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RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AMONG MUSLIMS IN AZERBAIJAN

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Many writers now talk about "the globalization of pluralism," but most of the time they are talking about political diversity than religious (Berger 2006). One reason for that is that religious pluralism poses special challenges not only for the state and society, but also for particular religions and believers. Many of them are now struggling in various countries to come to terms with other kinds of pluralism, an especially difficult challenge given that religious communities are especially sensitive to both in-group and out-group distinctions, such as proper versus improper, saved versus unsaved, and the like (Davidson and Pyle 1998).

Religious pluralism also presents challenges to outside observers, who—tending to make simple generalizations about religions—often lack the expertise of internal divisions within other faiths. That is far from a purely theoretical problem, because affiliation with a particular group within a faith can have a significant impact on social and political choices. Until the end of the Soviet Union, contacts between Muslim groups in the USSR and their co-religionists abroad were limited. But one aspect of Soviet-era Islam continues to inform those contacts. That is the distinction between official and unofficial Islam, between the government-recognized mullahs and muftis based in mosques and other religious practices based at so called *pirs* (Muslim shrines).

Since 1991, this division has been projected onto the Muslim community of the post-Soviet states, with many viewing successors to the former as “traditional” and the continuers of the latter as “fundamentalist.” In Chechnya, for example, this division is between the Sufis and the Wahhabis, with the former viewed as liberal and peaceful and the latter as backward and radical. But this imagery is just as inadequate now as it was in Soviet times and should be viewed as an ideological tool for exercising control (Wiktor-Mach 2009).

In some places, there are far more than just two trends. Azerbaijan is one of them. That country is home to many different Islamic groups, the most influential being Salafis, as well as Turkish and Iranian interpretations of Islam. This diversity offers people in Azerbaijan many choices and allows one to speak of religious pluralism within Islam there, even though the state has opted for a greater extent of regulation of religious activities on its territory.

One aspect of this pluralism of possibilities in Azerbaijan is that many believers in that country begin their religious search with an assertion of importance of choice rather than end it as is often the case elsewhere, thus opening the way for religious inclusiveness rather than exclusivity. Such an inclusivist strategy both reflects and requires a certain amount of interaction among people from different groups, and in Azerbaijan, some Muslim groups allow for Sunni and Shia to pray and meet together, something that is unheard of elsewhere.

Such inclusivist strategies typically assume one of two forms: either an approach based on the conviction that all religions are in some way acceptable even if Islam is the best or one that assumes that all major world religions lead to God. The latter perspective helps promote inter-religious dialogue. While most Azerbaijanis fall into the first and a few into the second, some of the Salafis in that country have adopted an exclusivist model, one that rejects all other Islamic trends and non-orthodox practice. In their view, only the kind of Islam they practice is true and acceptable. Some Shia have the same view: In Nardaran, one of the bastions of Shiism in Azerbaijan, children learn verses that curse the Caliph Umar, known in Shia tradition as an unjust usurper, and are routinely told that Sunnis are to be avoided because they honor Umar—“a very bad man who urged people to marry their brothers or sisters” (Rohozinski 2005).

Azerbaijan is a religiously plural society, but that is a process not an endpoint. There is a real struggle going on, and only the future will tell whether that society will adopt the inclusivist model currently predominant or the exclusivist one that is found at the margins of society there.

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THE AZERBAIJANI MODEL OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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Azerbaijan has a well-deserved reputation for religious tolerance, a country whose people respect each other's faiths, but the country's legal arrangements intended to protect and advance religious tolerance are less well-known. This article addresses the constitutional and legal arrangements that the Republic of Azerbaijan has put in place to ensure that all its citizens are free to practice their religion and that all religions are equal before the law.

Under the terms of the country's constitution and laws, the government respects the rights of all faiths and believers and does not intervene on questions of doctrine or practice. [1] It does not prefer any religion to any other or religion to atheism or agnosticism. It treats all religions as equal before the law. And it limits religious activities only to the extent that no religion is permitted to humiliate anyone or to call into question humane principles. [2]

The Constitution specifies that no national or religious discrimination is permitted in Azerbaijan. The 24th, 26th, 28th, and 48th articles of the country's basic law, together with the first article of the *Act on religious liberty* form legal basis for all relations between state and communities of believers. Thus, according to the Constitution, every individual has certain inalienable rights and liberties. [3] Moreover, he or she has legal rights to defend those liberties and rights. [4] And everyone is free to

engage in religious activities as long as they do not undermine the rights of others. [5]

No one, under the law, can be forced either to adopt a particular religion or any religion or to declare himself or herself a member of one or the other categories. [6] The state may not put any obstacles to the practice of faith, but no one is permitted to threaten anyone by insisting on a particular faith or denying it. Restrictions on religious propaganda only affect non-citizens and foreigners. [7]

The Constitution's freedom of conscience clause in the 48th Article is the foundation of religious liberty in Azerbaijan. It corresponds to the 18th article of International Human Rights Memorandum, to the 18th article of the International Treaty of Civil and Political Rights, and to the 9th article of the European Convention of Human Rights.

