

TEAS

M A G A Z I N E



Culture | Public Affairs | Business



(Photo: Getty Images/Anadolu Agency)

2016 – A YEAR OF CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Also in this issue:

AZN devaluation – inevitable, yet surmountable

Shahbaz Guliyev and Dilham Asgarov – one year of illegal incarceration

Pierre Thilloy – inspired by tragedy

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01 / 2016

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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.

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.

Enter the TEAS survey and win £100 of Amazon vouchers!

Firstly, congratulations to Dr Robert Frew, who won the competition for avid readers in the December issue of the *TEAS Magazine*.

We are currently launching a new initiative to ensure we meet the needs of our friends and supporters and hold up-to-date contact information.

Many of you will have received a SurveyMonkey questionnaire during the past few days, and we urge you to complete this. Alternatively, you can complete the form at <http://bit.ly/teassurvey2016> – it is particularly important that you provide your email address so we can exclude you from unnecessary reminders. Please note that all data provided will be held confidentially and never be passed to third parties.

A draw of respondents will be held on 8 February, and one will receive the prize of £100 of Amazon vouchers! Good luck! Please note that if you have already responded, you will be automatically entered into the prize draw.

Upcoming Event For full details of all TEAS events, go to www.teas.eu/upcoming events

24 February

[Khojaly Memorial Evening \(Brussels\)](#)

BOZAR, rue Ravenstein 23, 1000 Brussels. 18.30hrs. RSVP via EventBrite at <http://bit.ly/khojalybruxelles2016>

Organised under the auspices of the *Justice for Khojaly* campaign, this event comprises a screening of the independent documentary *Endless Corridor* (Aleksandras Brokas; US/Lithuania; 2015) and a concert by Azerbaijani violinist Nazrin Rashidova, duetting with pianist Daniel Grimwood.

25 February

[Khojaly Commemoration Concert \(Paris\)](#)

Cathédrale St-Louis des Invalides, 6, boulevard des Invalides, 75007 Paris. 20.00hrs. RSVP to paris@teas.eu

Organised under the auspices of the *Justice for Khojaly* campaign, in association with the Association des Amis de l'Azerbaïdjan and the Ambassade d'Azerbaïdjan en France. Features the Orchestre Lamoureux performing *Khojaly 613* by Pierre Thillooy.

26 February

[Khojaly Commemoration Concert \(London\)](#)

St. Paul's Church (the Actors' Church), Bedford Street, London, WC2E 9ED. 19.00hrs. RSVP via EventBrite at <http://bit.ly/khojalylondon2016>

Organised under the auspices of the *Justice for Khojaly* campaign, this concert features the Deco Ensemble, led by Sabina Rakcheyeva (violin); Nazrin Rashidova (violin); Jamal Aliyev (cello); Ayyan Salahova and Gunel Mirzayeva (pianos); and Seljan Nasibli (soprano).



Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS

From the TEAS Director

For the second time, Azerbaijan has assumed the presidency of the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, comprising Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

Despite the devaluation of the Azerbaijani Manat (AZN) – precipitated by the fall in global oil prices – a Gallup survey has indicated that Azerbaijan is the fourth happiest country in the world. Meanwhile, gas production has hit record highs, and H.E. Richard Morningstar, former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan and now Director, New Global Energy Centre, Atlantic Council, has reiterated the importance of the Southern Energy Corridor for European energy security.

Following on from the first anniversary of the illegal imprisonment of Shahbaz Guliyev and Dilham Asgarov (two Azerbaijani citizens captured whilst tending their relatives' graves in the Armenian-occupied territories) the Azerbaijani government has appealed to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve their detention conditions and to help secure their release.

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, has thrown his weight behind talks aimed at easing tensions on the 'contact line'. Following the summit between the Azerbaijani and Armenian Presidents in Bern, a swift follow-up summit in Minsk is widely mooted.

Finally, a *Concert for Peace*, supported by TEAS and the Ulduz Association, was performed by pianist Zaki Allal in Paris – the scene of several terrorist outrages during the last year.

May I wish all friends of Azerbaijan the very best for 2016.

Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS



A declining international oil price, combined with various other factors, led to devaluation of the AZN currency

Azerbaijani AZN drops by 48 per cent

The Azerbaijani Manat (AZN) lost 48 per cent of its value on 21 December after it switched to a floating exchange rate from a dollar peg. As reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, the decision was attributable to sharp declines in the price of crude oil. This saw the AZN slide to 1.55 against the US\$, after trading at around 1.05 against the US\$ on 18 December.

With an estimated 90 per cent of revenues coming from oil and gas exports, Azerbaijan is the latest emerging economy to devalue its currency, against the backdrop of oil prices hitting an 11-year low. In August, the Kazakh Tenge (KZT) lost a quarter of its value against the US\$, immediately after the National Bank of Kazakhstan let its currency float freely in an attempt to boost the competitiveness of its export-focused economy.

Both countries have also suffered from a steep drop in the Russian rouble (RUB). Although no longer pegged to the US\$, the RUB has also decreased by 50 per cent in value from the highs of the year, as the Russian economy is battered by lower energy prices and Western sanctions. Russia is the second-largest oil producer in the world.

Speaking to the Azerbaijani APA Agency, Ali Hasanov, Head, Department for Public and Political Issues, Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, commented: "Azerbaijan is an oil-producing country, and countries such as this cannot discount the factor of a drop in the oil price – the main source of their budget revenues. Everyone knows that oil prices in world markets won't rise in the near future."

Simon Mandell, Senior Vice-President, Central and Eastern European and Middle-East and African equities at New York-based frontier markets brokerage

firm Auerbach Grayson, commented that it may be necessary for a similar policy to be adopted by other countries with currencies under strain. He particularly cited Venezuela, Nigeria, Egypt, Oman, Iraq, Libya and Ecuador.

Speaking during a sports awards ceremony, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev explained that the devaluation was attributable to a threefold decline in oil prices. He added that the change in the exchange rate was inevitable, commenting: "Throughout the year, we were trying our utmost to prevent this, and were waiting for the oil price to stabilise. When the oil price stabilised at \$50 (£34) a barrel, we began to think that there would be no need for devaluation. However, currently, the oil price is \$36 (£24.68)."

