at the time of the USSR's collapse (Demmers 2005: 11-12). In the early 1990s<sup>12</sup> the regime that had established itself in the political homeland was already trying, with ever-increasing levels of intensity, to take advantage of this activity that had arisen spontaneously, thus supporting the thesis that "the formation of diaspora is therefore an issue of social mobilization" (Sökefeld 2006: 268). Throughout the 1990s, the Azerbaijani political regime was acutely in need of international platforms and foreign actors in order to represent the Azerbaijani version of the conflict in EU countries, the USA and Russia.

The regime had particular hopes of the emigrés, and this was no coincidence. It had by now become commonly accepted that the existence of a large and influential Armenian diaspora had been of substantial help to the political regime established in post-Soviet Armenia in its victory in the information war that had unfolded in parallel with the military conflict. It seemed vital to create a diaspora 'of one's own' in order to overcome the adversary. If this perspective is adopted, it is necessary to acknowledge that the researchers who maintained that "diaspora politics may be more a result of conflict than its cause" were right (King & Melvin 1999-2000: 137). It was through these politics that the Azerbaijani diaspora was created in the first decade of the new century, from when its record of successful opposition to the Armenian diaspora can be measured.

However, this incentive to intensify the diaspora building process was constantly being supplemented with others. Thus the widest possible publicity for the history, culture and economic achievements of Azerbaijan soon became publicity for the governing regime as well. Discourse about the need to strengthen the position of post-Soviet Azerbaijan in the international community ("They know us better and better") is likewise inextricable from the constant striving to reinforce the position of the ruling regime. In this context, the diaspora's real success on international platforms is not as important as the demonstration to Azerbaijani citizens of the achievements of the diaspora building policy, or, put another way, of the successful policy of gathering Azerbaijanis scattered throughout the world into a single and united transnational community.

The politico-patriotic myth of the existence of such global unity is a major component of official ideology, which tells of the long, tragic, yet at the same time heroic struggle of the Azerbaijani people for independence. Like a fairy-tale with a happy ending, the result of this centuries-long struggle has been the appearance on the world map of an independent nation-state. The creator of this national happiness is held to be the, now late, former president, Heidar Aliev. Thanks specifically to his genius, if the official ideology is to be believed, the people were able to acquire (or restore) their independent nation-statehood.

Accordingly, this same Heidar Aliev became the main hero, the face of the global unity of the entire Azerbaijani people (the diaspora and the political homeland), their National Leader.<sup>13</sup> According to the official chronicle, at the most difficult moment in the twilight of the USSR's existence, it was none other than:

Heidar Aliev [who] raised all the world's Azerbaijanis to their feet, embodying and declaring the political will of the people. This declaration gave impetus to the organization of the world's Azerbaijanis as a nation, and united our compatriots around a single politician, a national leader capable of bearing the historic responsibility of the people's fate.<sup>14</sup>

The transnational unity within the community and the success of the diaspora building policy are gauged by the growing number of organizations, and also by their amalgamation into a single hierarchy. In this way, on the basis of everything so far discussed, it should be emphasized that the "political homeland" is the key factor in the existence of a post-Soviet Azerbaijani diaspora.

### **The "Political Homeland" as the Key Criterion in Describing a Diaspora**

The modern Azerbaijani republic is not the country of origin (homeland) for all emigrés. For Azerbaijanis, several countries, as opposed to just one, are the homelands from which emigration occurred. Apart from post-Soviet Azerbaijan, in fact, there are also Iran, Turkey and Georgia, where many groups of ethnic Azerbaijanis live in close proximity (Swietochowski 1995; Shaffer 2002; Nodia 2003: 59-93). This means that any attempt to describe the Azerbaijani diaspora from a perspective that demands

the presence of what Tishkov describes as a “conditional category” – the homeland – acquires additional difficulty.

The criteria of belief in the inevitable return to the homeland and of the sense of a tie to it are not relevant, considering that there is not one such homeland, but several. Of course, Azerbaijani nationalists construe their imagined homeland to be a unified “historical Azerbaijan”, which includes a part of modern Georgia and some of north-western Iran within its borders.<sup>15</sup> But even in the minds of nationalist emigrés this imaginary unified ‘historical homeland’ inevitably breaks up into unequal parts, i.e. this myth of a unified “historical homeland” does not threaten the existence of borders between Iranian, Turkish, Georgian and former Soviet Azerbaijanis.

And now, after two decades of diaspora building, Iranian Azerbaijani activists in nationalist parties and other kinds of association are more concerned with events in Iran than in Azerbaijan. They proclaim their main aim to be the drive for cultural autonomy or for an exit from the composition of Iran (which is typical of the radicals’ position). For Turkish Azerbaijanis, any kind of separatist ideas do not seem relevant in principle: the homeland for them is modern Turkey. Russian-speaking (or not) Azerbaijanis who grew up in Soviet Azerbaijan, of course, may be tempted by the idea of a big “historical homeland”, but the options for return or for “loyalty” are always linked to post-Soviet Azerbaijan.