In Azerbaijan, then, religion and religious communities [8] are separate from the government, and the latter does not interfere in the activities of the former. All religions and religious communities are equal before the law. And religious communities have rights equivalent to those of other social communities to take part in public life and use the media. [9] Under existing legislation, religious communities have central organizations and are required to register with the authorities if there are at least ten members. Once registered, a religious community has the status of a legal person. [10] For Muslims, this organization is the Caucasus Muslim Religious Department; [11] for others, it may involve ties to organizations abroad.

The Caucasus Muslim Religious Department appoints leaders of mosques, under the terms of the 8th article of the religious liberty act, but that act does not place any restriction on religious activities otherwise except to say that only citizens trained in Azerbaijan can perform these religious functions. The act also allows soldiers to practice their faith when not on duty, and it opens the way for religious groups to apply to work in various social organizations and institutions such as prisons and hospitals. The law also specifies how religious workers are to be paid in order to ensure that they meet government social security and pension standards. [12]

Under Azerbaijani law, religious groups have the right to own property just as in any other democratic country, [13] but also just as in all such countries, religious groups have to meet the same requirements that non-religious owners do. And all legislation concerning property ownership stresses that. [14]

As far as religious figures' participation in the state's political life is concerned, they can do so without hindrance [15] with only one other limiting factor: the Constitution's 85th Article specifies that religious figures cannot become candidates for the Milli Majlis or contribute money to political candidates or parties. [16]

It should be remembered that 90% of the Azerbaijani population is educated and that state education is secular in nature, as required by the provisions of the Constitution separating religion and the state. [17] But at the same time, existing Azerbaijani law includes provisions allowing for the inclusion of courses on religious issues in the curriculum, [18] although no secular school provides training for religious figures as such. [19] Religious training abroad and the establishment of religious training centers in Azerbaijan is subject to government regulation. [20] Nonetheless, under the terms of the law, any graduate of a secular secondary school has the right to pursue religious training.

Two organizations oversee these arrangements in Azerbaijan, the State Committee of the Azerbaijan Republic for Work with Religious Communities and the Caucasus Muslim Religious Department. The former was created by President Heydar Aliyev's decree in 2001 in place of the Department of Religious Affairs. It is directed by a chairman and his deputies who are appointed by the president. The Committee is charged with ensuring religious liberty, preserving the secular nature of the state, and suppressing fanaticism and violence (Aliyev 2004, p. 9). It works to ensure that all people in Azerbaijan observe the principles of the 48th article of the Constitution. [21] And it serves as a forum where any problems that arise in relations between religions and the state can be resolved. [22]

The other institution, the Caucasus Muslim Religious Department, has a history tracing back to tsarist times. [23] At present, it is led by Allahshukur Pashazade, the sheikh-ul-Islam. It plays a major role in organizing Islamic religious life in Azerbaijan. The key figures in all mosques are appointed by the Department, which also confirms the charters of Islamic schools and other institutions in the state. After 1991, many *madrasas* appeared, but now the Department has controlled through registration five of them. The others have been closed. Since 1993, the Department has maintained the Baku Islam University which has five separate Schools.

Given its commitment to religious liberty and tolerance, Azerbaijan maintains ties with all key international organizations involved in these issues, including but not limited to the United Nations, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe. As a signatory to the basic human rights and religious rights documents of these institutions, Azerbaijan has created the position of ombudsman to provide additional protections for its citizens. Moreover, it has frequently held seminars on religious issues, expanded studies at the highest levels of religious law, and worked to ensure that provisions on religion are included in all state legislation that may touch on religious questions.

Given its long and complex history and its tradition of tolerance, Azerbaijan has on its territory places of worship for many different faiths past and present, including the ancient Albanian-Christian temples, Russian Orthodox Churches, and Jewish synagogues. In addition, it has a Roman Catholic cathedral and the largest synagogue in the region, the result of supportive state policy since 1991. At present, there are approximately 1,300 mosques in Azerbaijan, of which 220 have been built since 1991, some 40 churches, five synagogues, and other temples, and more than 500 other places of worship for those of other faiths.

Islamic missionaries in Azerbaijan have come mainly from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Qatar, UEA, Kuwait and Jordan. They were most active between 1993 and 2002 and built numerous mosques around the country. But because some of them promoted *Wahhabi* ideas, they were restricted in their activity after 1998. But those groups which live within the law have been allowed to continue their activities unimpeded, including the formation of religious training schools in Azerbaijan and the chance for Azerbaijanis to study abroad.

Many Christian, Jewish and other missionary groups are active in Azerbaijan, although only 27 of them are registered with the state.

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Notes

[1] See *The Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic* (hereinafter referred to as ARC), Article 18.

[2] ARC, Article 18; *Act about Religious Liberty of the Azerbaijan Republic* (hereinafter referred to as ARLAR), Article 1.

[3] ARC, Articles 24, 28.

[4] ARC, Article 26.

[5] ARC, Article 48.

[6] ARC, Article 48.

[7] ARLAR, Article 1.

[8] A religious community is a local organization of believers voluntarily assembled to provide for their religious needs. See ARLAR, Article 7.

[9] ARLAR, Article 5.