According to the President, other geopolitical factors have also impacted the oil price, and he stated: "Personally, I believe that the sharp decline in the oil price has no natural economic grounds." He acknowledged that the global economy is currently undergoing a recession, but not to such an extent that the oil price would have fallen thrice during the year, saying: "I personally believe that this is a thought-out policy. Its purpose is not a secret for anyone but, nevertheless, we will surely try to minimise the consequences of this situation."

President Ilham Aliyev reiterated that the government has been tasked to maintain macroeconomic stability and minimise inflation, together with sustaining stable prices for domestically-produced food products, construction materials, and fuel. He pledged: "The government of Azerbaijan will try to minimise the negative consequences of this inevitable decision. Those who allow artificial overpricing and speculation will be punished."

Azerbaijan takes over GUAM Presidency

Azerbaijan has been selected for the presidency of the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development. The decision was made on 3 December during a meeting of the GUAM Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers in Belgrade. Azerbaijan previously held the presidency from 2007–08, and the decision also sees H.E. Altay Afandiyev, former Azerbaijani Ambassador to Spain, appointed to the post of GUAM Secretary-General for the next four years.

GUAM – an acronym of member states Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova – was established in 2001 to promote democratic values, stable development, international and regional security and increase the speed of European integration for its members.

One of the main objectives specified in the GUAM charter is active co-operation in the settlement of the unresolved conflicts in GUAM states that undermine their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.



Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, led the Azerbaijani delegation at the GUAM meeting

This intention was reiterated in Belgrade, where the Council of National Co-ordinators (CNC) was instructed to finalise the text of the draft resolution *Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development*, with a view to submission to

the UN General Assembly. This is particularly relevant to Azerbaijan, where Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts have remained under illegal Armenian occupation for over 20 years, despite four UN Security Council Resolutions being passed against the occupying forces.

ICRC: we try to improve captives' detention conditions

A delegation led by Ali Hasanov, Azerbaijani First Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Azerbaijani State Committee on Work with Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has met Peter Maurer, President, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, according to the APA news agency. The meeting was also attended by Firudin Nabiyeu, Chief, Azerbaijani State Migration Service.

Mr Hasanov mentioned the inherent religious and ethnic tolerance of Azerbaijan and explained that the state maintains the fabric of the Armenian church in Baku, whereas monoethnic Armenia has demolished many mosques in its territory and has permitted the religious buildings in occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts to fall into a

state of disrepair. He also explained that around 875,000 refugees and IDPs remain in camps spread across Azerbaijan, placing an enormous economic burden on the state.

Under the instruction of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, Mr Hasanov asked Mr Maurer to assist Dilham Asgarov and Shahbaz Guliyev. They were taken hostage by the occupying Armenian authorities in July 2014 and jailed by an unrecognised court in December 2014. He asked that they be assisted in maintaining contact with their families using the internet.

Mr Maurer stressed that the ICRC is monitoring the situation of the men, and is striving to enhance their detention conditions. He commented on the great work undertaken by Azerbaijan to improve



Peter Maurer, President, ICRC (right) discussed the plight of Dilham Asgarov and Shahbaz Guliyev – two Azerbaijani hostages in Armenian-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh – with Ali Hasanov, Azerbaijani First Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Azerbaijani State Committee on Work with Refugees and IDPs

the situation of refugees and IDPs, and expressed his gratitude for the Azerbaijani support to ICRC. The meeting concluded with an invitation for Mr Maurer to visit Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani soldier Jafarzade killed by Armenian mortar

Rashad Jafarzade, an Azerbaijani soldier, was killed on 16 December during Armenian mortar shelling of Azerbaijani positions near the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied territories, according to the press service of the Armenian Defence Ministry. The Ministry expressed its deepest condolences to the relatives of the deceased, and dispelled the Armenian misinformation that a further two Azerbaijani snipers had been killed. The death followed the killing of another soldier on 14 December, named as Nihat Rahimli, according to the Defence Ministry.



Elkhan Usubov, Mayor of Sheki, signed the memorandum with Gilbert Meyer, Mayor of Colmar (Photo: Alsace/Jean-Louis Lichtenauer)

Twin cities – Sheki and Colmar

Gilbert Meyer, Mayor of Colmar – located in the Alsace region of France – has signed a final twinning memorandum with Elkhan Usubov, Mayor of Sheki, following a meeting in his city. This was also attended by H.E. Elchin Amirbayov, Azerbaijani Ambassador to France, during which the two mayors stressed a resolve to expand their relationship in all spheres, especially in youth education programmes.

Gallup: Azerbaijan ranks amongst the top four happiest countries

Azerbaijan has entered the list of the top four happiest countries in the world, following a poll of 68 nations conducted by research company Gallup. According to the survey, Colombia tops the list with 85 per cent net happiness, followed by Fiji and Saudi Arabia (82 per cent) and Azerbaijan (81 per cent). Of those surveyed, 33 per cent of Azerbaijani respondents believe that 2016 will mark an improvement on the past, with 19 per cent expressing pessimism and 23 per cent indicating their neutrality.

When asked about the prospects for economic development in the country during 2016, 36 per cent of respondents were in favour of improvement, 21 per cent expected negative results, and 11 per cent anticipated that the economy would remain the same.

The poll saw 66 per cent of respondents report that they are happy with their lives, with 23 per cent claiming to be neither happy nor unhappy, and 10 per cent feeling unhappy. The findings indicated that Iraqis are the least happy nation.



Azerbaijani people are amongst the happiest in the world, according to a Gallup poll

ADB to allocate \$2.24bn to Azerbaijan over three years

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved its business plan for operations in Azerbaijan during 2016–18, comprising a loan of an estimated \$2.2bn (£1.5bn). The ADB funds will be spent on water, transportation infrastructure (road and railway), energy projects, financial integration promotion, support for improved governance, and drafting of an educational sector development project. The total volume of technical assistance, to be provided by the ADB from 2016–17, amounts to \$3.08bn (£2.1bn).



Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijani Minister of Economy and Industry signed a portfolio of agreements in Tehran with Ali Tayyebnia, Iranian Finance and Economic Affairs Minister

Iranian investment in Azerbaijan hits \$760m

Iranian investments in Azerbaijan have reached \$760m (£521.1m), according to a senior government official, of which spend in the non-oil sector totalled \$145m (£99.4m). Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijani Minister of Economy and Industry, commented: “Some 50 mutual visits have been made, and more than 20 documents have been signed between the two countries, since the previous meeting of the commission. Altogether, the two countries signed 108 documents, 30 of which are in the economic sphere. More than 450 companies with Iranian investments are active in Azerbaijan.”

EEU ascendance never a possibility

Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister, has vituperatively dispelled any rumours that Azerbaijani accession to the Kremlin-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is on the agenda. Speaking to the APA agency, he commented: “No official proposal was received from the EEU or its member states.”

He recalled that, during a session of the UN General Assembly, he used the phrase “never say never”. However, Mr Mammadyarov reflected that Azerbaijan would never participate in an organisation that envisages an economic and customs union with Armenia, which continues to occupy Azerbaijani territory.

Morningstar: Southern Energy Corridor ‘very important’ to Europe

H.E. Richard Morningstar, former US Ambassador to Azerbaijan and Founder Director, New Global Energy Centre, Atlantic Council, has stressed the importance of the Southern Energy Corridor in an interview with *Natural Gas Europe*. He stated that Azerbaijan has succeeded in its role as energy supplier over the last 20 years, despite its location, initially via the realisation of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline running from Azerbaijan to Turkey. Meanwhile, Ambassador Morningstar noted that construction of the Southern Energy Corridor is underway, and would eventually deliver gas to Turkey and then to Europe by 2020.

He stressed: “The Southern Energy Corridor will be important for gas. One must remember that, initially, it will deliver 10bn m³ (bcm) per year to Europe. An additional 6bcm will go to Turkey.”

Franco–Azerbaijani educational relations expand

Mikayil Jabbarov, Azerbaijani Minister of Education, has met H.E. Aurelia Bouchez, French Ambassador to Azerbaijan. During the meeting, Mr Jabbarov extended his condolences to the Ambassador regarding the appalling terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November. Mr Jabbarov recalled that he met his counterparts in France earlier in November, and participated in the launch of the Nizami Ganjavi Literature and Culture Department at the University of Upper Alsace. He acknowledged the activity of the French Lycée in Baku and the ongoing negotiation process for launching the Azerbaijani–French University. Mr Jabbarov also stressed the importance of co-operation between educational systems.

Aliguluzade takes the strain to gain silver

Azerbaijani athlete Elkhan Aliguluzade has achieved silver in the World Weightlifting Championships in Houston. He secured the medal following an outstanding 77kg Clean-and-Jerk event. He also finished the group by setting the new Junior Clean-and-Jerk World Record of 203kg, smashing a record that had stood for 11 years.

Geopolitical gearshifts, Russia, Karabakh and the role of civil society – footsteps towards peace?



Violence on the 'contact line' has escalated in recent times

A conversation between Dr Kavus Abushov, Assistant Professor, Political Science, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) and Neil Watson

Dr Kavus Abushov is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at ADA in Baku. He spoke to *TEAS Magazine* during a visit to London, where he participated in a debate at Chatham House.



Dr Kavus Abushov

What are the prospects for peace in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh?

The humanitarian impact of the conflict is considerable, and makes me very emotional. I deeply regret the number of deaths that are occurring on the 'contact line' on an annual basis, which have intensified during the last few years. The situation is very frustrating, with a number of mortalities on the frontline and no movement in the peace process. Armenia and the occupying forces in Nagorno-

Karabakh are enjoying impunity. In my view, the OSCE Minsk Group process is exhausted, although it should remain in place, as there is no alternative for the time being, whilst we find alternative paths. However, it is tired, and has tried to apply every possible model!

Exploring Track II diplomacy between civil society representatives from both the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations of Nagorno-Karabakh might be useful, but this issue is more complex because it has too many levels of conflict dynamics, so Track II is unlikely to break the ice. It might be useful for the secondary stage of the conflict resolution, namely that aimed at achieving reconciliation. Azerbaijan has to deal with many conflict parties, including Armenia; the Armenian community of Nagorno-Karabakh; the Armenian diaspora, particularly in the US and France; and last, but not at all least, Russia. It has to satisfy all four interested parties in order to reach a deal – this is a real problem. So, as you see, the circumstances and complexity of the conflict make it intractable. That said, I also raise the question myself as to how many more deaths are going to occur if the conflict remains unresolved for the next five to ten years. So, the status quo cannot continue, and the situation requires an urgent change.

Track II diplomacy may help the sides in the reconciliation stage, but I am sceptical about its usefulness at the present time. What is required at this stage is *modus*

vivendi, resulting in the release of some of the occupied regions and the restoration of communication. This would be followed by Track II reconciliation, and then settlement of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is necessary to understand each other, but I am pessimistic, as this is actually an elite-led peace process. At Track II level, we sit together and talk with our Armenian counterparts and afterwards depart for our respective homes, and nothing happens.

How well do you feel that the humanitarian impact of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is understood in Europe?

Unfortunately, many European countries are either uninformed or ill-informed about the conflict. It has never been a priority for either the EU or the US, but has always been prioritised by Russia. The EU has two primary interests in the area – one is energy, and the other is loosely security and conflict resolution. It would be possible for the EU to apply pressure on Armenia to withdraw from some of the occupied territories. Unfortunately, there is a perception in Armenia, and also in Azerbaijan, that time is in their favour.

The only sanctions that may lead to a breakthrough in the peace process would be those supported by the Russian side. However, the relationship is considerably more complex. It's not as simple as Russian President Vladimir Putin calling his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan, resulting in the overnight release of

the occupied territories. The conflict is related to concepts of identity for both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia just plays a manipulating role – it's a regional power that determines the situation. The real conflict parties are Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Armenian diaspora remains one of the main stakeholders on the Armenian side because the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and particularly the apparent Armenian victory during the war, has gone some way towards healing the pain of the Armenian people that has been an inherent element of their identity since 1915. If President Sargsyan decides to release the occupied territories, he may cause great displeasure amongst the diaspora, who are resident in the US, France and other countries. They are totally unconcerned about the plight of everyday Armenian citizens.

