

TEAS

M A G A Z I N E



Culture | Public Affairs | Business



FC QARABAG AND FC QABALA – CARRYING THE HOPES OF AZERBAIJANIS IN EUROPEAN FOOTBALL

Also in this issue:

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Religious tolerance highlighted in Paris
OSCE condemns 'contact line' violence
Pierre Thilloz's apocalyptic evocation of IDPs' plight
Gwen Burchell – creating a better future for the next generation

10 / 2015
www.teas.eu

Please see inside for how to win £100 of Amazon vouchers



Welcome to the TEAS Magazine

The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS) is a UK-registered pan-European foundation dedicated to raising awareness of Azerbaijan and fostering closer economic, political and cultural links between that country and the nations of Europe.

As well as promoting the positive aspects of Azerbaijan, TEAS also highlights the plight of the 875,000 refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within the country. These people are unable to return to their homes and lands because of the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts by Armenia's armed forces – in defiance of four UN Security Council resolutions.

TEAS has three main facets to its operations:

- Culture – TEAS raises awareness of Azerbaijan's rich and vibrant culture to a worldwide audience by organising cultural events and operating as a networking centre.
- Business – TEAS supports its membership of European and Azerbaijani businesses. It provides a platform for organisations to establish links and strengthen their existing business relationships via a programme of networking opportunities across the regions.
- Public Affairs – TEAS works to increase awareness about Azerbaijan amongst key opinion-formers, key decision-makers and other political, academic and civil society stakeholders.

In pursuit of its objectives TEAS:

- Organises meetings with interested parties, opinion-formers and decision-makers
- Arranges roundtables, seminars, lectures and conferences
- Publishes pamphlets, reports, bulletins, books and produces films
- Facilitates fact-finding trips by politicians and business people.

Mailing List

TEAS is always bringing the latest news, views and interviews from Azerbaijan. Sign up to our mailing-list to receive the latest information straight to your inbox: www.teas.eu

Facebook

The TEAS Facebook page is your chance to learn about the latest news, events, campaigns and other Azerbaijan-related items. Visit and 'like' our page at: <http://bit.ly/TEASFB>.

Membership and Sponsorship

TEAS offers a range of corporate and individual membership packages, providing such benefits as advertising, trade missions, networking, business sector advice and hotel discounts.

TEAS also offers numerous sponsorship opportunities throughout the year for its events and conferences. To find out more, e-mail: membership@teas.eu.

Win £100 of Amazon vouchers!

Firstly, congratulations to Paul Stapleton, Subsurface Data Specialist, Shah Deniz Reservoir Management, who won the competition in the September issue of the *TEAS Magazine*. To stand a chance of winning £100 of Amazon vouchers, simply answer the following five questions, the answers to which will be found in this issue. In the case of a tie, a draw will be made. Previous winners are ineligible to enter, as are TEAS employees and their families. Please send all entries to editor@teas.eu by 17.00hrs (GMT) on 9 November.

1. Which Belgian club was beaten by FC Qarabag on 1 October?
2. Which country will organise the inaugural Baku European Grand Prix?
3. Who is the rapporteur for the PACE committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?
4. For which country is the President Milos Zeman?
5. Which French composer is the director of the *De Soie et De Feu (Silk and Fire) Festival*?

Upcoming Event For full details of all TEAS events, go to [www.teas.eu/upcoming events](http://www.teas.eu/upcoming-events)

10 November

A concert for Fiona, a great friend of Azerbaijan (London)

St. James's Church, 197 Piccadilly, London, W1J 9LL

RSVP via EventBrite at <http://bit.ly/fionaconcert>

A concert celebrating Fiona Maclachlan, featuring the leading musicians, composers and educators Dmitry Yablonsky (cello), Farhad Badalbeyli (piano) and Janna Gandelman (violin). The event is in aid of Cancer Research. Their varied repertoire will include works by Claude Debussy, Dmitry Shostakovich and Azer Rzaev.

Visions of Azerbaijan magazine, founded under the auspices of TEAS, recognised that Fiona was special. Much of her work is captured in the pages of the many *Visions* magazines and other TEAS publications.

This concert will be a simple celebration of a wonderful person who left more than her mark on this amazing country.



Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS

From the TEAS Director

As exchanges of fire across the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied territories continue on a daily basis, Ivica Dacic, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, has criticised the targeting of civilians by Armenian armed forces. Military casualties on both sides continue to mount, but nonetheless the only civilians to fall victim to sniper fire are on the Azerbaijani side. This upsurge in violence led Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, to strongly condemn Armenian provocations in a speech to the UN General Assembly.

Echoes of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh reverberated across Europe as FC Qarabag – which originated in the occupied territories – pulled off an unlikely win against the mighty Belgian team Sporting d'Anderlecht in the UEFA Europe League. Continuing the sporting theme, TEAS was delighted to be one of the sponsors of the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup, which was held one week prior to the main tournament. I was honoured to play for the British House of Commons and Lords team against the Japanese Parliamentary team, which resulted in a narrow win for the home side.

On the cultural front, an exhibition by Reza, a National Geographic Fellow, entitled *Azerbaijan – Land of Tolerance*, was held in Paris, encapsulating the inclusive nature of coexistence that makes Azerbaijan unique. There was also an enthusiastically-received jazz concert by pianist Emil Afrasiyab and *Azerbaijan Through the Lens* exhibition in the Alastian French town of Colmar, which is twinned with Sheki. This cultural extravaganza was rounded off with a performance at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées of Pierre Thilloy's 10th Symphony *Exil*, dedicated to all internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, accompanied by a stunning video montage that included footage of the green hills of Karabakh.

Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS

Qarabag and Qabala battle in Europe

Azerbaijani side FC Qarabag battled ferociously in their first match of the UEFA Europa League against the world-renowned North London club Tottenham Hotspur, playing at home at White Hart Lane on 17 September, supported by around 200 screaming Azerbaijani fans. Spurs' defender Kieran Trippier endured a tough first half as he made a slow start to the match, and he gave Qarabag the chance to take an early lead as he tripped Ansi Agolli in the penalty area. Qarabag's Brazilian playmaker Richard Almeida de Oliveira then stepped up to clip the penalty into the side of the net and stun the White Hart Lane crowd into silence just seven minutes into the match.

Despite a mighty onslaught led by new Spurs' signing Heung-Min Son – who scored two goals – FC Qarabag refused to go quietly as Spurs wasted chances to put the game beyond doubt. However, it was left to Spurs' Erik Lamela to crown the night with a decisive third goal just four minutes from time with a clever scooped finish.

The win gave Spurs the perfect start to their UEFA Europa League campaign, but demonstrated that the return match in Azerbaijan on 26 November will certainly be more challenging than they previously thought.

However, the tables were turned on 1 October, when FC Qarabag took on Belgian club Sporting d'Anderlecht in Baku to secure their first UEFA Europa League group stage win this season. This saw Richard Almeida de Oliveira score the only goal of the game in the 36th minute, thereby ending Anderlecht's six-game unbeaten run in all competitions. Qarabag, who have not conceded in their last five European home games, are now ranked second in Group J behind Tottenham Hotspur.

Meanwhile, the complex history of FC Qarabag, which is inextricably intertwined with the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, has formed the basis of a fascinating and well-researched article by football pundit Michael Yokhin in the UK's leading print/online football journal *FourFourTwo* (<http://bit.ly/qarabagfourfourtwo>). He writes: "It's impossible to talk about Qarabag without mentioning their unique and tragic history. They were established in Agdam, a town of rich history in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and played in the Azerbaijani championship during the Soviet Union era. After the empire ceased to exist, they won the title in 1993, but at the same time a terrible ethnic conflict erupted in the region.