[10] ARLAR, Article 11.

[11] ARLAR, Article 7.

[12] ARLAR, Articles 25, 26.

[13] ARLAR, Article 16.

[14] ARLAR, Articles 17, 19.

[15] ARC, Article 54.

[16] ARC, Article 85; ARLAR, Article 6.

[17] ARC, Article 18.

[18] ARLAR, Article 6.

[19] ARLAR, Article 10.

[20] ARLAR, Article 24.

[21] The article reads "1. Each person has freedom of conscience. 2. Everyone has rights to determine his religious attitude, to worship to any religion individually or collectively, or not to worship to any religion, to determine and spread his thoughts about the religion. 3. The fulfilment of religious rites is free if it doesn't break the law or contradicts the social ethics. 4. The religious faith and thought does not justify the

law discordance. 5. No one is forced to determine his religious faith and thought, to fulfil the religious rites or to participate in them." See ARC, Article 48.

[22] ARLAR, Article 28-30.

[23] Explore the official website of the Caucasus Muslim Religious Department at <http://www.qafqazislam.com/> (accessed 19 April 2010).

AN EVENT OF "BOTH SYMBOLIC AND PRACTICAL" IMPORTANCE: THE BAKU SUMMIT OF WORLD RELIGIOUS LEADERS

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Some 150 religious leaders from more than 30 countries around the world gathered in Baku April 26-27 for a summit meeting on "Globalization, Religion and Traditional Values," a meeting that had immense symbolic and practical importance not only for the participants but for Azerbaijan and the world.

On the one hand, the meeting served to call attention both to Azerbaijan as a symbolic crossroads of civilizations and a land proud of its history of religious and ethnic tolerance and to the common views many religious leaders have on particular political and economic questions. And on the other, it served as the occasion for practical work in which religious leaders from Azerbaijan and Armenia met and talked about the Karabakh conflict and the occasion for the first meeting of a UNESCO inter-religious council.

The meeting, which was organized by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Muslim Spiritual Directorate (MSD) of the Caucasus which is based in Baku, was the fourth in a series of inter-religious meetings. The first was convened in Moscow in 2002 by the then-Patriarch Aleksiy II and Allahshukur Pashazade, the sheikh-ul-Islam. Subsequent sessions were held in the Russian capital in 2004 and 2006. But the current meeting both in intention and impact represented a breakthrough.

That can be seen in the welcoming speech by President Ilham Aliyev and the declaration adopted by the participants at the conclusion of the meeting and also by the two meetings that the coming together of so many religious leaders from so many different places made possible.

In his address to the religious summit, President Aliyev said that it was "an event of enormous importance," one that calls attention to the fact that "over the course of centuries, representatives of various nationalities and various religions have lived in Azerbaijan in an atmosphere of friendship and brotherhood, as members of one family." In short, he said, "religious and national tolerance has a very great and glorious history in Azerbaijan." [1]

"Azerbaijan," the president continued, "is a natural bridge between Europe and Asia." It is a member of both the Organization of the Islamic Conference and a member of the Council of Europe. "Islam is our holy religion," he said, "but "at the same time, Azerbaijan is a country open for the entire world and one that seeks cooperation with all countries."

Last year, President Aliyev recalled, Baku itself was "chosen the capital of Islamic culture," and the country as a whole has "more than a thousand constantly functioning mosques." But at the same time, there are 11 churches, six synagogues, and other religious shrines," a pattern that he suggested "makes us stronger."

Because of this religious and cultural tradition, he argued, "social justice is one of the basic directions of our activity. Of course, justice and social justice in particular are concepts which occupy a high place in any religion," not just Islam. And at the same time, he said, the people of Azerbaijan want "our region and the world "to become more secure," something that meetings like the Baku summit can help promote."

To that end, President Aliyev said, "we must do what we can so that all conflicts will be in a short time resolved. We must do what we can so that people will relate well one to another. For that, the actions of politicians alone are insufficient. There is a large role for religious leaders who enjoy in society great respect." And that is one of the reasons meetings like the Baku summit are so important.

Another reason this summit is so important is because its participants are grappling with "a relatively new theme for the world"—globalization, he said. "Naturally, processes of globalization cannot pass us by." And "we must not under the pressure of globalization forget about our national values. We must continue to maintain them."

"The Azerbaijani people have a great history. But the period of our independence is not that long," President Aliyev said. "Despite the fact that in earlier times Azerbaijan was not an independent country, we were able to preserve our national values and traditions." Azerbaijanis can do no less now that they have their own country. And, President Aliyev said, "we want to educate the younger generation in the spirit of patriotism and national spirit and we are doing this," even as "we successfully move toward modernization."

The Azerbaijani leader concluded his remarks with the hope that "Baku will become one of the world centers of dialogue and development of world religions," a perfect combination of its past and its aspiration for the future.

The other key statement emanating from the summit was a declaration adopted by the "leaders and representatives of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu communities from 32 countries" at the conclusion of the session concerning the ways in which religious traditions can positively interact with the processes of globalization despite the fears of many that these are antithetical phenomena. [2]

"In connection with globalization," the declaration says, "there have been calls for turning away from the special features and integrity of cultures and religious and moving toward a syncretic system of views, toward 'a mixing of faiths.'" But the history of the past and the beginning of the current century has shown that such an approach leads not to unification but to a still greater division of people."