The majority of Iranian, Turkish and Georgian Azerbaijanis do not perceive the post-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan to be a single homeland for all. However, at the same time, this circumstance does not prevent the majority of ethnic entrepreneurs in emigration from seeing modern Azerbaijan as their ‘political homeland,’ i.e. they take the political regime ruling Azerbaijan to be the single wielder of what Bourdieu termed the symbolic capital of recognized authority, and the sole sponsor, inspiration and manager of the diaspora building project. Moreover, any group form of cross-border Azerbaijani solidarity only exists in the context of the authorities’ diaspora discourse. Not that this prevents the ethnic entrepreneurs from either competing to receive support from the political homeland or from participating in joint actions and sundry other events organized under the patronage of, and with financial support from, the authorities in the political homeland.

Summarizing it should be said, that: *with such an approach, the project for constructing a diaspora should be studied primarily as a*

*process of bureaucratic and discursive homogenization of networks and organizations which ethnic Azeris in emigration participate in and create, also considering the fact that diaspora organizations and networks are created with the active ideological, political and financial support from the ruling regime in the Azerbaijani Republic.*

## **Bureaucratization of Social Networks**

Fast bureaucratization of social networks in USA, EU and CIS countries takes places in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and its goal is to construct a single vertical organizational structure of the diaspora. Officials from Azerbaijan's increasingly more active "State Committee for Work with the Azeri diaspora" seek in this way to control the process of construction of the diaspora. Ethnic activists in emigration, however, hope for funding from the Azerbaijani authorities, creation of transnational business networks or any other support from Azerbaijan. To this end, more and more new diaspora organizational structures "including transnational ethnic and hometown associations" (Henry, et al., 2004: 841) are produced within the context of actualization of contacts with political homeland. With an ever increasing intensiveness, during almost all post-Soviet years ethnic activists have been making attempts, as Benedict Andersen put it, with the support of the state machine of the country of origin, to construct an ethno-national Azeri diaspora in USA, EU and CIS countries, as "collective subjectivity" (Anderson 1998b: 44-45). Given this implementation of the project of diaspora construction, ethnic Azeris who temporarily or constantly live in emigration are increasingly often referred to as "a homogenous group" (Brubaker 2002: 163-167) – the "Azerbaijani diaspora in Germany" (or in France, Romania, Russia, etc.).

At the same time, it is diaspora organizations that act in USA, EU and CIS countries as the main partners of the Azerbaijani authorities. One of the main centers of diasporic activity – this is Germany. "The Congress of Azeris of Europe" (CAE) (president N. Agamirov) was established in Berlin in April 2004. This is an organizational structure which aims to unite all ethnic Azeris living in EU countries. The Coordination Centre of Azeris of FRG was set up under the CAE, permanently operating in Cologne. In addition, Cologne is the city where annual meetings of the World Azerbaijanis' Congress (WAC) are held. The latest ones of them were held in Cologne in July 2007 and in June 2008. Besides, the increasingly

more active embassy of Azerbaijan in Germany (Berlin, Ambassador P. Sahbazov) is acting as a coordination centre providing for cooperation between diaspora organizations in Germany and the authorities of the political motherland.

*This bureaucratic structure should be understood not as a static one but in the process of its construction and homogenization, i.e. construction of a single co-subordinated system of the diaspora with as many arms as possible. Focusing on the bureaucratic structure of the diaspora will also make it possible to study the aspects and practice of the selection of symbolic dates (mourning, holidays, etc) and holding of collective events.*

### **Discursive Homogenization as a Practice of Constructing a Diaspora**

The diasporic discourse is produced by both the authorities in Azerbaijan (political homeland) and ethnic activists in USA, EU and CIS countries. It is in a discursive manner (tests of articles and books, Azerbaijani president's addresses to the diaspora, various speeches, reports at forums and congresses, numerous interviews to the media, etc) that the Azerbaijani diaspora in USA, EU and CIS countries is endowed with features of a joint and homogenous ethno-national community.

Within the space of the diasporic discourse, for example, statistics on the number of Azeris in Germany (or any other country) gains special significance. Thus, according to estimates by ethnic activists, there is a total of about 100,000 Azeris in Germany, of whom about 20,000 live in Berlin. However, there is no precise statistics on the number of Azeris in Germany (like in any other country).

Within the context of the political project of constructing the diaspora, its significance and influence<sup>16</sup> in the host country are directly linked to the number of members of the diaspora. This is one of the reasons of the disposition for a maximum possible increase in the number of statistical members of the community and inclusion of Turkish and Iranian Azeris into the composition of the diaspora.