Playing in Baku, the FC Qarabag defence proved invincible, despite the endeavours of Belgian club Sporting d'Anderlecht (Photo: Belga)

"Armenian forces captured Agdam, destroying most of it, including the stadium, and allegedly committing war crimes. The local Azerbaijani population had to flee to other parts of the country, leaving Agdam as the largest ghost town in the world. It remains empty today. The team retained the name while playing in Baku, and they still represent the Nagorno-Karabakh region, aspiring to return there after more than two decades. Recent success on the pitch is a source of huge pride, especially winning the championship title in 2014 and 2015, and achieving phenomenal results in European competitions. Players and fans alike feel like they fight for their homeland when facing top opposition in the Europa League. This is especially true for midfielder Gara Garayev, born in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992. His family had to leave the city of Fuzuli when he was an infant." It goes on to detail the achievements of Allahverdi Bagirov, a coach at the club who was killed by an anti-tank mine when serving in Agdam.

There have been similarly mixed fortunes for FC Qabala, the other Azerbaijani club in the UEFA Europa League. Following their match in Baku against BVB Dortmund on 22 October – which ended in a 3–1 defeat – Thomas Tuchel, Head Coach for the German side, said: "I have a huge respect for Qabala. They started well, whilst we lost our focus. We would have been in trouble if they had scored first."

The club had taken encouragement from a 0–0 draw with Greek side PAOK and narrow 2–1 defeat versus Kransodar of Russia in their opening Group C games. Despite the score, Roman Hyrgorchuk, Qabala coach, reflected positively on the performance, saying: "I have watched all of BVB Dortmund's games this season, and no other team managed to create as many opportunities against them. It is a pity we did not take them, but I am still proud of my players. It was very a useful match for us – we are stronger as a result." The return match in Germany will take place on 5 November.

Over 300 international politicians come together for the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup



Over 300 sporting politicians from ten parliaments competed for the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup trophy, which was supported by TEAS – represented by Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS and Jack Pegoraro, Head, TEAS UK (second and third from right)

TEAS has supported the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup from 13–18 September – in which more than 300 rugby-loving politicians from ten parliaments around the globe compete – in anticipation of the Rugby World Cup, which was subsequently hosted in the UK.

Launched 20 years ago, and now in its sixth edition, the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup has forged myriad international relationships



Lionel Zetter's participation in the UK Parliament vs. Japanese Parliament match was featured on the BBC television programme *Daily Politics*

between politicians and decision-makers through a shared passion for the game.

The 2015 event kicked off with a first round of matches on 13 September at Rugby School, Warwickshire, where William Webb Ellis picked up the ball and ran during a football match in 1823, thereby giving birth to the eponymous game. The tournament continued at the Richmond Rugby Club ground, close to Twickenham, the home of British rugby.

After the cup was raised by a triumphant Australian team, there was an additional game featuring the Japanese delegation, led by Yoshiro Mori, former Japanese Prime Minister, in advance of the next edition of the Rugby World Cup, to be hosted in Japan. This match featured a run-on from Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS, and rugby aficionado.

Mark Pawsey MP (Rugby and Bulkington) said: "As the MP for the birthplace of Rugby football, I am utterly delighted to see the game celebrated in this way by my colleagues from 10 parliaments from across the world. It is excellent to see so many people coming together through a shared love of the sport; to herald the forthcoming Rugby World Cup, hosted in the UK; and to raise funds for three worthwhile charities."

TEAS' support of the Parliamentary Rugby World Cup benefited three UK charities – the Rugby Football Union (RFU) Injured Players Foundation; HITZ Rugby, which benefits young, economically-challenged young people; and the School of Hard Knocks, which uses sport to tackle the issues surrounding unemployment, anti-social behaviour, crime and health.

Bahrain to organise Azerbaijan F1



The Baku European Grand Prix is set to benefit from the application of Bahrainian expertise (Photo: Tike)

It has been announced that Bahrain will organise the inaugural Baku European Grand Prix, due to be held on 17 July 2016. Bahrain won the bid to organise the race after fierce competition from the UK, Australia, the UAE, Russia, India and Hungary.

The contract follows the successful Bahrainian organisation of the debut F1 race in India in 2011 and the UAE F1 race in 2009, together with several other key races and events. Bahrain has also achieved a reputation for its expertise, as it is the home of motorsport in the Middle East. The 51 laps of this daytime Grand Prix will be held on a 20-corner track that runs for just over 6km in Baku city centre and along the Baku Bulvar.

LSE Undergraduate Programme to be taught at UNEC

It has been announced that courses developed by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) are to be taught at the Azerbaijan State University of Economics (UNEC).

Adalat Muradov, Rector, UNEC, explained to the new intake of students that studying the LSE syllabus would enable them to use LSE teaching resources, and that gaining LSE-validated degrees would enable them to become more attractive on the labour market. The first lecture at UNEC was conducted by Tyson Lemons, Director, Academic Affairs, UNEC. He spoke about the advantages

of LSE teaching, and commented that curriculum development, educational quality and management of the educational process would be directly implemented by LSE.

Altogether, 12 major subjects over three years will be taught in accordance with the current LSE curriculum. The final exams will be held at the end of each academic year (May–June) and the results will be sent to LSE for assessment. Successful graduates will receive their undergraduate degrees from the LSE, and the diplomas will be awarded during the Graduation Day in London.

Prague adds its voice towards dismissing so-called 'elections'

The Czech Foreign Ministry has dismissed any recognition of the constitutional and legal framework behind the so-called 'elections' held in Armenian-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding regions on 13 September. The Ministry noted that Prague supports peaceful resolution of

the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh within the principles of international law.

Official Baku has condemned this provocative move by the occupying forces, describing the so-called elections as an open violation of international law without

any legal standing. In addition to the Czech Republic, the Azerbaijani stance gained support from Bahrain, China, France, Georgia, Germany, Pakistan, Turkey, the UK, and Ukraine, amongst other countries, in addition to such bodies as the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC), OSCE and the EU.

Religious tolerance celebrated in the City of Lights



The provocative and verisimilitudinous images by Reza, capturing believers in all the Abrahamic faiths, was placed on display at the City Hall of the first arrondissement

Due to the work of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Azerbaijan has been omnipresent in the French capital throughout September, with the Azerbaijani Village being presented in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal – opposite the Louvre – as part of the *Villages du Monde* initiative and the hosting of renowned photographer Reza's *Azerbaijan – Land of Tolerance* exhibition at the City Hall of the first arrondissement. This focused on the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other communities that are present in Azerbaijan, and this was complemented by a conference entitled *Religious tolerance: the culture of coexistence in Azerbaijan*. This was attended by various French and Azerbaijani religious leaders, together with Mubariz Gurbanly, Chairman, Azerbaijani State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations.

Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijani First Lady and President, Heydar Aliyev Foundation, explained how the country is located at the crossroads of civilisations and cultures, and represents a bridge between Asia and Europe. This led to the country emerging as the embodiment of cultural and religious diversity, where mosques, churches and synagogues are constructed, respected and maintained with state assistance, all religious freedoms are ensured, and believers have equal rights. She commented: "We have never experienced any confrontations on religious or ethnic grounds. The relationship between the state and religions has played an integral role in preserving of the traditions of tolerance in our country, and the conditions, created in Azerbaijan, give reason to say that there is no alternative to multiculturalism."

The principle of secularity is enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of Azerbaijan, which covers relations between the religions and state, and one of the important elements of tolerance is that its preservation has become state policy, and that political stability, social and economic development contributed to the achievement of this.

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation has undertaken extensive restoration of religious monuments and shrines, participated in the construction of the department of Islamic Art in the Louvre, the restoration of the Roman catacombs, the creation of Jewish schools, and the repair of churches and cathedrals in Strasbourg and across France.

In Azerbaijan, there are currently seven synagogues, two secondary schools, a college, three Jewish kindergartens and a home for elderly persons. Milikh Yevdayev, Chairman, Azerbaijani Religious Community of Mountain Jews, explained that the Azerbaijani and Jewish peoples had always co-existed without any issues. He commented: "In a Muslim country, the state has built a synagogue for us – there is nothing comparable anywhere else in the world." Alexander Ischein, Archbishop of Baku and Azerbaijani Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, stressed that the basis of the unique Azerbaijani mentality is that believers in all religions have equal rights and participate in public life.



Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijani First Lady and President, Heydar Aliyev Foundation, views the exhibition, which encapsulates her country's inclusive approach to religion and culture

A similar conference also took place in Strasbourg, attended by Mr Gurbanly and chaired by Catherine Zuber, Regional Councillor, Alsace Region. The delegates comprised representatives of religious communities from both Azerbaijan and France.

ASAN Imza showcased in Marseille

ASAN Imza has been presented at *World Smart Week 2015* in Marseille, France, one of the world's most prestigious events dedicated to the topics of e- and m-ID, contactless services, smart infrastructure solutions and cyber security. Jana Krimpe, Founder, B.EST Solutions, Azerbaijan, gave a presentation during the *World e-ID and Cybersecurity* conference within the plenary session *Mobile ID – from eGov to mGov*. B.EST Solutions is the developer and operator of the ASAN Izmza mobile authentication and signature service designated for granting access to public and private e-services, together with the signing of e-documents by using a mobile phone.

The presentation also covered such topics as the development of mobile ID infrastructure, based on public-private partnerships, the technological basis of

ASAN Imza and the various cases of its usage, ranging from e-services to cross-border online platforms. The mobile ID



model was showcased – comprising a centralised mechanism of interaction that ensures the highest security for all involved parties. It was mentioned that its

flexibility remains the principal advantage in the process of deploying mobile ID technology by e-service providers, ensuring a rapid rate of subsequent development, and attracting a high level of international interest in the technology.

Delegates were informed about the ASAN Service, the Azerbaijani model of provision of socially-oriented services to the public; AsanPay, a single platform portal for online payment of state penalties and fees and public utilities; and the mechanism for interaction between ASAN Imza and the Call Centre of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Taxes, the purpose of which is to provide tax services in the most efficient manner, negating any possibility of corruption. For more information on ASAN Imza, go to www.asanimza.az, and for details of the ASAN xidmet centres and range of services, visit www.asan.gov.az.



To mark World Humanitarian Day, the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) team, in co-operation with Bakcell and UAFA, brought together children with special needs to jointly pay respect to those courageous people who risk their lives and give up their comforts to bring aid to those whose lives are shattered by war and disasters (Photo: UN Information Centre)

Gwen Burchell – tackling disability, institutionalisation and attitudes head-on

UK-born Gwen Burchell has lived in Azerbaijan since 1998, where she heads the United Aid for Azerbaijan (UAFA) organisation. This has a mission to 'aid long-term development of life in Azerbaijan, with a particular focus on children, health and education.' Initially focusing on the needs of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, it has particularly concentrated on the rights of abandoned and disabled children. In 2004, Gwen received the MBE for Special Services to Education in Azerbaijan, and in 2012 Gwen and UAFA were awarded Runner-Up status in *The Influencer Award*, run by the *Directory of Social Change*. Neil Watson met Gwen during a rare trip to London to find out more:

What brought you to Azerbaijan for the first time in 1998, and what prompted you to establish UAFA?

Before coming to Azerbaijan I was living in the UK, where I worked for a children's charity called the Rainbow Trust, which helps terminally-ill children and their families. My background is in management science, so my typical career direction would have been into management consultancy. However, the corporate world did not attract me, so I found myself at the Rainbow Trust and discovered that I gained a great deal from being employed in the social sector, in addition to undertaking some voluntary work.

I have always been a keen traveller, and knew quite a lot about Azerbaijan, as my father was regularly visiting the country whilst he led the early oil negotiations with SOCAR, beginning in 1992. Azerbaijanis were constantly visiting our house, and the country became part of our family.

I was around 25 years of age, decided that I wanted to get some more experience, and thought that the ideal place to visit would be Azerbaijan. This was quite a simple decision – I immediately felt comfortable and started travelling around the country. I became involved with a small NGO named the Leonard Cheshire Centre of Conflict Recovery and started to visit the IDP and refugee camps. At the time, this was an adventure, and I was entering unknown frontiers. During the following two years, I became increasingly

focused on children's issues, and started to visit children's institutions. At the time, the situation in Romania was receiving a great deal of media coverage, and it became evident that there were similar situations in all Eastern Bloc and former Soviet states – including Azerbaijan. All my work has just been an evolution, with needs presenting themselves, leading to addressing of the relevant policy and research issues.

Azerbaijan has quickly embraced the market economy and implemented all the necessary mechanisms. However, social policy remains stuck in a Soviet timewarp. Some legislation has been reformed, but the planning management and performance practices are still rooted in Soviet structures. It is impossible to provide modern, effective social services if all mechanisms relate to a period when everything was centrally planned, with a focus on targets and ensuring that each person was contributing to the Soviet machine. Only then is it possible to introduce human, children's and disability rights agendas. However, to meet those, the entire system needs to be addressed. Attitudes need to evolve, and that takes a great deal of time. UAFA has created models and instigated practices that can be adopted and replicated by ministries to help with this evolution of state services so they are commensurate with the market economy.

UAFA has had a huge impact in terms of health, social protection, and education. It has become very well-known, has made some tangible policy reforms, and created some models that have achieved assimilation at government level. I believe our work has provided a firm foundation for expedited development.

What was the situation in children's institutions in Azerbaijan at the time?

When UAFA started its work, it must be remembered that there was no budget for social institutions, and they had remained underfunded over a long period. Very little money was made available at the end of the Soviet period, and nothing was invested in these places. When we first started visiting social institutions, buildings were crumbling, children were running around, and



Gwen Burchell receives the Robin Bennett Award from the British Business Group in Azerbaijan in May 2015, acknowledging her role in developing Azerbaijani-UK relations

there was insufficient food. Any children with disabilities remained in bed all day, because the Soviet model was that disabled children were classified as ‘sick’, and it was thought that ‘sick’ people should remain in bed until they were cured, even if there was no way they would be cured of their ‘sickness.’ These children were put into bed and fed and cleaned there. Even mobile, yet disabled, children were put into bed, and subsequently lost their mobility.

Due to our good working relationship with all Azerbaijani ministries, we have been able to introduce a programme that has shown some success in reversing this policy, if adopted on a wide scale. This is particularly because we focused on disability first, rather than initially focusing on typical children and thereafter introducing services and reform systems that were fully inclusive. Whatever mechanisms are implemented for disabled children are actually applicable to all children. However, a preliminary focus on typical children can mean that certain elements are unsuitable for their disabled counterparts.

International organisations are increasingly becoming aware of the UAFA approach, and we are taking calls from around the world regarding our strategy. Some progress needs to be achieved in terms of budgetary planning and job descriptions of care staff in the institutions, but that is the next stage.

We have always employed entirely local staff, all of which have been trained by foreign specialists. The majority of those who have provided training for us over the years have given up their free time and given instruction during their holidays. Many trainers have come on a recurrent basis, including occupational therapists, physiotherapists and communications specialists; special needs teachers; and social workers. Some UAFA members have also gone for training abroad, particularly to Israel, which has a very good programme. Our team has really developed its skills and experience, and most of the team – the core members – have stayed with me for 10–15 years.

What were your initial aid projects?

The first projects were charitable in nature and located in the IDP and refugee camps. One of these was located in an old oil camp in Saatly, where engineers attempted to drill the deepest ever borehole during the Soviet period. The security guard proved very supportive of our work. Educational facilities were very basic, and we visited a garage where children were having lessons. UAFA then successfully asked BP for some money to transform the garage into a functioning school. We created an excellent school environment for the children, and sourced some money from ExxonMobil to undertake renovations to makeshift family homes, providing them with running water and basic sanitation. The famous railway carriage camps were nearby, and sanitation was very poor, so we found some money to create some proper toilets.