The reasons for that conclusion, the appeal says, are rooted in the impact of the new information technologies which "make interconnections among people" far easier and quicker than before. "Contacts which earlier required trips of many months duration now can be established in a few seconds, [and] practically every religious community today is able to talk about itself in the web. But that very possibility carries with it a serious risk: "In the common information space, ever more strongly are heard the voices of extremists, fanatics, false missionaries, inciters of war and terror, of those who call for hostility and force and who insult the feelings of those who believe differently or in general all believers."

Moreover, despite the hopes of many, "globalization has not removed the threats to the security of states, peoples, and individuals," the religious leaders say. Instead, "rich countries have become richer and poor ones poorer," and "the unjust division of world incomes is generating ever more criticism." Religious communities are in a position to "give an adequate answer to this challenge by offering alternative models of development of economic life, at the basis of which must be the common spiritual values of many peoples—justice, solidarity, love and respect for the individual and for centuries old traditions and cultures of our peoples."

"Religious leaders," the declaration says, "can make an important contribution to the resolution of world economic and social problems both at the level of macro-level international contacts and at the level of their own countries and concrete communities."

One area where religious leaders can make a particularly important contribution, the declaration says, is in the fight against terrorism, all the more so because "people sowing death and destruction are attempting to use religious slogans to cover their goals." Some of them even "call themselves 'religious activists' and already are establishing alternative 'theological theories,' justifying the murder of people on religious or nationality lines."

Religious leaders, the declaration says, "have frequently declared that acts of terror are crimes from the point of view of any traditional faith." But that is not enough. "Religious-political doctrines which justify aggressive force against peaceful people must be banned in the entire world just as Nazism has been banned in many countries."

"At the same time," the declaration continues, religious leaders are very much aware that "only an idea can defeat an ideal, and consequently precisely the traditional religious communities are called among to counter the distortion of religious values by the extremists and terrorists." That requires "not only the preservation or revival of the tradition of religious education and enlightenment but the inclusion in it of the spirit of peace and inter-religious tolerance."

"Many in the contemporary world try to push religion to the periphery of social life," the declaration says, by "insisting on the secular nature of the public space excluding from that any expressions of religiosity" and denying "the presence in man and society of unchanging moral values." This, the declaration says, "opens the way to complete moral nihilism" and ultimately the destruction of humanity.

To counter that trend, the declaration goes on, "cooperation of traditional religious communities has become more important than ever before." Consequently, in the name of all those represented at the Baku summit, "we call for a world in which each

state will preserve the integrity" not only of its territory but of its traditions. And the religious leaders said, "believers" are called to play a greater role in inspiring diplomacy toward those ends.

"At political summits," the declaration notes, "ever more often are invited spiritual leaders, and many countries are making inter-religious dialogue one of the priorities of their policy." That goal is strengthened by the initiatives of the UN and UNESCO "on the development of cooperation of religious communities and their dialogue with politicians." The leaders added that they "are convinced that an effective mechanism of dialogue with the international community will make possible the discovery of paths of overcoming the negative consequences of globalization and a change for the better of the world's political, economic and legal arrangements."

Consequently, the participants of the Baku Summit "call for the development of inter-religious cooperation at all levels and in all formats" and pledge "to do everything that is in our power to support peace among countries and peoples."

As important as these ideas are, many would have ignored this meeting of the world's religious leaders had it not been for the ways in which the Baku Summit sought to translate them into action. On the one hand, the meeting provided the occasion for the coming together of the religious leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia despite the Karabakh conflict, a session that at the least represented a confidence-building measure. Armenian Patriarch Garegin not only took part in that session but met with President Ilham Aliyev and proposed holding the next such session of religious leaders in Yerevan. (A second meeting which would have involved the religious leaders of equally divided Georgia and Russia had to be postponed because of the illness of Patriarch Iliya II. [3])

And on the other, the Baku summit provided a venue for the first session of the consultative group of religious leaders as part of the UNESCO initiative, a meeting whose importance was underscored by the presence of Dendyev Badarc, the regional representative of that United Nations organization. [4]

As a result of such activities, the meeting fully justified the statements of those like Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill that it had both "practical" and "symbolic" significance [5] as well as the claim by the organizers that "this was not a congress of 'Tolstoyans' but an assembly of soberly thinking people." [6]

Notes

[1] The full text of the speech is available in English at http://www.president.az/articles.php?item_id=20100428113822765&sec_id=11 (accessed 30 April 2010).

[2] The full text of the declaration is available in Russian at <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/1147205.html> (accessed 30 April 2010).

[3] See <http://www.newsru.com/religy/26apr2010/deklaration.html> (accessed 30 April 2010).

[4] See <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/world/w-news/12527/> (accessed 30 April 2010).

[5] See <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=33956> (sccessed 30 April 2010).

[6] See <http://www.blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=3&id=33962> (accessed 30 April 2010).