Another reason is official Azerbaijani nationalism. One of its most important elements is an ethno-historical myth about the division of the formerly united Azerbaijani nation. Responsibility for this division is placed on the Russian and Persian empires. What is more, Azerbaijani

nationalism appeals to the idea of an invariably united, continuous (since ancient time to date), and culturally uniform (despite dividing state borders) ethno-nation. The certain success of the project for such unity could be linked to the fact that a language common to all ethnic Azeris (the various dialects in Iran, Turkey or Azerbaijan are no serious obstacle to free communication) is wide-spread and the fact that they have a common religion (an absolute majority of ethnic Azeris are said to be Shi'is. In addition, the possible success of such a national project has to do with the existence of an independent nation state (Azerbaijani Republic) whose authorities sponsor the spread of ideas of Azeri nationalism. However, within this context the project for diaspora construction contains certain contradictions. Thus, a policy of unification with the Turkish diaspora is declared, which, in the opinion of William Safran, can, with a certain degree of proximity, be described as an ideal type of diaspora.<sup>17</sup>

It is declared that unification of the Azeri diaspora with the large Turkish diaspora in EU countries and USA will considerably increase its significance. At the same time, the very idea of the feasibility of such unification is based on the proximity of the language (Turkish and Azeri) and the policy of nationalism in the countries of origin that contains the idea of "One nation – two states".<sup>18</sup> It is this element of the diaspora politics that can be especially topical for the community of Azeris in EU and USA. However, the project for an Azeri diaspora supposes, at the same time, the construction of borders between ethnic Azeris from Turkey (so-called Turkish Azeris) and actual Turks.

### **The Specific Features of the Post-Soviet Cultural Policy of Commemorations**

This active diasporic policy is bringing to the phenomenon of transnationalization (or diasporization) of the post-Soviet politics of commemorations. Here it should be mention that Azerbaijan was the outskirts of Asia and not Europe from the perspective of the geography of the Soviet Union. And now, in many publications in Russia, the South Caucasus region is still referred to as not Europe. However, from the political perspective of the European Union, the South Caucasus region is now the southeastern outskirts of Europe. The fact that it is within European borders is confirmed by membership of different European institutions. Thus, all the three republics in the region – Azerbaijan, Armenia and

Georgia – have now long been members of the Council of Europe. They participate in different programmes to get closer to the European Union, and so on. Although these are outskirts that are the most distant from Central Europe, they are still sort of southeastern European outskirts.

At the same time, although the South Caucasus region is located on the very edge of Europe, it has “long arms” which easily reach up to Kiev, Chisinau, Moscow or Sankt Petersburg, that is to say, to the political and cultural urban centers of the former Soviet Union, and they would not mind reaching out even farther. These long arms are reaching out not without a purpose. They reach out towards other cities with symbolic gifts, for example, monuments. And here, it is important to understand that this is not about monuments or symbols of any ideas – like, for example, the Statue of Liberty in New-York city. These are depictions, made of bronze and marble, of “national brands” that are symbolically significant only for one or another imaginary community. Mainly, these are, of course, monuments to poets, who are, as Eric Hobsbawm said, “literary and not existential” (1990, p. 57) idealized symbols of nations. In turn, Baku is also open for the installation of these kinds of “national brands” from other imaginary communities. That is to say, kind of a fourth “institution of power” (Anderson, 1998, p. 163). The power to fill the public space of the urban centers of one’s nation state with the monuments as symbols of political and economic alliances.

All this quite intensive swap of not only monuments but parks, street names and so on, I will call a “policy of reciprocal curtsies”. Rephrasing Pierre Bourdieu, I will mainly be talking about a policy of manifestation of signs of respect and curtsies which is implemented based on allied relations between some countries. It is from this perspective that I find it interesting to talk about the meanings and practices of the post-Soviet policy of commemorations. Paraphrasing John R. Gillis it is possible to say, that the commemorations “as national memory practices” in the post-Soviet space still did not become “more democratic” and “more impersonal” (1994: 11). I also think that the specific features of these tendencies do not always constitute only a rethinking of the national past or the fact that Soviet symbols and monuments are replaced with national and counter-Soviet symbols. This is not only the problem of “the potentially (though not inexorably) charged symbolic nature of public monuments – particularly statues of historical figures – as well as the potential that they offer for ‘historical populism’” (Burch & Smith 2007: 934). The post-Soviet

cultural policy of commemorations also reflects the specific features of current political, cultural and economical interstate relations.

This symbolic monument swap is certainly not a post-Soviet invention. Here, I could recall for example the old practice of monument swap between twin towns. However, in post-Soviet years, especially in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one can observe the process of these practices becoming topical again and new meanings being added to them. I cannot rule out, however, that the process of them becoming topical again is happening for the time being mainly in the former Soviet republics. In some cases such a policy of swaps is undoubtedly determined by the specific features of the political regime. This can be observed for example in the case with the political regime in Azerbaijan. But attempts are still being made, as I will actually try to demonstrate, to go beyond the borders of the former USSR. The meaning of these attempts to put monuments whenever an opportunity to do so arises is certainly not a symbolic demonstration of warm interstate relations and political or economic alliances. One of the meanings can also be a demonstration of independence that was achieved not so long ago. For example, a very noteworthy feature of public discourse in Azerbaijan is the idea that few people in the world at large know about this country and nation existing. In the course of this discourse the appearance of every new monument to an Azeri person is perceived as another important event leading out of the boundaries of being unknown.

