

AZERBAIJAN'S ETHNIC MINORITIES

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CAUCASUS IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MULTIETHNIC REGIONS AND IS HOME TO OVER 50 INDIGENOUS ETHNICITIES. IN THE PAST, CAUCASUS HAS REPEATEDLY BEEN PART OF VARIOUS STATES AND EMPIRES, INCLUDING MEDIA, THE ACHAEMENID STATE, PARTHIA, THE SASSANID STATE, THE ARAB CALIPHATE, THE SELJUK EMPIRE, THE MONGOL EMPIRE, THE SAFAVID STATE, THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE.

This list is crowned by the Russian Empire which ruled the Caucasus for over 200 years. The administrative division into provinces existing at the time did not take into consideration the ethnic, confessional and geographical factors, which is why the regions inhabited by local ethnicities were artificially dismembered. This is exactly what happened to the Azerbaijanis.

Azerbaijani ancestors established

the first significant state in the Caucasus, the Mannean kingdom (9-7th centuries BC), three millennia ago. Other Azerbaijani states emerged afterwards, including Media and the Caucasian Albania. In the middle ages, the territory of Azerbaijan was home to the states of Ildenizids, Safavids and Shirvan.

In the latter half of the 18th and early 19th centuries, there were 20 independent khanates on Azerbaijani



soil. Until the first third of the 19th century, when Azerbaijan was divided between the Russian Empire and Persia, this was the only region with a single nation. However, the people of Azerbaijan and their lands have been developing along two different scenarios since then.

In 1918, after the break-up of the Russian Empire, the first secular state



Mountain Jews living in Azerbaijan



Representatives of Azerbaijan's German community

in the Muslim East was proclaimed in Northern Azerbaijan – the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920). In April 1920, following the arrival of the red army of Russian Bolsheviks in Baku, Azerbaijan lost its independence again and was made part of the USSR. Since 1991, this has been an independent and sovereign Republic of Azerbaijan, while Southern Azerbaijan continues to be part of Iran.

The main ethnicity, **the Azerbaijanis**, constitute over 8 million people, or 90 per cent of the country's population. According to estimates, there are around 50 million Azerbaijanis in the world. Of these, 36 million live in their native country – in Azerbaijan. The rest live outside the

republic, including 2 million in Russia, 1 million in the USA, 500,000 in Georgia, 110,000 in Kazakhstan, 250,000 in Germany, 150,000 in France, 1 million in Iraq, 50,000 in Canada, 20,000 in Kyrgyzstan, 10,000 in Austria, 20,000 in Sweden, 20,000 in the United Kingdom, and 150,000 in Turkey.

Azerbaijan is a country populated by many ethnicities. The biggest of them are Azerbaijanis, a Muslim people living in their historical homeland. Azerbaijanis have their own history and self-consciousness, material and spiritual culture, traditions of statehood. They are the biggest indigenous ethnicity in the Caucasus and the second biggest Turkic-speaking nation.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has a population of 9 million people. In ad-



- The Udis are Christians.
- **Kryzes** (1,000 people), **Khinalugs** (2,000 people) and **Budugs** (1,000 people) are also the descendants of Alban tribes currently living in Gusar District. They are Muslims.
 - **Ingiloys** (8,000 people) are the descendants of one of the Alban tribes living in Zagatala region. They follow both Christianity and Islam.
 - **Lezgins** are the descendants of the Alban tribe of Legs living predominantly in Gusar District. They are Muslims.
 - **Pontian Greeks** (700 people) are the descendants of the Greeks that inhabited settlements in the Caucasus over 2,500 years ago. They are Christians.
 - **Germans** appeared in Azerbaijan



They are Christians.

- **Mountain Jews Juhur** appeared in the country in the 5th century. Most of them have been living in Krasnaya Sloboda, a settlement near Guba, for over 270 years. They follow Judaism.
- **European Jews Ashkenazi** appeared in the country in the mid-19th century and are living predominantly in Baku.
- **Russians** appeared in Azerbaijan in the late 18th century. A century later, there were 100 Russian villages in Azerbaijan. Now there are 141,000 Russians in the country. They are Christians.
- **Ukrainians** appeared in Azerbaijan in the 19th century and are living mainly in Baku. There are 29,000 Ukrainians in Azerbaijan. They are Christians.



dition to Azerbaijanis, the country is home to 20 ethnic minorities which have preserved their language, material and spiritual culture. These include:

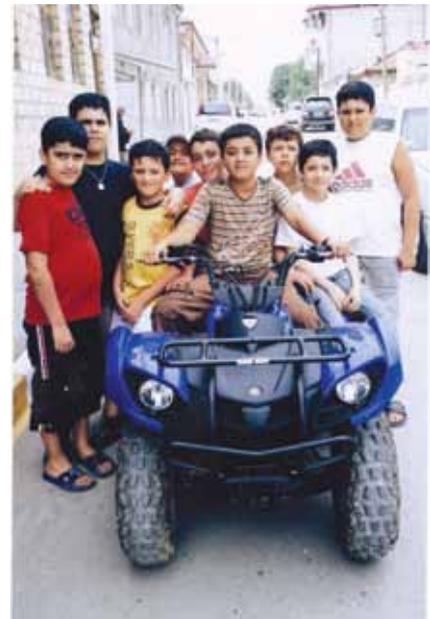
- **Udis** are one of 26 local Alban tribes that established the Alban state (3rd century BC – 8th century AD). Their central region is Karabakh – the area between the Kura and Aras. There are 6,000 Udis living predominantly in the Nij village which is mentioned by ancient Greek authors.

in 1819 and established nine residential settlements here, the biggest of which were Yelenendorf (currently the town of Goygol) and Anefeld (currently the town of Shamkir). They are Christians.

- **New Assyrians** are the descendants of the Syrians who appeared in Azerbaijan in the 4th century and spread Christianity in the Caucasus. There are 700 New Assyrians in Azerbaijan living in Terter and Tovuz Districts.

- **Belorussians** appeared in the country in the 19th century and are living in Baku. There are 15,000 Belorussians in the country. They are Christians.

- **Armenians** appeared in the country in the early 19th century in the aftermath of the Russian Empire's policy of resettlement. Now there are 120,000 Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku. They are Christians.



- **Tatars** are the descendants of the tribes that appeared in Azerbaijan together with the Mongols in the 13-14th centuries. They live in Baku. There are 30,000 of them. They are Muslims.
- **Talyshes** live in Lankaran, Astara, Lerik, Jalilabad and Masalli Districts. They are Muslims.
- **Kurds** have been living in Azerbaijan since the 5th century mainly in Lachin, Kalbajar, Zangelan, Terter and Gubadli Districts. They are Muslims.
- **Georgians** live in Baku and are Christians.
- **Avars and Tsakhurs** moved to Azerbaijan in the 17th century due to a lack of lands in their historical homeland of Dagestan. They are Muslims.
- **Tats** appeared in Azerbaijan in the 5th century and are living on the Absheron Peninsula, in Shabran and Devechi Districts.
- **Ahiska Turks** were deported from their historical motherland in Georgia to Central Asia in 1944. After political rehabilitation in 1956 some of them settled down in Azerbaijan. There





are 100,000 of them in the country now. They live predominantly in Saatli and Sabirabad Districts.

There are religious institutions of all represented faiths in the country – Islam, Christianity and Judaism. In total, there are 1,300 shrines in Azerbaijan. Most of these are mosques, but there are also Christian temples and synagogues. In 2004, a new catholic church was established in Baku with the participation of John Paul II, the Pope of Rome.

At the same time, there are numerous religious, cultural and educational communities representing ethnic minorities. They learn their languages in the elementary grades of comprehensive education schools and have various teaching aids, curricula, radio and TV programs in their respective languages. There are state theaters and amateur studios repre-

senting ethnic minorities. Since 2006, there has been a dedicated program, Ethnic Minorities, on Public TV.

A Presidential Decree “On the protection of the rights and freedoms, state support for the development of languages and culture of ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples and ethnic groups living in the Republic of Azerbaijan” was adopted in 1992. The 1995 Constitution of Azerbaijan guarantees the equality of rights and freedoms of all individuals regardless of race, nationality, religion, language, sex, origin, property and public status, convictions, affiliation to a political party, trade union and another public organization. It is prohibited to restrict or prejudice the rights and freedoms of people and citizens on the basis of their race, nationality, religion, language, sex, origin, convictions, political and

social affiliation.

Ethnic minorities are taking an active part in the political, economic, scientific, cultural and public life of the country. They are represented in the government, other state bodies and the Milli Mejlis, Azerbaijan's parliament.

The Republic of Azerbaijan adheres to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has joined the Final Act of the OSCE (Helsinki, 1975) and adopted its 10 fundamental provisions; has signed documents that guarantee the rights and freedoms of people and citizens, as well as the Framework Convention on the protection of ethnic minorities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 1995). ❖