This was a wonderful achievement for UAFA, but all the big international organisations were also present and quite adequately dealing with the emergency situation. The catalyst for starting to work in an orphanage was when a friend gave me some bags of old children’s clothes.



Some of the children who have benefited from UAFA’s activities

Immediately following arrival at one orphanage, we decided this was where we were best able to meet a great need that was not currently being addressed by any other organisations.

I then began to learn more about how



Children benefiting from UAFA on a visit to see the petroglyphs in Gobustan

disability is addressed in the country – for example, one family at the camp for refugees and IDPs we supported had three sons with a congenital disability that deteriorated over time, leading them to lose control of their limbs following the onset of adolescence. I then discovered some of the issues dealing with congenital disabilities in Azerbaijan, and disability became a very strong focus for me. I entered various institutions, and saw many rows of children remaining dependent on very few adults to feed and clean them. It became evident that, if they did not become independent and learn to feed and clean themselves, they could die of malnutrition. If the children didn’t shout loudly enough, the staff members may not feed them.

We started to focus on skills development for children, emphasising the need for self-care skills and optimising child protection strategies. This also assisted them in developing feelings of independence and self-esteem, with the aim of helping them to avoid exploitation, abuse and neglect. UAFA propounded the necessity of equipping children with the skills and opportunities to protect themselves and other children, who may be in an even worse state. This became our very strong focus of activity, and has remained the case.

What were the challenges you experienced?

UAFA has never experienced any political opposition – it has met a need that has otherwise gone unaddressed. Over the years, we have had some contracts with ministries for community-based rehabilitation services. We are also about to enter into a contract with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Education to continue preschool services in 17 villages in a project that was piloted with EU funds. We hope to expand this year-on-year. We have also been promoting the local giving that has generated some income over the past two years or so. Many people donate through charitable means – it is difficult, but we are overcoming distrust from local people about giving to organisations. More income is now being generated by local society, and this is necessary to ensure long-term stability. UAFA has now proven that it is transparent and responsible with any funds received.

How did you work towards bringing abandoned and disabled children out of institutions and into society?

Actually, the key challenge is to prevent initial placement in institutions. Much UAFA work is concerned with service provision and development in communities to give families an alternative before they have placed a child. Emotional bonds are broken in institutions, and it is then very hard to reintegrate a child back into the family. We have managed to return some children to their biological families, but this is very hard. We need to assess why parents have placed their children into institutions in the first instance – frequently this is due to issues of poverty. It is necessary to address issues of social protection, employment and cash benefits.

UAFA has developed a cadre of social workers who have worked with one of the ministries to demonstrate how a social worker can help a family beyond just the cash benefit, addressing all their issues, including family breakups and identifying the reasons why a child may end up in an institution. Unfortunately, the children in our institutions are there to stay. In the two institutions where we work, we undertake many activities, such as taking children into town. At one stage we had the children joining classes in a local school, and were taking them out to public activities and events so they could gain greater integration with the local community, thereby destroying any preconceptions held by the local population.



Children from UAFA in Sumgayit

Thankfully, there is an absence of negative stigma regarding disability in Azerbaijan. Normal emotions are more connected with pity – ordinary people feel great sorrow, and often do not want to look, as it makes them feel sad and ashamed.

Once these emotions are tackled, inclusion becomes very easy. Judging from my own experiences in Azerbaijan, I would say inclusion seems to be easier to reach here than in the UK, for example. It is noteworthy that Ilham Zakiyev, the blind Olympic gold medal-winning Judoka, carried the final torch for the Baku2015 European Games. When the torch was being carried around Azerbaijan and came to Ganja, one of the torchbearers was a young man that

had come through UAFA since childhood and was confined to a wheelchair, due to cerebral palsy. Greater inclusion of disabled persons in society is definitely happening, and we are very positive about such developments.

Did UAFA play a role in drafting the State Programme on Deinstitutionalisation and Alternative Services?

This ran from 2006–15, and we were very actively involved during this period and from 2004–06 in determining the supporting mechanisms and goals and activities. However, the issue with deinstitutionalisation, disability and child protection issues is that they are multidimensional and cannot be solely addressed by one ministry. No mechanism has been designed or implemented that enables ministries to work together, yet this is necessary for a deinstitutionalisation programme, as it has to be planned and managed from an overriding body above the ministries. There should be a mechanism that assists with collective planning, and that enables outcomes to be evaluated together.

Deinstitutionalisation is very complex, and involves engaging social workers, who will be tasked with developing individual case strategies for each child. It is necessary to also address the benefits system. For example, one strategy could be to develop a voucher system for families so they have their meals at the local school. In 2006, there was no capacity to have that level of discussion or understanding. Once this state programme finishes, the next phase will hopefully comprise a more co-ordinated effort. I hope an umbrella body will be established to deal with such matters, and we have advocated such a move.

What is the UAFA Early Intervention Project?

This relates to early detection of disability and developmental delays, addressing these at the earliest opportunity. Detection should ideally take place before the age of three years, and the child is then referred to the relevant service. As no intervention policy was in place in Azerbaijan, doctors would typically advocate waiting to see if the problem disappears, but this would often result in treatment beginning too late. We developed this clinical protocol in collaboration with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Health, and it comprises a set of guidelines for all medical practitioners at the child's point of entry to the system. The policy is in place – now the practice needs to follow.

Health practices need to modernise – for example, I recently performed some

hearing tests for children in one region. One little girl was eight years old and had only partial hearing in both ears, and the doctor erroneously advised that it was now too late to have a hearing aid. According to her parents, a couple of other children had suffered a fever and went deaf. This was clearly meningitis, but the doctors in this particular region did not recognise that and are clearly unable to treat this.

The upgrading of training is down to money, but is also determined by social policy modernisation. If the system is managed using the Soviet practices of centralisation and control, there is no incentive for doctors to improve. Choice and competition are necessary to raise the level.

A plethora of private medical services are now available in Azerbaijan, which is fine for those who can afford them, or wish to go somewhere else for treatment, such as Iran or Turkey. I have noticed a new atmosphere at the Azerbaijani Ministry of Health, which previously focused on hospital renovation and capital building projects. It now understands that it must address the actual content of health policy. Services need to be evaluated by outcomes, rather than reliance on targets, otherwise the desired quality will not be achieved. This is a totally new way of thinking for public services in Azerbaijan, and one that UAFA can play a valuable role in supporting.

Which services are in the current UAFA focus?

We run services in preschool, health, community-based rehabilitation, the education of children with disabilities, social work and case management services, and these have operated across Azerbaijan for 10–15 years. We are increasingly building up a network in each region, comprising social workers, community-based rehabilitation and preschool services. This is not centralised at all, although we are constantly demonstrating how they should work together and refer children to each other for support in regions where there are specific specialisations. A positive move is the request by several Azerbaijani universities for UAFA to develop short courses for child development specialists.



Go to www.uafa.org.uk for more information on UAFA.

Deadly violence on the 'contact line' condemned by the OSCE

Ivica Dacic, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Serbian Foreign Minister, has condemned the upsurge in violence on the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied regions. On the sidelines of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in New York, he met the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, tasked with establishing a negotiated resolution to the conflict, namely Igor Popov (Russian Federation), James Warlick (US) and Pierre Andrieu (France), alongside Andrzej Kasprzyk, his Personal Representative.



Ivica Dacic, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, resolutely condemned the increased violence on the 'contact line', seen here during his meeting with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in New York

Mr Dacic strongly condemned the recent escalation, offering his condolences to the victims' families, urging all to show maximum restraint and to work towards de-escalation. The situation on the 'contact line' remained tense for several days, as the Armenian military continued to break the ceasefire using large-calibre machine guns. Frequent shelling by the Armenian military also jeopardises the lives of residents in the Azerbaijani settlements close to the 'contact line'.