A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

President Ilham Aliyev tells the Baku Summit of Religious Leaders of the World that "religious and national tolerance in Azerbaijan has a very large and glorious history" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206013.html>).

Anar Mammadkhanov, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that to his "great regret" American policy in the South Caucasus reflects "an ignorance of historical realities [and] a superficial acquaintance with geopolitical aspects" of the situation there, shortcomings that can lead to "unpredictable consequences" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206032.html>).

Novruz Mammadov, the head of the foreign relations department of the Presidential Administration, says that "the US risks the loss of its most important and reliable partner in the region of the South Caucasus" by its recent statements and actions (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205375.html>).

Ziyafat Askarov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, says that "the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been in vain" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204436.html>).

Ali Hasanov, head of the social-political department of the Presidential Administration, says that "Azerbaijan is seeking alternative paths of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204464.html>).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Iranian Interior Minister Mustafa Mohammad Najar tells Azerbaijani Ambassador to Iran Javanshir Akhundov that Tehran "wants to broaden cooperation with Azerbaijan in the area of security, the police, and border affairs" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206127.html>).

Boris Klimchuk, Ukrainian ambassador in Baku, says that "GUAM is in the highest degree a useful organization" but that it is "another question" how to bring it "into line with new realities, by considering the developments among out neighbors" (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/205540.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

30 April

The Russian foreign ministry says that it has nothing against Tehran's proposal to organize trilateral talks with Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206844.html>).

Nazim Mammadov, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that "it is only possible to recover the Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia by force" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206833.html>).

Sabir Rustamkhanly, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that "the US has already for a long time been conducting a policy in support of terrorist Armenia," although he adds that "not all of the leadership" of the US agrees with that (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206733.html>).

29 April

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov tells his Italian counterpart Franco Frattini in Rome that "Azerbaijan has accepted the renewed Madrid Principles and considers them a suitable basis for resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206693.html>).

The Foreign Ministry, reacting to a statement by the newly appointed Russian co-chair of the Minsk Group Igor Popov, says that "Azerbaijan has frequently declared that both communities of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenian and Azerbaijani, undoubtedly will participate at a definite stage in the negotiation process ... for the definition of the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh in the framework of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206696.html>).

Fuad Aliyev, the chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, says that "after the declaration of [Armenian President] Serzh Sargsyan the chances for the peaceful resolution of the Karabakh conflict are exhausted" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206508.html>).

Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, says that "a common striving to begin dialogue on broadening cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union in the energy sector exists" (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/206514.html>).

The US Embassy in Azerbaijan says that Baku's cooperation with NATO "shows the entire world" the independence and sovereignty of Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206746.html>).

The Working Group on Azerbaijan of the US House of Representatives has called for the annulment of Article 907 regarding assistance to Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206728.html>).

Burak Ozugergin, a representative of the Turkish foreign ministry, says that "it is very strange to expect that Ankara would stop paying attention to the question of Karabakh" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206715.html>).

28 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Buabdulla Gulamulla, the Algerian minister for religion and waqfs (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206515.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Sang Dik, a member of the Korean National Assembly (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206502.html>).

Yashar Aliyev, Azerbaijani ambassador to the United States, addresses the American Jewish Community (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206630.html>).

Samad Seyidov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, says that he has met with his Armenian counterpart (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206584.html>).

Elin Suleymanov, Azerbaijani consul general in Los Angeles, says that "good relations with Turkey are more important for the White House than hurt feelings of the Armenian diaspora" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206344.html>).

Thorbjørn Jagland, the secretary general of the Council of Europe, says that "we must increase our efforts directed at the fulfillment of resolutions adopted by the Council" concerning Karabakh (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206389.html>).

Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for human rights, expresses the hope that the return of Azerbaijani refugees can be arranged (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206535.html>).

Gianni Buquicchio, chairman of the Venice Commission, says that the Azerbaijani election law allows for honest voting (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206533.html>).

Zahid Oruj, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that "Armenia risks encountering unexpected responses" because of its unwillingness to negotiate seriously (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206353.html>).

Aydin Mirzazade, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that "the military infrastructure of Armenia in the occupied territories must be destroyed" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206433.html>).

Bahar Muradova, deputy speaker of the Milli Majlis, says that "Armenia has more than once demonstrated an unconstructive position" in negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206459.html>).

Gular Ahmadova, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that Armenia has delayed giving its position on the renewed Madrid Principles because it is "not capable of taking decisions fully independently" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206354.html>).

27 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Valery Gayevsky, governor of Russia's Stavropol kray (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206324.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev signs an agreement awarding Adel Abdallah al-Falaha of Kuwait with the Friendship Order for his work in promoting ties between Kuwait and Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206248.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev signs the law on Azerbaijan's approval of the statutes of the Organization of the Islamic Conference as signed in March 2008 in Dakar (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206348.html>).

Vasif Talybov, president of the Supreme Majlis of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan, meets in Ankara with Turkish State Minister Hayati Yazzyjy (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206369.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Egypt's Deputy Foreign Minister Saamah M. Sutuhi (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206346.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives a telephone call from Kazakhstan Foreign Minister Kanat Saudbayev, OSCE chairman-in-office. Saudbayev also telephoned Armenian Foreign Minister Edvard Nalbandyan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206326.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Seyid Kazym Musavi, leader of the Iranian-Azerbaijani Interparliamentary Friendship Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206321.html>).