Do you believe there is any potential for peaceful resolution of the conflict whilst Serzh Sargsyan – born in Khankendi – remains as the Armenian President?

The situation is not helped by the fact that Armenian President Sargsyan belongs to the Karabakh clan. Their position is much harsher than that of Armenia proper, and they are closer to the diaspora. The key country is Russia – maybe one day it will exert the necessary pressure on Armenia. The real problem is not the peace process – it is the pre-peace process, which begins with the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the five regions. Once the peace process begins, it will be like a train – it will gain momentum. In the past, Azerbaijanis and Armenians have lived together.

The international community previously used to pressurise Armenia, but no longer does so and currently places no emphasis on maintaining Azerbaijani territorial integrity.



The intransigence of Armenia is due to beleaguered President Sargsyan – a member of the Karabakh clan

What has been the impact of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling on Chiragov and others vs. Armenia?

The impact of the ECHR decision in the case of Chiragov and others vs. Armenia has been minor in terms of moving the peace process from impasse, although it has now enshrined what was widely known – that Armenia is involved in the conflict as a conflict party.

However, what are the practical implications? Do we see any withdrawal of forces? Will there be any impact on Armenia or the occupied regions? From the very beginning of the conflict, everyone knew that Armenia was involved in the occupation. There are dozens of statements from Armenian President Sargsyan taking responsibility for the occupation and acknowledging that occupied Nagorno-Karabakh is integrated with Armenia.

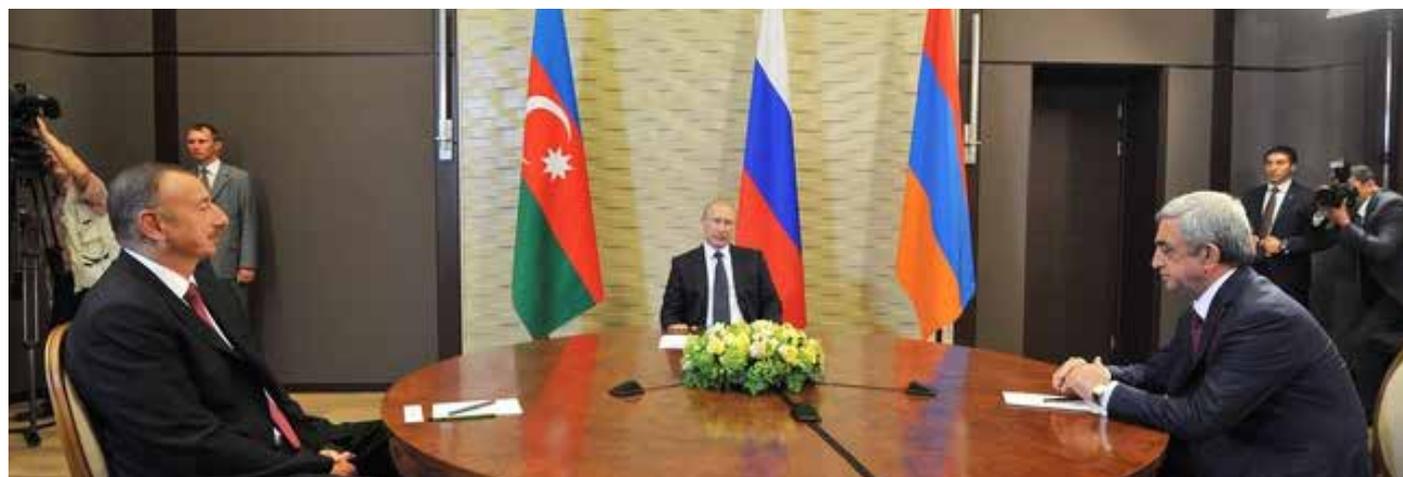
What can be done to improve the effectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group? Should the Co-Chairs be changed?

The Co-Chairs could be changed, and the

UK could replace France, but that will have a negligible impact on the peace process. Again – the only actor who can put real pressure on both parties is Russia. It must always sit there – and what would a new actor give Azerbaijan? The OSCE Minsk Group is very much largely exhausted. The Madrid Principles – which provide a pathway towards peaceful conflict resolution – are very good, and have been approved by Azerbaijan.

The Madrid Principles give a blueprint for the phased return of Azerbaijani territories. Initially, Armenian troops will withdraw from the five districts – which never had a substantial Armenian population. The two remaining districts are then returned, and finally Nagorno-Karabakh is repatriated. However, it will have the autonomy of self-government.

To order a copy of *Self-Determination and Secession in International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2014), edited by Dr Kavus Abushov, Antje von Ungern-Sternberg and Christian Walter, go to <http://bit.ly/selfdeterminationandsucession>



Russia holds the key – Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev meets his Armenian counterpart in Sochi in talks brokered by Russian President Vladimir Putin



Zaki Allal's contemplative music transported his audience to a higher level of human emotional connection (Photo: Maga Baghirova)

Zaki Allal's transcendental concert emphasises peace and understanding in Paris

Coming soon after the appalling terrorist attacks in Paris on 13 November that claimed the lives of 130 people and injured scores of others, the Azerbaijani Cultural Centre, located in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, has played host to a *Concert for Peace*, performed by the internationally-renowned Algerian pianist Zaki Allal.

Attended on 8 December by around 80 audience members, the event was jointly organised by the Ulduz Association and TEAS France. Attendees included Ayaz Gojayev, First Secretary: Cultural Affairs, Azerbaijani Embassy to France; Yamina Bachir Bouaidjra, Cultural Counsellor, Algerian Embassy to France; and Ayten Gracco, President, Ulduz Association, who initiated and co-ordinated the concert.

Marie-Laetitia Gourdin, Director, TEAS France, explained the purpose of the event: "With tonight's concert, at the foot of the Eiffel Tower – the symbol of France – we have decided to pay homage to the many victims of terrorism and, above all, those who died in the attacks in the French capital in November, which shocked the world. This concert adds its voice to calls for peace in the world, using music, which is its best messenger.