As a rule, these monuments, parks, or streets appear in the capitals of states, in urban centers which occupy, as Paperny put it, a special location in the hierarchy of towns (Paperny 2007: 109-111). The political leadership, apart from everything else, seems to be also demonstrating its right to use the public space of their capitals at their own direction. As a result, monuments, parks or street names dedicated to culture figures or politicians that have nothing specific to do with the country or the history of the city may appear in Sankt Petersburg, Kiev, Chisinau or Tbilisi. Effectively, these are practices of commemoration of economic and political projects that an ordinary person might even fail to remember a couple of dozens of years later on.

However, in the post-Soviet situation a category of townsmen has taken shape, for whom a monument, a plaque or a park named after some figure may also become a place for periodical collective events. These are activists of ethno-national diasporas and diasporic organizations. Precisely the diaspora ethnic activists become increasingly more active actors who

independently initiate or actively support the intervention of monuments into the space of receiving cities. It is diasporas that are frequently mentioned as collective actors of the idea of erecting a monument or implement a larger cultural or political project. However, I think that in the case with monument swap between capitals, diaspora activists more often than not fulfill the role of crowd in an unveiling ceremony.

Such monuments appearing in the capital are rather projects backed by the political leadership of the two countries – the one that presents the gift and the other that receives it. The installation of these kinds of monuments are political projects representing political alliances. As for the participation of the diasporas, this is rather a curtsy by the political leadership of the receiving country towards this conditional category of citizens and one more occasion to underline the interstate proximity. However the foregoing applies rather to capitals. The appearance of monuments in provincial towns is probably to a large extent initiated and implemented by diaspora activists.

At the same time I find it necessary to talk about this “policy of reciprocal curtsies” also based on the context of symbols of the socialist past being ousted from the space of post-Soviet towns. This process of the Soviet being ousted is very unequivocal and within the context of policy of reciprocal curtsies, a feeling of *déjà vu*, a feeling of the return of the Soviet past, albeit somewhat modernized past, may also arise. Thus, this is also a situation within the context of which one can observe the entire ambiguity of democratization processes in the post-Soviet space.

## **Practices and Rituals of Interstate Monument Swaps**

I will now try to demonstrate all that I have said above using specific examples. In this article I will mainly be analyzing a case of such swaps which is being initiated and in which the Azerbaijan political regime is actively involved. Naturally, I am best familiar with this case but, in addition, I find it to be the most interesting and ambiguous one.

The late president of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev conducted a flexible foreign policy and strove to preserve good relations with all neighbors and political actors important for the region. However, the relations with Russia were quite complicated for a long time. Only during Putin’s presidency did interstate relations experience something like a renaissance. And I would risk asserting that this situation was largely determined by the background

of the two presidents. Both had previously served in the KGB. And as everyone knows, there can't be a former KGB officer. The two, especially Putin, had very warm feelings towards each other, which probably were even sincere. The political and economic results of these feelings were, for example, the visa-free regime between the two countries, which is important for Azerbaijan given the number of its emigrants in Russia and money flows from them to Azerbaijan. The uninterrupted operation of the Novorossiysk oil pipeline is important for both countries. There were no problems in the process of extension of the operation of the Russian radar station in Azerbaijan, which is more important for Russia, and there is a lot more.

The very first result of the symbolism of these warm feelings was a monument to the well-known Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin in Baku. It was installed on 12 October 2001 in a public garden on the crossing of streets named after Pushkin and Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hacıbəyov. As conceived by the authors of the project, this street crossing, already symbolized the proximity of Russian and Azerbaijani cultures. Besides the monument by sculptor Yuriy Orekhov was a present from Russia on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Azerbaijan's independence. In the case with Baku the sculptor did not make particular efforts to implement his creative ideas. For this reason the Baku Pushkin is effectively a spitting image of the bronze Pushkin made by the same Orekhov which is installed in Vienna.

A return present from Azerbaijan was a monument to poet Nizami. This is poet who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Ganca, now the second important and second largest city in the country. This gift was timed to coincide with the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sankt Petersburg. The selection of the city was not accidental I think. Besides the stereotypical idea about Petersburg in the spirit of "northern capital" or "cultural capital" of Russia, the idea that this is Putin's home town was of rather greater significance. Besides, a monument to Nizami had long been standing in Moscow since the Soviet times. The significance of the all improving relations was underlined by the presence of both presidents – Vladimir Putin and Heydar Aliyev – at the opening ceremony for the monument. This event happened on 9 June 2002. At the opening of the monument, Putin, wishing to please the guest, rephrased a phrase from Nizami's works – "a word said from the heart hits right in the heart". Putin was speaking in the spirit of "all that we are doing today comes from our heart and we want this to reach the hearts of the Azerbaijani people".