Azerbaijani civilian Bahram Baghirov was killed during Armenian shelling of villages in the Azerbaijani Agdam region by the Armenian military on the night of 26 September. According to

the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry, during the period of 26–28 September, four Azerbaijani servicemen were killed during heavy battles. The violence also claimed the lives of more than ten Armenian servicemen and wounded more than 16 others.

Mr Dacic expressed his full support for the work of the OSCE Minsk Group, tasked with establishing a negotiated settlement to the conflict, and reiterated their call for advancing peace, together with the implementation of confidence-building measures.

Mammadyarov condemns Armenian policy at the UN

Speaking during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 30 September, Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, commented on the ongoing Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, saying: "It is well-known that Armenia unleashed the war and used force against Azerbaijan, occupied almost one fifth of its territory, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, carried out ethnic cleansing of the seized areas by expelling about one million Azerbaijanis from their homes, and committed war crimes and crimes against humanity during the conflict."

He recalled that the international community has "consistently deplored, in the strongest terms, the use of force by Armenia against Azerbaijan and the resulting occupation of its territories." He also mentioned the four outstanding UN Security Council resolutions from 1993 that: "demand the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying

forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan."

Mr Mammadyarov continued: "Azerbaijan is the most interested party in the swift negotiated settlement of the conflict." However, he warned that: "If the negotiations fail to bring about the complete and unconditional withdrawal of the armed forces of Armenia from our occupied lands, Azerbaijan will be compelled to use its inherent right of self-defence, guaranteed under Article 51 of the UN Charter to ensure the restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognised borders."

The comments came five days after he met Edward Nalbandian, his Armenian counterpart, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Brokered by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and Andrzej Kasprzyk, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Mr Mammadyarov stressed that the



Addressing the UN General Assembly, Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, made clear the Armenian culpability for the conflict

current status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable.

He added that Armenia pursues the goal of undermining the negotiation process through various provocative actions, including escalation of the situation on the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the occupied territories and on the Armenian–Azerbaijani border. Mr Mammadyarov also highlighted that Armenia hinders civil society contacts between the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has the potential to operate as a confidence-building measure.

PACE rapporteur listens to 'contact line' testimonies

The recent escalation of tensions on the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied territories has led to renewed concerns regarding the possibility of an armed conflict. This led a representative from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to visit the 'contact line' to check the real situation on the ground. According to the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry, Robert Walter, rapporteur for the PACE committee on Political Affairs and Democracy for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, visited the regions close to the 'contact line', and met both servicemen and residents.

During a meeting with Zakir Hasanov, Azerbaijani Defence Minister, Mr Walter expressed his wish to visit the 'contact line', and was subsequently taken there by helicopter. Mr Walter saw the Barda, Tartar, and Agdam regions, met servicemen, and observed the entrenchment of the opposing side. Residents of the Gapanli

village in the Tartar region, who are constantly exposed to shelling from the Armenian side, informed the PACE rapporteur about the use of mortars and large-calibre weapons by the enemy. He was also informed that Armenian shells recently wounded two women and a child who were attending a wedding.

Mr Walter explained that he would incorporate this information within his report, and expressed confidence about resolving the conflict within the norms and principles of international law.

In late August, OSCE representatives met residents of the settlements located near the 'contact line' following their monitoring mission. The residents spoke of regular ceasefire violations by the Armenians, commenting that their lives remain under threat due to the ongoing shelling of villages. They also complained that the work of international mediators has failed to yield any results.



Opera aficionado Asli Samadova has undertaken considerable cultural detective work to uncover the roots of *Turandot* amidst the works of Nizami Ganjavi

Nessun Dorma – a Puccini aria with Azerbaijani origins

Having studied business at the University of California in Santa Cruz, the Bocconi University in Milan and LSE in London, and now working as a freelance consultant, based between Baku and Europe, Asli Samadova is truly a citizen of the world. However, she has never forgotten her Azerbaijani roots, and this has led her to launch various initiatives highlighting the connections between European culture and that of her homeland, the latest manifestation of which is an animated video entitled *The Story of Continuity: from Nizami to Puccini*. Neil Watson spoke to Asli in Italy soon after the video was released on YouTube:

What prompted your initial interest in opera and classical music?

I vaguely remember my first visit to the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Baku to see Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* ballet at the age of four or five years. However, my real passion for opera did not evolve until I visited La Scala for the first time. I had applied to Bocconi University and, as much as I hoped to gain entry on a full scholarship – which I eventually obtained – I dreamed of living in a city that housed such a great opera house so I could visit it more frequently. I took out

membership of the Young Friends of the Bayreuth Festival, and this facilitated my attendance at many special opera events across Europe.

How did you uncover the connection between Nizami Ganjavi's *Seven Beauties* and the plot of Puccini's *Turandot*?

I would like to highlight that this was a personal discovery for me, as I only subsequently read a series of academic articles published since 1941 regarding the oriental influences on *Turandot* – Puccini's last opera. I also found mentions of Nizami in programmes published by La Scala and other opera houses, although these were inconsistent, and one of the objectives of this initiative was to ensure that the name of Nizami is referenced in all publications, going forward. This will also serve to increase awareness of the Azerbaijani poet and highlight studies of his work in both academic and musicological circles.

In early 2013, I embarked on a quest for personal identity, and tried to relate to those elements of Azerbaijani history and culture that, in my opinion, would help me reassert my national identity. I have been living abroad for a long time, where I had been exposed to myriad cultures and lifestyles, so I was concerned about losing my roots and dedicating too much time to my career as a business consultant.

When reading Nizami, it became immediately apparent that the plots of the poem and the opera are inextricably interlinked. In the wake of this random discovery, I immediately started to look for evidence. Living in Europe provided me with the opportunity to visit certain institutions and meet various people working in the sector of Oriental poetry, opera and comparative studies. Only at that point did I discover the research undertaken in the West, which remains strictly within academic – not operatic – circles. I was also surprised to learn that this subject has not been studied to any great extent in Azerbaijan.

Reading Nizami's *Seven Beauties* was full of discoveries. I was projecting the story of the personal quest for love and wisdom by King Bahram to what was happening in my life. However, I was most struck by the story narrated to Bahram by “the ruddy-cheeked fair Slav princess – flame-hued, with water gentleness”*, namely his wife Nasrin-Nush in the Red Pavilion on Tuesday, the day of Mars.

According to Professor Christina van Ruymbeke, renowned Nizami scholar at the University of Cambridge, who greatly assisted with my comprehension of Nizami, the Tuesday tale is the central story of the entire poem, and concerns the qualities that a ruler should have to wisely rule a state. In the story by Nizami, a state is allegorically represented by a woman – a nameless princess of “Russia's far-off lands”*, according to Nasrin-Nush's tale. However, it was Professor Maria Teresa Giaveri of Turin University who investigated the link between the poem and opera and produced an article in the programme for the La Scala 2010–11 season. Coupled with my conversations with Professor van Ruymbeke, meeting Professor Giaveri and a few other scholars considerably assisted in the working process that led to *The Story of Continuity: from Nizami to Puccini*.

Why do you think the roots of the story became submerged over time?

The issues are attributable to the fact that the subject lies between two academic fields – comparative literature and musicology. In comparative literature, researchers study the links and influences of Eastern thought and literature on Western cultures. Dante and numerous Italian Renaissance authors and French Troubadour poets have been strongly influenced by the Oriental depiction of love and idealisation of the woman. However, very few musicologists focus on studying an opera's libretto.

In the operatic world, according to Franco Pulcini, Editor of La Scala publications, music remains the firm focus. The Italian composer and Puccini scholar Lorenzo Ferrero also adds that many Puccini biographers are satisfied with the fact that the libretto for *Turandot* is based on Carlo Gozzi's and Friedrich von Schiller's eponymous plays. However, no-one has thought to investigate from where Gozzi and Schiller derived their plot. One of the possible 'chain reactions' is that François Pétis de la Croix, a French traveller, took a piece from Nizami's poem – we cannot prove whether he was aware of Nizami's authorship – or transcribed one of the many oral versions of the poem from a dervish storyteller traveller in the Middle East. De la Croix gives the name Turandot to a nameless princess of Nizami – or again, transcribes that which he heard – and includes the story in his *Thousand and One Days*. The book was a bestseller at the time, but was then forgotten and overlooked by historians.