"Situated between East and West, and Europe and Asia, and rich in cultures, languages and religious confessions, Azerbaijan has experienced numerous periods of war. Many conflicts that impacted the region, following the fall of the Soviet Union, have still not been resolved, to this day. Azerbaijan also suffered badly from terrorism during this period, and has been involved in the international coalition against terrorism since 2001. It is the wish of TEAS to create a bridge between the peoples of Europe and Azerbaijan and

pay homage with music – a universal language that has the ability to touch the heart and spirit, which is common to us all."

Ms Gourdin went on to dedicate the concert to the victims of the terrible fire on an oil rig in the Caspian Sea that claimed the lives of over 30 workers during the previous weekend.

Performing in a seamless stream of his unique semi-improvised compositions, Zaki Allal transfixed all those present with his captivating and rhapsodic melange of music. All pieces were replete with melodies and minimalist repeated phrases, enabling the audience to concentrate and focus on our common humanity and the true meaning of peace. These plaintive compositions were inspired by such diverse subjects as the cosmos; creatures and patterns of nature; love, life and peace itself.

Following ecstatic applause, Mr Allal performed his delicate *Lamentations of the Heart*. He lost a friend in the Paris attacks, and another was wounded, and reflected on the significance of the evening, saying: "This has been a concert of my own compositions, its purpose being to demonstrate that nothing can affect our common human space. It is extremely important not to forget this today."

The hosting of the concert at the Azerbaijani Cultural Centre was most appropriate, as Azerbaijan – a secular nation – is synonymous with tolerance and acceptance, as enshrined in its constitution. Jews, Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians live alongside each other in perfect harmony. To find out more on Zaki Allal, go to www.zakiiall.com.

Dilber's bilingual story launched in Baku

Dilber and Her Spoonful Journey by author Leyli Salayeva, member of the Azerbaijani Writers' Union, and illustrated by Arif Huseynov, Azerbaijan People's Artist, who has 40 years' experience of working on children's books, is aimed at helping make mealtimes more enjoyable and interesting for children aged 0–3 years. The goal is to provide an alternative to modern technologies, such as a television or an iPad. The book is narrated in both Azerbaijani and English, and tells the journey of a little girl who has found a magic spoon. This spoon takes her to

different places in Baku, her home city. The illustrations incorporate Azerbaijani national colours and portray places in the capital, and the book was launched on 29 December at the Port Baku branch of W.H. Smith.

The main character, Dilber, is based on the eponymous daughter of Mrs Salayeva, and the illustrations are based on her image. This book concept developed after Dilber refused to eat a meal without entertainment. The author was then unable to find a book with little text and large

illustrations to keep Dilber engaged during her mealtime.

This book launch marks the inception of the project *A Child's Perception of the World Through National Elements*, whereby a series of books will enable Azerbaijani children to learn about the nature, national cuisine, and cities of their country through simple sentences and illustrations. The author is seeking parents who would like to see their children published as heroes of these stories and would be ready to sponsor future books featuring them.

Nazrin unearths Moszkowski's masterworks

In his day, the German–Polish composer Moritz Moszkowski (1854–1925) was regarded as the successor to Chopin, Rubenstein and Liszt. However, other than his sizzling and technically virtuosic *Spanish Dances* (in their arrangement by his friend, the violinist Émile Sauret), his works are now largely forgotten and virtually unrecorded.

It has therefore been left to the UK-based Azerbaijani violinist Nazrin Rashidova to uncover these small gems of violin virtuosity in her new album of Moszkowski's *Works for Violin and Piano* – her third CD, and the second for the mid-price, internationally-distributed Naxos label. Teaming up with pianist Daniel Grimwood, the album focuses on compositions dating from 1876–90, beginning with the flamboyant *Five Spanish Dances*, replete with double and triple stopping, octave leaps, pizzicato and harmonic effects and dizzying passagework.

A more lyrical mood pervades the *Ballade and Bolero (Zwei Concertstücke)*, written for friends, although his trademark utilisation of harmonics, triple stopping and bouncing spiccato render them a challenge for any violinist. The *Bolero*, in particular, focuses on the deeper sonorities of the violin, so it assumes the timbre of a viola.

The *Suite for Two Violins* (featuring a double-tracked Nazrin) is a highly dramatic work, dating from the early twentieth century. Again, the two violin parts are very challenging, full of double stops, and it features a high level of connectivity, with the adumbration of the severe chordal opening being repeated a multiplicity of times to devastating effect. On the other hand, the *Quatre Morceaux* are quite distinct from each other, each bearing a dedication to a different violinist.

The final three pieces are arrangements of pieces originally for piano. The first of these, *Étincelles (Sparks)* was arranged into a delightful showpiece by the legendary violinist Jascha Heifetz, where the violin and piano take turns to scamper up and down



Moritz
MOSZKOWSKI

Works for Violin and Piano

Five Spanish Dances • Four Pieces • Suite for Two Violins

Nazrin Rashidova, Violin • Daniel Grimwood, Piano



the scale. Pablo de Sarasate arranged *Guitarre* for violin, where it takes up a song-like melody, above the strumming of the piano. Finally, violinist Fabian Rehfeld arranged the *Serenata*, a gentle, melodic piece.

To order the new album, go to <http://bit.ly/rashidovamoszkowskiuk> (UK) or <http://bit.ly/rashidovamoszkowskiworldwide> (worldwide). To see Nazrin perform Moszkowski's *Spanish Dance No. 2* at the famed Wigmore Hall in London, go to <http://bit.ly/moszkowskispanshdance2> and for a sneak view of the recording session, go to: <http://bit.ly/moszkowskirecording>.

A sad farewell to Azer Rzayev

The composer Azer Rzayev – a giant of Azerbaijani music – sadly passed away at the age of 85 years on 14 December. An Azerbaijani People's Artist, Honoured Artist and recipient of the Order of Shohrat (Glory), amongst other accolades, he had been suffering with ill-health for some years. Born in Baku in 1930 as the son of opera singer Haqiqat Rzayeva, Mr Rzayev graduated from the Azerbaijani State Conservatoire (now Baku Music Academy), majoring in composition and violin, in 1953.