These kinds of official ceremonies and speeches on the occasion of monument swaps are designed to publicly represent the nature of interstate relations. Thus, a temporary warming in the relations between Russia and Ukraine was also accompanied by the opening in Petersburg of a monument to the chief and well-known Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko. This happened on 22 December 2000. Both presidents, Vladimir Putin and Leonid Kuchma, were present at the symbolic opening ceremony in order to give it special significance. Here, thing did not go without a symbolic undertone, which was not very profound but still was present. The public garden where the monument to Shevchenko was installed in Petersburg is located in a square which the Ukrainian diaspora suggested naming Slavyanskaya (Slavic).

However, the speeches during the ceremony were far from being as warm as those in the case with the Nizami monument. The presidents were far more reserved in their statements. For example, Putin called for that event not to be politicized and in this way he, on the contrary, underlined its political significance. The complicated relations are underlined in this case also by the background of the appearance of the Shevchenko monument in Petersburg. If we believe Anatoliy Sobchak, during his visit to Kiev in 1995, the Russian ambassador to that country told him about a monument to czar Aleksandr II. This monument outlived the USSR and was gathering dust in the yard of the city museum. Sobchak proposed giving the monument to Russia so that it was installed in Petersburg. In return he promised to install a monument to Shevchenko in the city centre. However, subsequently the Ukrainian side also demanded the handover of archive documents and also some items from the Ermitage. As a result, although Shevchenko did appear in Petersburg, Aleksandr II is still in Kiev, as far as I know.

The relations between Ukraine and Russia never improved afterwards and the monument in each other's capitals were later on unveiled by representatives of a different political alliance – incumbent Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. Especially warm relations were established between the two countries in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Symbolic monument swaps have, naturally, resulted from this alliance.

A monument to the chief Georgian poet Shota Rustaveli, who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century too, appeared in Kiev on 7 June 2007. Under a tradition taking shape, the monument was installed on the crossing of the streets named after the very same Shota Rustaveli and Ukraine's known playwright

and theatre director Panas Sagsaganskiy. Naturally, both presidents attended the ceremony. A Georgian choir which performed the anthems of Georgia and Ukraine without accompaniment added exoticness to this event. Already on 2 March 2007 a monument to Taras Shevchenko was installed in Tbilisi too.

In both cases the emotional speeches made by President Saakashvili expressed his accentuated respect to the Ukrainian nation. Here, the language in which he said those words was of greater importance than the words themselves. In Kiev Saakashvili was speaking in Ukrainian. In Tbilisi, also in Ukrainian, he read out without looking at any notes Shevchenko's poem "Zapovit". Here it is worth recalling that previously, Mikheil Saakashvili had lived in Ukraine for some time. Yushchenko failed to do the same in response. But his speeches on both occasions were more specific and reflected the meaning and goals of the political alliance of the two states. Besides the "deep friendly ties" and "the history that unites us", this alliance is reinforced by political prospects. In Yushchenko's words, both countries are "united by the future" which should manifest itself in a full membership of the EU and NATO. So, the meanings of a symbolic monument swap can be quite different sometimes. This can well be seen in the difference in speeches by Yushchenko at the opening ceremony for another monument to Taras Shevchenko in the summer of 2008, this time in Baku.

Azerbaijan is an important and necessary partner. It is Azerbaijan with whom great hopes are connected for diversification of delivery of energy resources from the post-Soviet areas. I should recall that for the time being the project for the only oil pipeline on the territory of the former Soviet Union bypassing Russia – the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline – has been implemented largely owing to the position of the Azerbaijani leadership. But this is not an undoubted partners with which one could jump into fire and water. Yushchenko said that the installation of the monument in Baku was a "great gesture of respect for Ukraine and Ukrainian-Azerbaijani relations". "This is a tribute to the values that make us closer to each other". But he did not call on Azerbaijan to go to Europe together with Ukraine. However, President Ilham Aliyev too refrained from reproducing the Ukrainian poet's poems. Though, he did mention that many of them had long been translated into Azeri.

## **Déjà vu or Returning of the Soviet Past**

Usually all this policy of monument swap pays no attention to the wishes of townsmen themselves. However, one could assert that, as a rule, townspeople themselves quite often do not show a noticeable interest in the installation of those monuments. At the same time, some events around the intervention of these monuments into the space of post-soviet capitals demonstrate not only the fact of appearance of ethnic diasporas but also growth of xenophobia. For example, paint has been poured on Nizami's monuments in both Petersburg and Kiev. The quick spread of monuments to the late Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev causes even more mixed reaction.

Here I should say a few words about this political figure. He was born in 1923 and already in 1944 he started his career in the then KGB. He made it to the title of major-general and for about two years – from 1967 to 1969 – he held the post of chairman of the KGB in Azerbaijan. Then, from 1969 to 1982 he was invariably led the republic as secretary of the central committee of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan. For his good work he was awarded the title of hero socialist labour in 1979. In 1982 he became the only Azerbaijani member of the Politburo of the central committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and up until 1987 he held the post of deputy chairman of the supreme council of the Soviet Union. This is one of the most prominent representatives of the top leadership of the Soviet Union. From 1993 he became the president of Azerbaijan and stayed in this post up until his death in 2003. During the years of his rule he managed to create an authoritarian political system of management of the country with some elements of totalitarianism. He managed to leave this system in legacy to his son Ilham Aliyev. Not counting Chechnya this is the only success story of creation of a ruling dynasty. In principle, back in his lifetime, some kind of a personality cult was established in the country which only strengthened after his death. Now not one single more or less large population centre or institution in Azerbaijan is without a monument of bust to Heydar Aliyev. This spread of clone monuments inevitably causes a feeling of déjà vu from the Soviet past.