The Foreign Ministry says that the recent comments of Armenian Foreign Minister Edvard Nalbandyan prompt it to point out that "the Armenian side must reflect that instead of its focus on public relations, it needs to soberly, critically and realistically approach the existing situation on the question of the resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206227.html>).

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu says that "Turkey takes an active role in the future of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic" because of the continued relevance of the Kars Treaty (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206368.html>).

Agriculture Minister Ismet Abbasov visits Latvia where he is received by his counterpart Janis Duklavs (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/206256.html>).

Iranian Ayatollah Mohammed Ali Tashiri says that "Karabakh must be liberated from occupation by means of negotiations in the nearest future" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206307.html>).

Ganira Pashayeva, a member of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, tells that body about the violation of the rights of Azerbaijani women as a result of Armenian aggression (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206290.html>).

Abdualaziz Orthman Altwajri, the secretary general of ISESCO, says that "an end must be put to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories and that refugees must be given the chance to return to their native lands" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206259.html>).

US Congressman Jim Moran says that "the murders committed in Khojaly were a terrible event" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206211.html>).

Milli Majlis deputies say that the decision of the European Court for Human Rights in the case of Eynulla Fatullayev was "politicized" rather than just (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206237.html>).

The Baku World Summit of Religious Leaders adopts a declaration which calls on traditional religious communities to oppose the ideas of extremism and terrorism (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206228.html>).

Micheline Calmy-Rey, Swiss foreign minister and chairman of the Council of Europe's Council of Ministers, says that "the Council of Europe very much hopes for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206173.html>).

Rafael Huseynov, a member of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, prepares a document on illegal elections to be held in Armenian-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206175.html>).

Mike Hancock, a member of the British Parliament, says that "one must not make a concession to Armenia; this would be a tragic mistake" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204651.html>).

Allahshukur Pashazade, the sheikh-ul-Islam, says that "the summit of world religious leaders promotes the development of inter-confessional relations" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205990.html>).

Berl Lazar, the chief rabbi of Russia, says that "in Azerbaijan, Jews live in an atmosphere of peace and harmony" (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206187.html>).

Talgat Tajuddinov, the chairman of the Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Russia, says that "in Azerbaijan, along with tolerance, there is a high level of respect and love for people" (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206186.html>).

The first session of the UNESCO consultative group of religious leaders takes place in Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206189.html>).

26 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Garegin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206147.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Adel Abdalla al-Falah, Kuwait's deputy minister of Islamic affairs and waqfs (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206129.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Italian Deputy Economics Development Minister Adolpho Urso (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206092.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Roland Galarag, the chief of the French Foreign Ministry's department on continental Europe and the Caucasus (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206115.html>).

Vamik Rahimov, head of the department of naval security of the State Naval Administration, takes part in a London conference on international naval administration (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205983.html>).

Vafaddin Ibayev, a justice of the Azerbaijani Supreme Court, says that "the European Court does not have the power to change or annul the decisions of national courts" as it has tried to do in the Eynulla Fattulayev case (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206070.html>). Ibayev's colleague, Ali Seyfaliyev, adds that "the decision of the European Court [in this case] contradicts precedent" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206047.html>).

Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, expresses concern that Armenia has not ratified the protocols on the normalization of bilateral relations with Turkey (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206143.html>).

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu says that "official Ankara considers the Karabakh problem as its own" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206083.html>).

Iranian Interior Minister Mustafa Muhammed Najar tells Azerbaijani Ambassador to Iran Javanshir Akhundov that Tehran "wants to broaden cooperation with Azerbaijan in the area of security, the police, and border affairs" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206127.html>).

Seid Kazym Musevi, the co-chair of the Azerbaijani-Iranian inter-parliamentary working group, says that Iran is "a supporter of the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206087.html>).

Movlud Chavushoglu, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, says that he will personally lead the PACE subcommittee on Nagorno-Karabakh (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206062.html>).

Denis Baikal, the head of the Peoples Republican Party of Turkey says that "the first step in guaranteeing stability in the Caucasus must be the withdrawal of Armenians from occupied Azerbaijani territories" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206038.html>).

Anar Mammadkhanov, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that to his "great regret" American policy in the South Caucasus reflects "an ignorance of historical realities [and] a superficial acquaintance with geopolitical aspects" of the situation there, shortcomings that can lead to "unpredictable consequences" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206032.html>).

Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Tashiri, head of the Committee of Interconfessional Rapprochement of the Iran, says that "we must coordinate our efforts in order to oppose the occupation in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Nagorno-Karabakh" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206015.html>).

Irfan Gunduz, a deputy of Turkey's Grand National Assembly, says that "along with Azerbaijan and Turkey, the West is interested in the liberation of the Lachin Corridor" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205950.html>).

The religious leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia sign a declaration following their joint meeting calling for "cooperation to overcome the alienation among our peoples" and for the peaceful resolution of all conflicts (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206004.html>).