Mr Rzayev's first major work for symphony orchestra was his *Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra*, which won the Composers' International Competition in Warsaw in 1955. His works were performed widely across the former Eastern bloc, including Bulgaria, Romania, the German Democratic Republic and Cuba.

Throughout his life, he focused on symphonic works, composing three violin concerti; a *Double Concerto for Violin and*

Viola; six tone poems, including *Lover of Life*, *Nasimi*, and *In Memory of My Father*; the *Baku-90 Symphony*, a concerto for the tar and symphony orchestra; the *Gaytagi* piano concerto; the *Haji Karim Travels to the Moon* operetta; numerous chamber and instrumental works and incidental music for plays and films.

Mr Rzayev was also a professional violinist and was Professor of String Instruments at Baku Music Academy. In 1997, he created a children's symphony orchestra at the Bulbul Music School. He was also the director of the Azerbaijan State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre for nearly 20 years. From 1963, he was a regular broadcaster on radio and television, and he wrote many insightful articles and inspirational critical reviews for newspapers and other periodicals.

His passing marks the end of an era in Azerbaijani classical music, but his extensive library of compositions,



Azer Rzayev at the height of his fame as an educator, composer and violinist

pieces and archive of articles, reviews and broadcast interviews will keep his memory alive. To see and hear his *Double Concerto for Violin and Viola*, performed at the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall featuring soloists Samir Asadov (violin) and Sabuhi Axundov (viola), go to <http://bit.ly/rzayevdoubleconcerto>.



The Azerbaijani State Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of the Italian Fabrizio Festa, performed a wide range of well-known Italian works and a new piece by Günay Mirzayeva synthesising Italian and Azerbaijani music.

Günay Mirzayeva – transcending cultures, surpassing boundaries

Born into a musical family in 1985, Günay Mirzayeva graduated from Baku Music Academy and thereafter continued her education at the Stuttgart Conservatory. To date, her works have been heard at the Berlin Philharmonic Hall and Stuttgart Theatre in Germany and the New Coliseum and Donizetti Theatres in Rome. Performers have included the Italian Philharmonic Orchestra, Berlin Classic Musicians, and Stuttgart New Vocal Soloists' Ensemble. She has collaborated extensively with Italian composer and music producer Francesco Maggio, most recently for the *Baku sings Napoli* concert at the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall in Baku on 10 September.

Baku has been twinned with Naples since 1972. Who developed the concept of the *Baku sings Napoli* concert?

The concert was held as part of the prestigious Uzeyir Hajibeyli International Music Festival, celebrating the 130th anniversary of the composer's birth. The project concept was developed by Francesco Maggio and supported by the Italian Embassy in Baku, in co-operation with the Azerbaijani Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

As you have said, Baku and Naples are twinned, and Francesco decided to create an aural project that connects Italy and Azerbaijan. This attracted a diverse audience of artists, diplomats and music aficionados, and the hall was full to capacity. At the end of the night, H.E. Giampaolo Cutillo, Italian Ambassador to Azerbaijan, commented that the event was "absolutely stunning." The orchestra was conducted by Fabrizio Festa from Italy, and featured the tenor voice of Azerbaijani People's Artist Samir Jafarov and the Italian soprano Tiziana Scandaletti, together with Italian pianist Riccardo Piacentini. They wrapped the audience at the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall in an unforgettable cradle of emotions.

How was the repertoire decided?

The repertoire was chosen by Francesco Maggio, and included such yearning and

melodious Neapolitan songs as *Torna a Surriento*, *'O surdato 'nnamorato*, and *O Sole Mio* in new arrangements by young Italian composers, replete with tonal colours. The composers and arrangers are members of the Cluster Association of Composers, headquartered in Lucca.

Your work entitled *Between Two Seas* was premiered at the concert. Can you describe this work? What imagery does it aim to evoke?

Between Two Seas was specifically composed for the concert. My objective was to write a piece that would operate as an aural bridge between Azerbaijan and Italy. Accordingly, I made musical reference to the two seas serving the cities of Baku and Naples, which merge into one rhythm. The piece contains a synthesis of Italian tarantella with Azerbaijani mugham, and has a dramatic and unsettled character that sometimes subsides. The work begins and ends with arrhythmic sections.

Which works by Francesco Maggio were premiered at the concert?

Naples is synonymous with vitality, volatility and excitement. This led Francesco Maggio to compose *Tarantella: O mare 'e Napule*, dedicated to Ambassador Cutillo. This contains a swirl of rhythms and sounds that serve to conjure up the sea of Naples, its people, and its ideological proximity to Baku.

How has your career been developing over the past two years, and where has your work been performed?

My concept entitled *Azerbaijan Visual Concert: The Flower of Fire*, was initially performed in Baku and Florence and supported by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Azerbaijani Youth Foundation, Italian Embassy to Azerbaijan, Municipality of the Tuscany Region, Province of Florence, Italian Ministry of Culture and others. It was subsequently replicated in the Czech Republic with the support of the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijani Republic (SOCAR), the Azerbaijan Student Network, the Centre for Development of Azerbaijani Human Capital (AZEDER) and the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Prague. The

Ensemble Prague Modern and a mugham trio comprising Gochag Asgarov (vocalist/khanende), Elnur Mikayilov (kamancha) and Shahriyar Imanov (tar) performed my compositions.

Following this, Francesco and I organised another project in Stuttgart, entitled *Azerbaijan Night*, with the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Honorary Consulate of Azerbaijan in Stuttgart. Numerous top-flight Azerbaijani and German musicians worked together, including Farhad Badalbeyli, pianist, composer and Rector of Baku Music Academy; the Minguet Quartett; Ensemble Musikfabrik and the Vocalconsort Berlin. Last year, we organised a project entitled *O Sole Mio* at the International Mugham Centre in Baku. It was dedicated to Neapolitan Songs and supported by the Italian Embassy in Baku. As with *Baku sings Napoli*, it featured Tiziana Scandaletti, Riccardo Piacentini and Samir Jafarov, together with the Jahangir Jahangirov Azerbaijani Television and Radio Chamber Orchestra and Choir, under the baton of Shahla Alakbarova.

What are you working on at the present time?