When monuments to Heydar Aliyev were already installed across the republic, the turn of his wife Zarifa Aliyeva arrived. She was a doctor of sciences, quite a known ophthalmologist in the republic. However, it is clear that her monuments are being installed not because of her professional activity but because of her husband.

Finally it was after his death that Heydar Aliyev became the main exported national brand, noticeably pushing poet Nizami aside. The disposition for a wide spread of his monuments, parks named after him and branches of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation is now an example of going beyond the logic of “policy of reciprocal curtsies”. Certainly, doing something nice to an ally continues to make sense. Political and economic alliances are preserved too. However, the spread of countless pictures of the late president is already some kind of an end in itself too.

Here, one cannot but view a certain process of return of the Soviet in a somewhat modernized form. And here it is a very illustrative thing that the main monument in Baku contains a symbolic reproduction of the Soviet background of the former president. Attempts to install monuments to him and his wife in the capitals of different countries are opposed not by democrats and opponents of the return of the Soviet but radical nationalists, as was the case in Moscow, for example.

This situation demonstrates, I think, the whole ambiguity of the post-Soviet democratization. This is rather a process of imitation of democratic changes. Since this is an imitation, residents of the capital are effectively deprived of the right, and often of the will too, to influence the process of filling of public space of their towns with monuments. The ideology of this spread of monuments to Heydar Aliyev is presented by the country’s chief ideologist Ramiz Mehdiyev, in the following way: “An independent and self-sufficient Azerbaijan is a monument to Heydar Aliyev”. Nowadays these symbols of independence and self-sufficiency are appearing in increasing numbers and this process is gaining momentum. Monuments to the former KGB general, a prominent communist party bureaucrat and post-Soviet authoritarian president have already been installed in Kiev and Tbilisi.

That is to say, in republics “whose future lies in a full integration into the Europe Union”, as president Yushenko said. However, there is now a monument in one of the capitals of the European Union too – in Bucharest – and no major protests have been voiced against its installation.

## **Conclusion**

Summarizing the foregoing, one can draw the following conclusions. The official ideology of the policy monument swaps in the post-Soviet space is to spread as widely as possible symbols of the independence of

one or another state. These are no longer gifts from twin towns but symbols of economic and political alliances. Their significance is confirmed by participation in opening ceremonies by leaders of independent nation states. Besides, the significance is stressed also in the context of hierarchy of cities and urban space. As a rule, that is the centre in a country's main city, in the capital. Here it is important to remember that "the capital cities in Central and Eastern Europe played an essential role in national movements and in the creation of new political identities" (Kolbe 2007: 79). However, although monuments are placed in the centre of the capitals these are as a rule not spaces where townsmen love to go for a stroll. These are rather although central but little visited parks and public gardens. And in this sense monuments representing the national brands of other imaginary communities occupier rather a subordinate position in relation to own brands.

The rituals of installation of such monuments look like established ones. On the whole, the ritual of ceremonies, the meaning of speeches and must-visits by president have already been established. The ceremonies are often timed to coincide with some significant dates, for example, culture days. An addition to the monuments are always a park, a public garden and a street with an appropriate name. Monuments are to be created by ethnic specialists even if they are installed on the money of the city itself, like was the case with the Shevchenko monument in Sankt Petersburg. Besides, this process is also ethnicized owing to the active participation of diaspora activists in the ceremonies.

The aims and meanings of these swaps can quite strongly differ. However, this, in all cases, is a process of influence of political relations on the filling of the urban space with monuments. This is also always some kind of a symbolic curtsy too. Actually the depth to which back bends demonstrates the boundaries from "let's be friends" to "we are such close friends that we can't be any closer".

And so, as regards the political activities of Azerbaijani diasporic organizations, it is possible to talk in terms of, if not a commanding role, then certainly a regulating and co-ordinating role emanating from the political homeland. This co-ordination is not always managed directly through the embassies and the State Committee. In Germany, the Co-ordinating Centre for the Azerbaijani diaspora in Germany has existed for several years now; it was created by the Azerbaijani embassy in that country, and is financed from state sources. The Centre exists as a nominally independent organization. This means that the Azerbaijani

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Committee can officially distance themselves from the activities of emigré organizations. All the political actions organized—pickets, protests and the like—are represented as voluntary activity undertaken independently from the government in the political homeland.