More than half a century passed before the story attracted the Italian writer Gozzi, whose comedia dell'arte induced Schiller to write his own version – *Turandot, the Princess of China*. In the 1920s, this piece attracted Puccini's interest, and he asked his librettists Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni to work on his new opera – *Turandot*. However, if one opens any book on Puccini or *Turandot*, very little information is given about the creative process and as to whether Puccini, Adami or Simoni were aware of the Oriental roots of the poem. Nizami originally placed the story in the lands of Slavs, whereas the story is associated with China in the West.

How has this revelation been received by operatic aficionados, critics and singers around the world?

The reception has been quite mixed, and both the video and subject require further promotion. To date, the soprano Nina Stemme has demonstrated the greatest interest amidst the operatic world, and she sang *Turandot* during the Milan 2015 Expo season and in the Dalhalla Opera in Sweden. I have reached out to a few other leading theatres and opera singers, so hopefully the initiative will gain more

support. The educational possibilities of the video have not yet been fully explored, but we are working in that direction.

The video aesthetics have attracted many plaudits: the Creative 141 office in Moscow worked hard to reflect the design brief and incorporate the relevant references into the final product. However, to date, the video has only attracted a few thousand YouTube views. Although the video was discussed and shared on opera-related groups on Facebook, it requires a wider audience. Obviously, it is an intellectual cultural product about cultural bridges between East and West, and thus does not rank among mass-appeal trending subjects.

The video will benefit from celebrity endorsements and mentions in reviews of *Turandot*. Together with our project partners, the Azerbaijan Student Network (ASN), we have been working on asking numerous institutions and public figures to share the video via social media channels or, if these are media/blogs, to publish our press release or accept our exclusively written material. Nazim Aliyev, Chairman, ASN, believes that: "It is the heritage that we pass to the history of humanity at the end of the day. We have just started, and expect that finding similarities ... [will] bring us towards a better future." Material has been published in Russia, Sweden and the UK, and I would like to thank TEAS for the media support and assistance in gaining press coverage.

Why do you feel it is important for the legacy of Nizami Ganjavi to be known in the West?

This question attracts a multilayered answer. Firstly, I admire Nizami, and find him an extraordinary example of timeless wisdom. As a great visionary, he was a proponent of such concepts as gender equality and state governance that were way ahead of his time. In the West, the poetry of Rumi and Omar Khayyam is widely known and cited, whereas very few people, other than those in academic circles, have ever heard of Nizami. My interest and passion for Nizami attracted a similar interest from my international friends, but they struggled to find books on Nizami in their language. The Italian version is a plain text and I



The mythical King Bahram goes hunting – 15th century Persian miniatures depicting sequences from Nizami's poetry inspired the animators

was disappointed reading it. The best English translation is by Professor Julie Scott Meisami, Lecturer in Persian at the University of Oxford, and the most effective French translation, according to Professor Giaveri, is by Michael Barry of Princeton University, who is well-known in Baku.

This little-known story connects the East and West effectively – and Nizami can be more approachable through the artistic prism of another great creator – Puccini! The two pieces are imbued with complementary beauty if considered together – "Analogy is the key to harmony!" – as Nazim Aliyev likes to repeat. This could be a great example of the positive influence of the Orient, and Islam on the Western world – an aspect receiving decreasing coverage in the media. This could be one reason why the video has attracted scant attention, to date – as the concepts of multiculturalism, cultural bridges and cross-cultural inspiration – are currently unpopular.

I admire the example of how Italy has approached Dante's heritage – students spend one year studying his *Divina Comedia*. Maybe this was also the reason I started to read Nizami myself: during my schooldays we had only one lesson about Nizami, focusing instead on Russian and international literature, which were considered to have the hierarchy of importance. I am now informed that his legacy is attracting more in-depth study, but I have not encountered many modern studies of Nizami from Azerbaijani sources – all my knowledge comes from Soviet and Western academics.



The Seven Beauties of various nationalities found in a locked room by King Bahram

What led you to create the concept for the new animated video *The Story of Continuity: from Nizami to Puccini*?

In order to gain support for the idea, I had to design a concept that was 'easy to digest' and sufficiently aesthetically appealing to retain the attention of the viewer. I was inspired by the School of Life and TED short animated videos on several educational topics, and shared my idea with the ASN management.



Turandot in her Oriental finery

The film is redolent of illuminated manuscripts and of traditional puppet theatres. Were you trying to create this aesthetic?

Yes indeed – and the pop-up book format is a reference to my childhood – there is always a mix of mystery, surprise and great mise-en-scène when flipping through such books. Our video has many references – the garments of King Bahram and Pehlevan (aka Calaf, if one refers to the European interpretation of Nizami's plot) are copies of the 15th century Persian miniatures that depict scenes from Nizami's poems. There were also attempts to recreate the garments for all seven princesses and other characters, based on historical costume research. The book that opens in the first seconds of the video is a copy of Edizioni Ricordi's 1926 deluxe edition of Puccini's scores with Leopoldo Metlicovitz' illustrations. When the video narrates the story of *Turandot*, she is dressed in a garment resembling that by the Italian designer Umberto Brunelleschi for the 1926 premiere of *Turandot* in La Scala.

How is the film being distributed, and will it be screened prior to any operatic performances of *Turandot*?

Ideally, this would have been a great way to communicate the legacy of Nizami. However, the project has some limitations, and the video is currently available only on the YouTube channel, as the soundtrack license for Puccini's music, as performed by Vanessa-Mae, is limited exclusively to this platform. If we wish to showcase the video elsewhere, it has to be extended for an extra fee. There are myriad possible uses of the video, but these are not only limited by the budget.

It is challenging to establish connections with relevant institutions and possible stakeholders. Knowledge of Nizami's contribution to *Turandot* is not well-known in opera, and not everyone follows up. We are open and happy for any assistance in this difficult task – this is our "protest against forgetting"**.

The film forms part of the *Milli Irsimiz – the National Heritage of Azerbaijan* initiative. Will the other parts of the series focus on similar connections between Eastern and Western culture?

The *Milli Irsimiz – the National Heritage of Azerbaijan (MI Project)* initiative is the realisation of my personal quest. This is envisioned as an ongoing curatorial experiment of sharing discoveries about Azerbaijan with the wider world – these are facts that I have a need and desire to learn about myself, and feel will be interesting to disseminate, using various media, to make them accessible to likeminded individuals.

When it comes to the Nizami–Puccini link, I would like to delve further, or better say, to create opportunities for the others. During my studies for the video, I met Professor Giaveri, who wishes to organise a conference on Nizami and Puccini and publish a book, yet struggles to find support. Professor van Ruymbeke believes that Nizami studies require new scholars and fresh research. I personally see a gap in Nizami studies in Azerbaijan, and maybe this is one of the reasons he is acknowledged as a Persian poet! By producing the YouTube video, ASN and I indicated certain areas that require attention and support. This is my first experience of working with an Azerbaijan-rooted NGO. Hitherto,



The video animation was inspired by Leopoldo Metlicovitz' illustrations and Umberto Brunelleschi's set design and costumes for the 1926 premiere of *Turandot*

all my other initiatives were exclusively supported by international organisations, such as the US Department of State in 2006 for a social marketing campaign to protect the architectural heritage of Baku and the Absheron Peninsula, and the UNESCO Participation Programme this year, dedicated to Azerbaijani carpets. Before ASN supported the Nizami video initiative, it was pitched to various donors. Any attempt to use international funds, as a person not directly affiliated to any organisations, nor NGOs, results in many constraints. It is imperative to find sufficient financial and organisational support for the MI Project.