I recently composed the piece entitled *Love is You* for Soprano and Bass Clarinet, based on John Lennon's *Because*, which was recorded by The Beatles. This was performed in the Italian towns of Lucca and Ascoli Piceno by the Noise Bridge ensemble from Germany. Several months ago, I composed *Con-sequenz* for tenor saxophone, erhu (Chinese violin) and pipa (Chinese lute) for the Sinogerman Sounds ensemble. I am currently working on a string quartet for the famous Prometeo Quartet of Italy, which received the Leone d'Argento at the Venice Biennale. I am also involved with several projects in conjunction with Francesco, which will take place in Azerbaijan, Italy and Germany.

To contact Günay Mirzayeva, email: gunaymirzayeva@hotmail.de, and visit <http://bit.ly/mirzayevapulse> to see her conducting her own composition *Within a Pulse*.

Gasimushagi carpets – Azerbaijani culture under threat

by Faig Ismayilov, Chairman, and Leyla Gasimova, International Chairman, Public Association on Protection of Historical Monuments in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

The culture of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was concentrated in Shusha by Panakhali Khan in the early 1750s, and the textiles in the region became acknowledged for their workmanship and great art. The quality of handicraft techniques rapidly developed and expanded into other geographical territories, including knitting and embroidery in both Zangezur and Nakhchivan, and eventually became widespread across Lachin.

The population of Lachin focused on livestock-rearing, farming and horticulture, in addition to the development of textiles and other crafts. Weavers particularly concentrated on the production of chulu (a thick carpet for sitting, also used to protect animals from the cold), carpets, rugs, palaz (thinner and lighter than carpets), zili (large tapestry-woven rugs), bags, farmeshs (decorated carpets of 0.5x1.2x2m), and jejims (much lighter form of palaz). The embroidery and tapestry was recognised for its unique beauty.

The name of Lachin became synonymous with the top-quality handicrafts of the Karabakh region, most notably in relation to the Gasimushagi school of carpets, which are specifically associated with the Gasimushagi and Qarachorlu tribes. Some of the earliest Gasimushagi carpets can be found in the Topkhana Museum in Istanbul and it is acknowledged that the Lachin region made a significant and invaluable contribution to the furtherance of Azerbaijani culture.

The writings of Al-Mugaddasi Masudi, the 10th century Arab historian, bears testament to the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh was known as an artisanal centre for over a millennium, particularly focusing on the processing of wool and cotton. The city of Shusha and villages of Dovshanly, Girov, Trniviz, Malibayli, Chanakhcha, Tug, Tuglar, Hadrut, Muradkhanli, Gubadly, Qozag, Mirseyid, Tutmas (Dagtumas), Gasimushagi and Bagirbayli played a significant role in carpet production, the latter two being located in Lachin.

In Lachin, many families were involved in the art of weaving. Families were engaged in such production from the end of summer and throughout autumn and winter. The artistic imagination of family members played a significant role during the weaving process, as colourful carpets featuring intricate designs would attract a higher price. When classifying textiles according to colour, technological features and artistic structure, the output of such carpet production centres as Zangezur and Nakhchivan were classified within the Karabakh carpet school. Other classifications within this school are Aran, Bagchadagullar, Balig, Buynuz, Barda, Bahmanly, Goja, Gasimushagi, Lambarani, Mugan, Talish, Lampa, Malibayli, Khankarvend, Khanlig, Khantirma, Chalabi and Sabalidbuta.

Artisans in Gasimushagi stood apart from other regions, notably regarding the production of knitted woollen scarves. Multicoloured male garments were also

made from wool, pigmented with plant roots and tree bark. Relatively coarse wool was used for producing carpets, palaz, rugs, jejims, large bags, gloves and making twine and other household items. From the 17th century, Gasimushagi handicrafts – particularly carpets – became renowned for their quality and craftsmanship. Haji Gasim Sam was widely respected in Gasimushagi, having originally come from Kirkuk in Iraq, and carpet-weaving was the predominant female occupation in his eponymous town. The school incorporates both crocheted and embroidered carpets.

The middle composition of Gasimushagi carpet motifs is different to that of other carpet schools, from an artistic perspective, and is replete with a multiplicity of complex details. One element features an edged large central panel surrounded by thick patterned edges of small flowers. On the sides are twisted branches, pointing in four directions, which are reminiscent of large horns. The carpets are decorated with round, rectangular, hexagonal, octagonal and geometrical patterns.

The carpet designs comprise zoomorphic (totemic) patterns, derived from myth, with a relatively simple structure. The zoomorphic patterns in Gasimushagi carpets comprise simplistic mythological beasts, particularly focusing on dragons, realised as line-drawings against a white background. The unique dragon illustrations in Gasimushagi carpets were derived from Khatai-Dragon carpets and altered their original shape over the passage of time. Identical patterns are woven in all corners of the carpet.

The unique S-shaped patterns of Gasimushagi carpets are found in the intermediate area of each corner. The dragon is a symbol of fertility, accommodation, and family, being known as a protector of the tribe. It is also symbolic of the conflict between spirituality and materialism. Furthermore, it was known as a symbol of evil in ancient times, and initial designs were emblazoned on clothing produced in China and Turkestan. During the 16th and 17th centuries, these illustrations were incorporated on carpets and embroidery from the Gasimushagi school, and included on those from the Tabriz school.

Alongside the zoomorphic symbols, women's daily household items are also portrayed, and flowers are emblazoned on the corners. These hooked motifs are inherently associated with protection against malevolent spirits and evil eyes. Most Gasimushagi carpets are small- and medium-sized and, during the weaving process, the knots are woven in a symmetrical way, using wool yarns. The inherent beauty of Gasimushagi carpets led them to be depicted on a set of postage stamps from the Czech Republic in 2010, following an exhibition in Prague.

On 18 May 1992, Lachin was occupied by Armenian armed forces – as part of the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding districts – thereby bringing Gasimushagi carpet production to an end. The entire population of Gasimushagi is now dispersed across Azerbaijan, living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in encampments. However, the lasting legacies of this great artisanship are the Gasimushagi carpets found in collections and museums across the world.