The policy of memory and the ideology of post-Soviet nationalism (or ‘Azerbaijanism’) is also re-transmitted to the diaspora. Such events as the genocide of the Azerbaijanis, which is commemorated on 31 March each year in the diaspora, too, only appeared on the calendar in the post-Soviet period. Exactly the same applies to the holiday celebrated on 15 June as the “Azerbaijani People’s Day of National Salvation”, which is linked to the commemoration of Heidar Aliev. In fact these commemorative dates are observed in the diaspora as well, including those of its members who emigrated from Azerbaijan long before these dates appeared on the calendar. The first holiday to be officially accepted by Heidar Aliev – the ‘Day of World Azerbaijani Solidarity’ (31 December – has also taken root in the diaspora. These dates and holidays were introduced by the regime into the diaspora’s festive activity, which had previously only revolved around celebrating *Novruz Bairama* (the coming of Spring) or the Muslim-wide *Kurban Bairami* (Greater Eid).

These (and certain other) goals of diaspora building are subordinated to the most important – the fight in the diaspora to have the Nagorno Karabakh conflict resolved in favour of Azerbaijan. A variety of exhibitions, concerts, Azerbaijani cultural days, and also pickets and protests, are organized with the aim of realising these goals. As a rule, a small number of activists, businessmen and intellectuals take real part in these collective actions. Their ability to influence the expansion of EU and US citizens’ viewpoints appears doubtful. It is more likely to concern attempts to find new means of influencing the popularity of the regime in the country which it governs.

In Azerbaijan itself, the political regime, in the context of diaspora policy, has tried to encompass all Azerbaijanis. In a populist spirit, the regime also represents itself both as taking care of the problems and needs of all Azerbaijanis, and as a successful opponent of “World Armenianism”. The construction of the diaspora and a cross-border Azerbaijani unity has become the great triumph of Heidar Aliev, which everyone should remember. And in order that no-one in the country does forget about it, the media constantly report on news from the diaspora and on the successes of diaspora building.

## NOTES

- 1 For example, the following could be named among the ever growing number of organizations of Azeris in Germany: The "Meints - Azerbaijan" Society (chaired by B. Kemur), "Azeri House" (Berlin, chaired by T. Karayev); The Nizami Ganjavi Institute (Berlin, director N. Ateshi), "Friends of German-Azerbaijani culture" (Berlin, head I. Ibragim), the culture and education society Odlar Yurdu (Berlin, chaired by J. Jafarzade), etc. One of the organizations set up most lately is the "Union of Azeri students and scientific workers of the FRG" established in January 2009 (Berlin, chaired by S. Abbasov). Or, in France: Association "Azerbaijan House", (Paris); "Azerbaijanis – France Youth Association" (Paris); France – Azerbaijan Association "ARAZ" (Paris); Strasburg "Azerbaijan House" (Strasbourg); "Azeri – Turk Centre" (Strasbourg), etc.
- 2 Both the term 'diaspora' and the concept of 'homeland' have recently been subjected to serious revision. "In the older vocabulary, 'homeland' was commonly depicted as a sacred place filled with memories of past glory and bathed in visions of nobility and renaissance. Paradoxically, in the new discourse 'homelands' sometimes fade out of view entirely, or [...] they become nation-states that by definition repress minorities and place limits upon their cultural and other freedoms" (Weingrod, A., Levy, A., eds., 2005: 4-5).
- 3 Even if it is acknowledged that the concept of postcoloniality is poorly suited to describing the networks and communities created by Azerbaijanis in, for example, post-Soviet Russia, looking at the contrasts from this perspective allows them to be better understood. This means it allows the phenomenon of the post-Soviet Azerbaijani diaspora to be more accurately described (on post-colonial diasporas, see: Keown, M., Murphy, D., Procter, J., eds., 2009).
- 4 Rogers Brubaker argues, that "if everyone is Diasporic, then no one is distinctively so. The term loses its discriminating power – its ability to pick out phenomena, to make distinctions. The universalization of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora" (Brubaker 2005: 3).
- 5 In this context, 'new' seems to act as a counterpoint to 'old', 'classical' diasporas. As Alex Weingrod and Andre Levy put it, "today's new diasporas are considerably different. Depending upon the particular definition and usage, there are likely to be many more of them, and they are scattered about as a result of the global trends that shape the contemporary world. As we know these new diasporas have emerged from the world-wide movement of millions of persons, which in turn has been caused by global inequalities, modern information and production technologies, powerful multi-national corporations that frequently shift production across the world, as well as the more familiar 'old-fashioned' reasons of famine and war" (Weingrod & Levy 2005: 4).
- 6 The Tsarist empire and the Soviet authorities undoubtedly differed in their judgement of the importance of the Transcaucasian region to them. For Tsarist Russia, this importance had arisen in the context of its strategic location on