My role model, Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, who is known for his obsessive interview practice, always poses one recurring question about unrealised projects. I hope that, in time, my realised projects will outnumber their unrealised counterparts. I cannot say, nor plan, for now, but I certainly aim to focus on a few more topics demonstrating the East–West connection.

To see the video *The Story of Continuity: from Nizami to Puccini*, go to <http://bit.ly/nizamipuccini>
To contact Asli Samadova, email: aslisamadova@gmail.com

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- * Julie Scott Meisami and Haft Paykar *A Medieval Persian Romance*. pp.158–159. Oxford University Press. 1995. ISBN 0-19-283184-4
- ** Hans Ulrich Obrist, who once described his curatorial practice as a "protest against forgetting" (*Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Curating* But Were Afraid To Ask*, Sternberg Press. 2011. ISBN-10: 1933128259)

Czech Republic ready to invest in over 30 Azerbaijani projects

During a visit to Baku, Czech President Milos Zeman has revealed that his country is ready to invest in more than 30 projects across Azerbaijan. Speaking to *The Business Year* he commented: "The fact that oil from Azerbaijan amounts to a quarter of Czech annual consumption makes it a strategic partner that contributes significantly to the diversification of our energy resources.

"Our partnership with Azerbaijan goes well beyond a simple case of oil supplies. This is only one part of intensive business-to-business and government-to-government contacts in many fields, including trade and investment. Both sides are benefiting from applying Czech knowledge and expertise in industry, transportation, and power generation to the astonishing Azerbaijani modernisation effort. I expect a continuation of this positive trend and steady growth of trade turnover.

"We welcome Azerbaijani investment in our country, and hope that there is even more



to come. I anticipate a further increase in both the volume of exports and the direct involvement and investment of Czech companies in Azerbaijan. More specifically, I am convinced that we should focus mainly on the energy and infrastructure sectors. The Southern Energy Corridor is *de facto* the only project under construction that would bring a new substantial energy source to the EU." During his time in Baku,

President Zeman visited the Sangachal Oil and Gas terminal, which is currently under major expansion to facilitate the processing of an additional 16bn m³ (bcm) of gas per year from the Shah Deniz II field.

During January–July 2015, trade turnover between Azerbaijan and Czech Republic amounted to \$440.9m (£285m), according to the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee.

Bakutel cements Azerbaijani position as regional ICT hub

The 21st Azerbaijan International Exhibition and Conference on Telecommunications and Information Technologies, *Bakutel 2015*, will take place from 2–5 December in Baku. The largest exhibition in the region, it brings together the leading players in the communications sector and is acknowledged as the main business platform where contacts are made and new businesses are created.

The Azerbaijani Ministry of Communications and High Technologies has shown invaluable support for *Bakutel* and has played a key role in establishing and developing this exhibition, together with such organisations as the UN, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the Russian-led Regional Commonwealth in the Sphere of Communications, and has received accreditation from the UFI Global Association of the Exhibition Industry. The organisers of the event are Iteca Caspian and Caspian Event Organisers.

Around 200 companies from Azerbaijan, Russia, France, the US and other countries have already confirmed they will be exhibiting at *Bakutel 2015*, of which 40 per cent are repeat exhibitors. They include leading ICT companies, mobile providers, communications operators, internet providers, systems integrators, and distributors of well-known brands. *Bakutel 2015* features national stands from several countries, actively supported by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Communications and High Technologies. Altogether, 15 national stands are expected this year, of which Belarus, Hungary, Israel, Iran, Italy, the UAE, Turkey, and Croatia have already confirmed. Several leading companies from Russia, the US and Turkey will be exhibiting for the first time.

The exhibition will also continue to provide a forum for young people to present their inventions, concepts, programmes, and services. Consequently, much attention



has been given to start-ups, which will be given a special platform at the exhibition. All the start-ups will be located at the High Tech Park stand in Hall 2 of the Baku Expo Centre. Government-led ICT projects will be presented in Hall 3.

An extensive business programme always complements *Bakutel*. Numerous meetings, forums, and conferences will also provide an opportunity to discuss the latest global industry trends and prospects for developing the Azerbaijani ICT industry. For full details, go to www.bakutel.az.

Italy offers its infrastructure to transport Azerbaijani gas to Europe

The State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and the Italian company Snam have signed a memorandum of cooperation regarding the development of the Southern Energy Corridor. Meeting in Baku, Rovnag Abdullayev, President, SOCAR and Carlo Malacarne, CEO, Snam ratified the document.

The sides discussed the possibility of

knowledge exchange between SOCAR and Snam regarding construction and operation of the equipment necessary for gas transportation from Azerbaijan to European markets via Italian energy infrastructure.

The Southern Energy Corridor is one of the priority energy projects for the EU. It envisages the transportation of gas from

the Caspian Sea region to European countries through an extension of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). Carrying 16bcm per annum of Azerbaijan Caspian gas from the BP-led Shah Deniz II development from 2020, its infrastructure has the potential to carry up to 31bcm by 2026, including resources from Central Asia and, potentially, Iran.

Emil Afrasiyab gave a dazzling display of genre-defying pianistic pyrotechnics during the opening concert of the Festival de Jazz de Colmar, performing alongside Raphaël Pannier (drums), Antoine Katz (bass guitar) and Alexandre Madeline (tenor saxophone)



The pulsating sounds and vibrant sights of Azerbaijan come to Colmar

Emil Afrasiyab, one of Azerbaijan's leading jazz musicians, headlined the opening of the 20th edition of the prestigious Festival de Jazz de Colmar on 7 September. His appearance was complemented by *Azerbaijan Through the Lens* – an exhibition of 30 stunning images of Azerbaijan – submitted by amateur and professional photographers from across the world for a competition run by TEAS. These were displayed for a week at the Pôle Média Edmond Gerrer, during which more than 700 visitors viewed them.

The events were organised by TEAS France in co-operation with the Mayor's Office in Colmar and come in the wake of the historic signing of a friendship and co-operation agreement between the ancient Azerbaijani town of Sheki and the historic French town of Colmar – the third-largest in the Alsace region – in May.

At the opening of the jazz festival, Gilbert Meyer, Mayor of Colmar, recalled leading a delegation to Sheki: "This is a special evening, as this concert reminds us of the friendship and co-operation agreement that was signed with the town of Sheki in Azerbaijan. We are welcoming one of the greatest Azerbaijani pianists – Emil Afrasiyab – whose performances combine jazz with elements derived from mugham that, like the Pyramids, has been recognised by UNESCO. Azerbaijan and France are great friends, yet they have quite different cultures, and Sheki is the Pearl of the Caucasus.

"Colmar and Sheki are towns of equal importance in their respective countries. This agreement is playing a critical role in strengthening relations between France and Azerbaijan. Tonight, the Azerbaijani government is represented by Ayaz Gojayev, First Secretary, Azerbaijani Embassy to France." The audience also included H.E. Emin Eyyubov, Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

At the exhibition opening, Marie-Laetitia Gourdin, Director, TEAS remarked: "Azerbaijan is a member of the EU Eastern Partnership and is aiming to develop understanding from European countries, notably through cultural exchange. After Colmar hosted the *Days of Azerbaijan* in 2012, the dynamism of these exchanges increased, culminating in the signing of the friendship and co-operation agreement. TEAS' collaboration with the Mayor's Office of Colmar in arranging tonight's jazz concert, photographic exhibition, and the reciprocal exchange of books between schools in Sheki and Colmar is indicative of the warm relationship between the towns."

Emil performed before a packed house of 300 enthusiastic jazz aficionados at the Salle de Spectacles Europe, in addition to being broadcast live to an audience on local TV channel TV7 Colmar. For the past two years he has been studying at the Berklee College of Music in the US, and it was there that he began to collaborate with

the three talented French musicians who now form his quartet – Raphaël Pannier (drums), Antoine Katz (bass guitar) and Alexandre Madeline (tenor saxophone). An interview with Emil was published in the *TEAS Magazine*, August 2015, pp.6–8.