Garegin II, the Catholicos of All Armenians, says that "in Baku we raise our praise to God for the fact that peace talks on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are continuing" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206002.html>).

Aleksandr, Russian Orthodox archbishop of Astana and Almaty, says that Azerbaijan "as a tolerant country can serve as an example for all countries" (<http://www.day.az/news/society/206139.html>).

25 April

Some 250 religious leaders assemble in the Azerbaijani capital for the Baku Summit of Religious Leaders of the World (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205953.html>).

Allahshukur Pashazade, the sheikh-ul-Islam, says that "the attention and concern of religious leaders of the CIS can help in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205935.html>).

Kirill, the Moscow Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, says that "in Azerbaijan exist the correct relations among people of different religions" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205930.html>).

The Baku meeting of religious leaders establishes a council of supervisors for the Inter-Religious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205937.html>).

The US state of Massachusetts formally recognizes the Khojaly massacre as genocide (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/206073.html>).

24 April

President Ilham Aliyev signs an order awarding Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill with the *Sharaf* Order for his contribution to the development of fraternal ties between Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205884.html>).

Fuad Ismayilov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Slovakia and Austria, takes part in the commemoration in Bratislava of the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205897.html>).

Bahar Muradova, the vice speaker of the Milli Majlis, says that alongside the three co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group there are other states, like Turkey, which deserve the chance to make a contribution to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205873.html>).

Ogtay Asadov, the speaker of the Milli Majlis, says that "the goal of the Armenian lobby [in Western countries] is the satisfaction of its own selfish interests" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205847.html>).

Thirty Azerbaijanis take part in a demonstration in support of Turkey in front of the Turkish embassy in Washington (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205899.html>).

Azerbaijanfilm presents a documentary film, "Genocide: Baku," about the killing of Azerbaijanis by Armenians in 1918 (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205776.html>).

23 April

President Ilham Aliyev tells Azerbaijani military commanders that "the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan never has been and never will be subject to discussion" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205769.html>).

Fuad Alaskarov, the head of the department for work with law enforcement organs of the Presidential Administration, says that in the case of Fatullayev, "the European Court did not conduct an internal investigation" as it should have.

The Russian Foreign Ministry says that Moscow "hopes that Turkey and Armenia will be able to overcome the current complex situation and create the conditions for the full normalization of relations in which all the countries of the region are interested" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205739.html>).

Azerbaijan's opposition parties adopt a joint declaration condemning plans for "parliamentary elections" in occupied Karabakh and appeal to the governments of the world to reject them as illegitimate (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205712.html>).

Ilham Mammadov, a deputy of the Milli Majlis, says that it is entirely appropriate that Turkey become a new member of the OSCE Minsk Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205382.html>). Another deputy, Zhalya Aliyeva, says that there are "political and legal bases" for taking this step (www.day.az/news/politics/205564.html).

The Russian Foreign Ministry says that Moscow would have to consult with all OSCE countries to determine whether it would be possible to include Turkey or any other country as a new co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205611.html>).

Philip Crowley, US assistant secretary of state, says that the decision to postpone the American-Azerbaijani military exercises was entirely Baku's and that the US will continue to cooperate with Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205616.html>).

Hulusi Kılıç, Turkish ambassador to Baku, says that "Ankara is grateful to Azerbaijan for the support it has shown to Turkey" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205694.html>).

Steph Goris, honorary president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the West European Union, says that "the position of the European Union on the Karabakh conflict is insufficiently strong" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205195.html>).

Bakhtiyar Sadykhov, a deputy of the Milli Majlis, says that "the consideration by the US Congress of the question about 'the Armenian genocide' in the Ottoman Empire is the fruit of the policy of double standards regarding Turkey" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205221.html>).

22 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Pakistani Defense Secretary Syed Athar Ali (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205555.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Emilia Muller, Bavarian minister for federal and European affairs (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205581.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives Pramono Anung Wibowo, the vice speaker of the House of Representatives of the Indonesian Parliament (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205530.html>).

Oktay Asadov, Milli Majlis speaker, says that "Armenia is ignoring the resolutions of international bodies on Nagorno-Karabakh" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205452.html>).

The Milli Majlis discusses a draft law "on the participation of Azerbaijan in peacekeeping operations," one that would supplement the October 1997 law on military service (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205588.html>).

Chingiz Askarov, the plenipotentiary representative of Azerbaijan to the European Court on Human Rights, says that the court's ruling in the Fatullayev case is deeply flawed and incorrect (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205496.html>).

Irfan Davudov, Azerbaijan's ambassador in Ukraine, lodges a protest with Kyiv over plans to construct a public park in memory of "Armenian victims of the 20th century" there (<http://www.day.az/news/society/205479.html>).

Azerbaijan and Kuwait issue a joint call for the establishment of a forum of Muslim women-parliamentarians within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Islamic Union, following a visit by Kuwaiti deputies to Baku (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205495.html>).

Rovshan Huseynov, the head of the Peoples Socialist Party of Azerbaijan, says that "the Azerbaijani army must be ready to recover the territories occupied by Armenia" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205379.html>).