- the border with the competing Persian and, especially, Ottoman empires. Nor did the title of ‘Defenders of the Christian Faith’ play an insignificant role for the Russian Emperors, particularly as it was their protectorate over the Georgians and Armenians which bestowed this honorific upon them. The economic importance of the region only began to grow as the oil boom took off in the second half of the nineteenth century. For the Bolsheviks, in contrast, Azerbaijan had become ‘a stronghold of socialism in the East’, while its capital Baku was perceived as a city which showcased the achievements of the Soviet authorities to the whole of the Near East (Bretanitskii 1970: 117-118; Baberowski 2003: 217-394).
- 7 Discussions about what to call the nation began at the end of the nineteenth century and have continued, with the occasional pause, to the present day (Shnirelman 2001: 94-96). Taking the most common features, it can be stated that a proportion of nationalists (and particularly, to a greater or lesser degree, of radical pan-Turkists) consider the correct name to be Azerbaijani Turks [translator’s note: in Russian, this may be spelt *turk* or *tiurk*] (Azəri-Türklər). The official version, established during Heidar Aliev’s presidency, prefers the name accepted in the USSR from the end of the 1930s: Azerbaijanis (Azərbaycanlılar). In general, both in daily life and in academic studies, both names are used in parallel.
- 8 It is striking that Azerbaijani historians studying this first wave of emigration as a rule avoid the label diaspora, talking instead of political emigration (Balaev 2009: 207-277; Guliev 2011: 4-10). Meanwhile, specialists involved in the policy of diaspora building describe the history of this wave of emigration as one of the stages in the formation of the Azerbaijani diaspora, the roots of which are now being sought in the middle ages, if not even earlier (Rizvan 2002; Əliyev 2009: 14-46).
- 9 This article does not consider the organizations formed by Iranian Azerbaijanis in emigration. These few organizations had no links with Soviet Azerbaijan; they are, effectively, part of the Iranian diaspora. The only exception is emigrants who were representatives of the Democratic party. This party, which headed the nationalists seeking autonomy for Azerbaijanis in Iran, was created in line with a Soviet policy aimed at increasing Soviet influence in Iran during the Second World War, at a time when the USSR was counting on being involved in the extraction of Iranian oil. However, following the departure of Soviet forces from Iran, the party and the regional government founded by its activists soon ceased to exist. Incidentally, some of these Azerbaijanis who left Iran in 1946 continued work in emigré structures that were created and operated under the patronage of Soviet security services (for more on these events, see: (Hasanli 2006).
- 10 In a wider sense, this article shares the position that Weingrod and Levy set up in contrast to the approaches of Cohen, Safran and Tölölyan, who prefer to begin by a definition of diaspora or by a catalogue of its types. “In

- contrast, Clifford, Appadurai, Bhabha, Hall, and many others tend to use the term in a looser, more metaphoric sense and consequently they may discover 'diasporic features' among a wider range of migrating groups. For these scholars certain historical moments, social contexts, and political-cultural processes are more important than whether a specific community neatly fits the type." (Weingrod & Levy, *Ibid*: 7).
- 11 It should not be forgotten that this specifically concerns emigrés from the Republic of Azerbaijan. And now that many years of diaspora building have passed, ethnic activists frequently complain in interviews that the majority of Iranian Azerbaijanis lack any genuine interest in the problem of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, that they know nothing of the basic facts and events of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation, etc.
- 12 To be precise, from the moment when Heidar Aliev returned to power in 1993. More on this below.
- 13 This title of 'National Leader' was established while he was still in power. For example, among an array of official holidays. every June 15 since 1998 has been celebrated as 'Azerbaijani National Salvation Day.' This was the date of Heidar Aliev's return to power in 1993. Since 2000, while he was still alive, 'Flower Day' has been celebrated, the date coinciding with the President's birthday. Every year on December 12, the anniversary of the death of the 'Great Leader' is widely commemorated, although this date is not on the official list of days of mourning.
- 14 The Azerbaijani Diaspora [[http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/Society/Diaspora/diaspora\\_r.html](http://www.azerbaijan.az/portal/Society/Diaspora/diaspora_r.html)]
- 15 For a more detailed account, see: (Rumyantsev 2010: 415-461).
- 16 The Azerbaijani authorities officially declare a policy of creation of an "Azerbaijani lobby" in countries that are the world's leading political and economic centres. The main idea behind the creation of such a lobby is to exert influence on the policy of host countries with the aim of getting them to make decisions, on a variety of issues, that would suit the Azerbaijani political regime. From "confrontation to the Armenian lobby" to support for Azerbaijan in the sphere of its integration into the European space. See: Formirovanie Lobbi. Available at the official site of the "First Forum of World Azerbaijanis" (<http://www.diaspora.az/qurultay/d-ru.htm>).
- 17 Safran singles out six main characteristics of such diasporas: dispersion from the original "centre", to at least two "periferical" places; presence of memory or a myth about homeland; the belief that members of diaspora will not be completely accepted by the new country; ideas about homeland as a place of inevitable return; commitment to support or restore homeland; presence of group solidarity and feeling of connection to homeland (*Ibid*: 83-84).
- 18 A phrase by former Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev that has become a phrase used by everyone. The phrase reflects the ideal model that implies that Turks and Azeris are one nation that has created two states owing to various circumstances.

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