The set included Emil's self-penned *Two Worlds*, composed to demonstrate the relationship between Eastern and Western idioms, rhythms and scales. After a rhapsodic solo introduction, replete with classically-influenced romanticism, Emil increased the tempo, running up and down the piano keyboard, his music incorporating the Eastern harmonies and microtones found in mugham. The propulsive polyrhythmic drumming of Raphaël Pannier carried the music along and his intuitive musical dialogue with Emil was notable throughout the concert. The improvisations even included a brief nod to J.S. Bach and his *Air on the G String*.

Emil's version of Azerbaijani jazz-mugham pioneer Vagif Mustafzadeh's *March* included Alexandre Madeline on tenor saxophone. This began with Emil's impressionistic introduction, after which Coltrane disciple Alexandre gave an exploration of the main theme prior to its deconstruction. Emil and Raphaël then took up the challenge, daring each other on to more tangential improvisations, Raphaël abandoning his drumsticks to use his hands when necessary. Emil's evermore complex improvisations inspired Raphaël to further demonstrate his abilities before the tempo receded – after spontaneous applause from the audience – with Emil and Alexandre returning the main theme. Emil then ended the piece in a romantic manner that owed much to Rachmaninov. The audience remained in reverent silence for a moment before showing its ecstatic appreciation.

After a standing ovation and much shouting the audience was rewarded with a passionate and dextrous introduction to a series of exciting variations on the main theme of the Azerbaijani traditional dance *Shalakh*, written in the challenging time signature of 6/8. This saw Alexandre's saxophone take on the role of the traditional balaban flute, even deliberately overblowing his instrument to distortion levels when wildly entering the realms of free jazz and call-and-response dialogue, accompanied by the rock-influenced on-the-beat percussion of Raphaël. The piece concluded in a furiously powerful and percussive manner, seeing Raphaël break the tip off his drumstick. The concert ended with a wildly enthusiastic standing ovation.

The concert marked the conclusion of a three-date French festival tour by Emil's quartet – sponsored by TEAS – that began on in May with a performance at the inaugural Sunnyside Festival in Reims. Nearly 400 fans attended his concert at the Festival Jazz à Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris.

Silk and Fire festival illuminates enthusiastic French audiences

The landmark *De Soie et De Feu (Silk and Fire) Festival*, directed by Pierre Thilloy, Artistic Director and Composer-in-Residence for the renowned l'Orchestre Lamoureux, began with an outstanding gala concert at the legendary 1900-seater Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in the heart of Paris on 13 September. This saw the l'Orchestre Lamoureux – one of the resident orchestras at the theatre – conducted by Ayyub Guliyev. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation sponsored the festival.

In the programme, Mr Thilloy explained his motivation: “This country, also known as the *Pearl of the Caucasus*, is part of me, and comes with a culture that never ceases to fill my dreams. Its musical universe has enabled me to discover amazing beauty, yet this is rarely performed in the West! Friendship should not suffer through ignorance. For that reason, it was in my heart to enable audiences to discover the thousand and one musical beauties of this joy of the Caucasus, as a vibrant homage to the women and men of this country.”

The concert began with the stirring *Koroglu Overture*, composed in 1937 by Uzeyir Hajibeyli, the father of Azerbaijani classical music. It then continued with the lilting waltz from the ballet *The Seven Beauties* by Gara Garayev, his student, and successor as leading Azerbaijani composer. The stage was then rearranged, to the amazement of the capacity audience, to accommodate two of the leading mugham musicians – the brothers Elshan and Malik Mansurov on kamancha and tar, respectively. They performed Haji Khanmammadov's *Concerto for Tar and Kamancha*, written in 1990, just as Azerbaijan was poised to reassert its independence from the Soviet Union. Khanmammadov specialised in works for the national instruments of his homeland, always taking into account the requirements of the instrument and the technique adopted for mugham performances, which incorporates a high level of improvisation. He cleverly combined the intonation and compatibility of both the tempered and untempered instruments, using the orchestral backing to complement the national instruments and achieving remarkable fusion between the idioms.

The stage was again reconfigured for Vagif Mustafazadeh's single-movement *Piano Concerto*, performed by classically-trained jazz maestro Emil Afrasiyab, who had undertaken his own transcription from the original recording. Inspired by the jazz-inflected concerti of George Gershwin and Maurice Ravel, Mustafazadeh, known by the epithet of the *Father of Jazz-Mugham*, amazed audiences in the 1960s and 70s with his inventiveness, dexterity and virtuosity, and this became apparent in his composing, which combined modes, microtonal scales and tonalities from both the East and West. Mr Afrasiyab's interpretation was outstanding, perfectly capturing the verve, melodic invention and tonal colours of the piece. The ensuing standing ovation was rewarded with an encore of his own solo variations on Mozart's *Rondo alla Turca*.

Following the interval, the audience heard the *Piano Concerto on Arabian Themes* by Fikret Amirov, written in 1957 in collaboration with pianist Elmira Nazirova. This was performed by Murad Huseynov, and cleverly combined a tempered instrument – the piano – with the instruments of the orchestra, which can achieve the microtones found in Azerbaijani mugham.

The concert concluded with the world premiere of Pierre Thilloy's monumental *Symphony No. 10 Exil*, for tar, kamancha, two violins, digital visual and musical artistes and augmented symphony orchestra. In his programme notes, the composer wrote: “This is a cry of rage against that which has created the absurd side of humanity. How is it possible to remain human when, today, at this



Brothers Elshan and Malik Mansurov on kamancha and tar, respectively, collaborated as part of the apocalyptic soundscape created by Pierre Thilloy's *Symphony No. 10*, named *Exil*, and dedicated to all IDPs and refugees

moment in time, men and women are on the road to exile, far from the land of the ancestors that they honour, driven by force and manipulated by the tyrants who are in the power of the new universal god that is money... this is an apocalyptic work – in the etymological sense of the term – about waiting for an impossible return.”

During the piece, the audience was plunged into darkness, their focus being on the digital abstract visuals projected behind the orchestra, the intention being to create an immersive work, the ambience being shared by all audience members. The abstraction was only once broken by clearly defined footage of the green hills of Nagorno-Karabakh, homeland to an estimated 875,000 Azerbaijani Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees, who are the ongoing victims of the Armenian occupation.

The opening movement included solo melodic passages for the Mansurov brothers on tar and kamancha – which were developed in Nagorno-Karabakh – and for the violins of Sabina Rakcheyeva and Nazrin Rashidova, achieving a subtle balance between classical and traditional instruments. The notions of suffering and exile were adumbrated by the sound of individual instruments against the orchestra. Earth-shattering pedal notes, complemented by the KORDS digital ensemble, demonstrated a sense of cruelty and inhumanity.

The second movement was slow, meditative and mystical. It comprised thematic material that was diatonic, modal and had a sweet and melancholic essence. The percussion created the rhythm of the road to exile, and the four solo instruments adopted a narrative style.

The final movement was a passacaglia that, during the extremely virtuosic variations for orchestra, imprinted its vigorous rhythm and successive waves on the listener, encapsulating the spirit of the symphony. Using the lowest notes of the orchestra – the lowest string on the double-bass was tuned down a semi-tone – this recreated the meditative sonority of the second movement, the sound being reminiscent of defeat, death and abandonment. The digital presentation concluded with the first article from the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” The symphony attracted an extensive standing ovation, multiple curtain calls, and the entire concert was subsequently broadcast on France Classique radio – the leading classical music station in the country.

The *Silk and Fire* festival subsequently moved to Mulhouse in the Alsace region – twinned with Yevlakh in Azerbaijan – where there was a programme of 11 further concerts, featuring a range of ensembles and styles from Azerbaijan, Poland and France, including the jazz quintet led by pianist Elchin Shirinov. For more information on the festival and to experience part of Pierre Thilloy's *Exil*, go to www.de-soie-et-de-feu.com.

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