The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs at a meeting in Moscow say that meetings at a high level in Washington, Baku and Moscow are giving "a new impulse" toward the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205580.html>).

Boris Klimchuk, Ukrainian ambassador in Baku, says that "GUAM is in the highest degree a useful organization" but that it is "another question" how to bring it "into

line with new realities, by considering the developments among our neighbors” (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/205540.html>).

Seid Kazym Musavi, an Iranian parliamentarian, says that “truth in the Nagorno-Karabakh question is on the Azerbaijan side, and we will defend Azerbaijan” (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205531.html>).

21 April

Novruz Mammadov, the head of the foreign relations department of the Presidential Administration, says that “the US risks the loss of its most important and reliable partner in the region of the South Caucasus” by its recent statements and actions (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205375.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives the Russian and American co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, Igor Popov and Robert Bradtke (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205314.html>).

Ali Hasanov, the head of the social-political department of the Presidential Administration, says that Turkey should be included among the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205301.html>). In other comments, he says that “Azerbaijan always was and will be alongside Turkey” (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205298.html>).

Ali Hasanov, the head of the social-political department of the Presidential Administration, says that “the reaction of the US State Department to dissatisfaction in Azerbaijan is normal,” adding that “we do not desire a worsening of relations with the United States and do not want to harm our partnership ties. However, at times, the situation forces things in that direction” (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205280.html>).

Justice Minister Fikrat Mammadov is elected vice president of the UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Jurisprudence (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205299.html>).

Elin Suleymanov, the consul general of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, says that the Minsk Group co-chair countries must “activate their efforts” to achieve the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205258.html>).

20 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Robert Bradtke, the US co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205169.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev receives Boris Klimchuk, outgoing Ukrainian ambassador to Baku, in connection with the completion of his mission in Azerbaijan.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Yuri Merzlyakov, outgoing Russian co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, in connection with the completion of his assignment in that post (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205107.html>).

Ali Ahmadov, the executive secretary of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, says that "the current position of the US as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, which has taken upon itself the mission of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, does not correspond to the character of relations between that country and Azerbaijan." He adds that the US has taken positions which harm the interests of Azerbaijan and provide material support to Armenia. "Azerbaijani society and, in particular, political parties, must express an open protest against this policy of the US" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/205075.html>).

Elman Mammadov, a Milli Majlis deputy, says that "negotiations with Armenia on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict have absolutely no chances of succeeding and cannot lead to the peaceful liberation of Azerbaijan territories" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204991.html>).

19 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204980.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov receives his Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu who says that "the liberation of Azerbaijani lands is one of our main missions" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204983.html>).

Iranian Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mottaki proposes holding a joint meeting of the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Iran (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204865.html>). The Azerbaijan foreign ministry welcomes the idea (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204907.html>).

Elchin Amirbayov, Azerbaijani ambassador to France who is jointly accredited to the Vatican, visits Vatican City and meets with senior officials there (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204993.html>).

Bahar Muradova, the vice speaker of the Milli Majlis, receives a delegation of Kuwaiti female parliamentarians (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204979.html>).

The Defense Ministry announces that an international NATO seminar which had been scheduled to take place in Baku April 20-21 has been postponed indefinitely (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204946.html>).

18 April

Prime Minister Artur Rasizade attends the funeral of Polish President Lech Kaczynski (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204721.html>).

Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and Defense Minister Col. Gen. Safar Abiyev receive Michèle Flournoy, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, who says that "Azerbaijan has demonstrated leadership by the obligations it has assumed before the government and people of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204747.html>).

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan says that Ankara will not open the Turkish border with Armenia as long as Armenia continues to occupy Azerbaijani territories (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204773.html>).

17 April

President Ilham Aliyev receives Michèle Flournoy, US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204691.html>).

Ali Hasanov, head of the social-political department of the Presidential Administration, says that "Azerbaijan may revise its policy in relation to the United States" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204666.html>).

Bahar Muradova, head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, receives her Italian counterpart Riccardo Migliori (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204690.html>).

16 April

President Ilham Aliyev says that "the Armenians have committed crimes of war against Azerbaijanis" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204599.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev approves the credit accord between Baku and the Saudi Development Fund (<http://www.day.az/news/economy/204460.html>).

Education Minister Misir Mardanov receives Mario Baldi, the Italian ambassador to Azerbaijan, to discuss educational cooperation between the two countries (<http://www.day.az/news/society/204458.html>).

Ali Hasanov, head of the social-political department of the Presidential Administration, says that "Azerbaijan is seeking alternative paths of the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204464.html>).

Ziyafat Askarov, the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, says that "the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been in vain" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204436.html>).

Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov announces that Azerbaijan and Russia have reached agreement on several disputed territories in the course of delimiting the Azerbaijani-Russian border (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204559.html>).

US Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley says that "the US supports the Minsk process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204647.html>).

Robert Simmons, NATO Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, says that "it is still early to apply the mechanism of intensive dialogue in relations between NATO and Azerbaijan" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204532.html>).

Ali Alakparov, the head of the National Independence Party of Azerbaijan, says, "we must prepare for war to secure the return of Azerbaijani territories occupied by Armenia" (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/204402.html>).

Note to Readers

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