Bern Presidential summit held amidst 'contact line' violence

Following a rising tide of violence, accusations and counter-accusations, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan met on 19 December in Bern. The summit was organised under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, tasked with establishing a negotiated peace to the ongoing Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The meeting was attended by the Co-Chairs – namely Igor Popov (Russian Federation), James Warlick (US), and Pierre Andrieu (France), alongside Andrzej Kasprzyk, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.



Didier Burkhalter, Swiss Foreign Minister (right) discusses the latest developments in the conflict with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev (left), whilst Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan looks on

The Presidents discussed the recent upsurge in violence and expressed their concern about the casualties – particularly civilian – caused by the use of heavy weaponry. They stressed their support for the Co-Chairs' ongoing work, aimed at reducing the risk of violence along the 'contact line' between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied territories and the Armenian–Azerbaijani border, including the implementation of an investigation mechanism. The Presidents confirmed their readiness to continue engagement on proposals regarding a peaceful settlement and their commitment to the OSCE Minsk Group format. During the meeting, President Ilham Aliyev requested the immediate release of Dilham Asgarov and Shahbaz

Guliyev, jailed almost one year earlier by the illegal Armenian occupying authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Following the summit, Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, expressed his hope that the meeting would bring the nations closer together, commenting: "The summit offered the sides an opportunity to discuss the practical steps for reducing ceasefire violations and the number of civilian casualties, together with developing ways of bringing the peace process closer." He urged Baku and Yerevan to co-operate closely with the OSCE Minsk Group to achieve further de-escalation of the situation.

Meanwhile, the turn of the year saw the

possibility for Belarus to host the next meeting. According to the oxu.az website, this potential summit was heralded by comments from H.E. Igor Nazaruk, Belarusian Ambassador to Armenia. He acknowledged that such negotiations are essential for the settlement of conflicts that remain 'cold', saying: "This is what the OSCE Minsk Group aims to do. I am confident that where there are contacts, there is a greater degree of understanding each other, and with increased understanding, we achieve additional elements of trust."

"I am convinced that this is the only correct path – negotiations, calm communications, and the negation of any possible shift towards the 'hot' phase."

Armenian illegality in microcosm – remembering Dilham and Shahbaz, one year on

On 29 December, all Azerbaijanis and those who believe in human rights and the maintenance of international law remembered the first anniversary of the harsh verdicts passed against Dilham Asgarov (aged 55) and Shahbaz Guliyev (aged 47), two men who were jailed for life and 22 years, respectively, by an illegal and unrecognised court in Armenian-occupied Nagorno-Karabakh for the alleged 'crime' of visiting their ancestors' graves.

In June 2014, Dilham and Shahbaz made a pilgrimage to the graves – as they had done many times before – in Kelbajar, an Azerbaijani region that has remained under Armenian occupation for more than 20 years. Travelling with a third friend, named Hasan Hasanov (aged 38), they were ambushed by Armenian armed forces. Hasan was murdered, and Dilham and Shahbaz were taken hostage on their own homeland. After three weeks of negotiations masterminded by the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC), the corpse of Hasan was returned to his family for burial. The ICRC is continuing to monitor the conditions under which Dilham and Shahbaz are being held, together with their health.

The incarceration of Dilham and Shahbaz – in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention – has been universally condemned. Subsequently, the issue of the trial and imprisonment of the men was raised in Strasbourg at the Spring Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). *Ensuring the Right of Dilham Asgarov and Shahbaz Guliyev to a Fair Trial* (Doc. 13709), a Motion for a Resolution, submitted to PACE, was signed by 46 parliamentarians, to date.

The detention violates the European Convention on Human Rights, International Humanitarian Law, the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

and ignores Armenia's commitment to its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Victoria Nuland, Assistant US Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, has requested that these men should be immediately freed. Federica Mogherini, Vice-President, European Commission and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, condemned this as an unlawful act, given that they are civilians.

The arrest, 'trial' and incarceration of these men clearly subverts the concept of international law, and their human suffering gives a face to a conflict that has continued for so long, yet remains overlooked and forgotten by the mass of the international community. The decision of the occupying Armenian forces to take Azerbaijanis as hostages on their own rightful homeland demonstrates Armenia's continuing provocative stance.

Azerbaijani gas production record smashed

Part of the Shah Deniz I structure on the Caspian Sea (Photo: BP)

Azerbaijani commercial gas production reached a new high in 2015, according to Rahman Gurbanov, Vice-President, SOCAR, in an interview with *Natural Gas Europe*. He stated that commercial gas output hit 18.9bn m³ (bcm) in 2015, amounting to an increase of 0.2bcm on the 2014 figure, produced from the BP-operated Shah Deniz I and Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG) fields. Production from the Shah Deniz I field began in late 2006, making Azerbaijan a net gas exporter, from which 9.9bcm of commercial gas was produced in 2015.

Tamam Bayatli, Spokesman, BP Azerbaijan, confirmed that Shah Deniz I production had increased in 2015, despite being suspended in August. Altogether, during the first 11 months of 2015, Azerbaijan exported 6bcm of Shah Deniz I gas, equating to an increase of around 1.6 per cent on the same period in 2014. In 2015, Shah Deniz I production reached 9.8bcm.

According to *Oil and Gas Journal*, in January 2014, Azerbaijani proven natural gas reserves amounted to 35tn ft³ (tcf), the vast majority of which were located in the Shah Deniz field. The discovery of the Absheron and Umid formations in 2010–11 augmented existing known resources by an additional 15tcf.

Currently, most Azerbaijani natural gas is destined for Turkey, but the country supplies a small volume to Greece via the Turkish-Greek interconnector. Under a pre-existing arrangement, Turkey

Azerbaijan joins GECF as an 'observer'

Azerbaijan has joined the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) as an 'observer' member. Its status was declared during the 17th ordinary GECF ministerial meeting, held in Tehran on 21 November, according to the Shana news agency. 'Observer' status is also held by Iraq, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Norway, Oman and Peru.

In addition to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, the presidents of Russia, Bolivia, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Venezuela, Turkmenistan and Iraq, together with the Algerian Prime Minister, are expected to attend the next GECF summit. The member countries are Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Russia, Trinidad and Tobago, the UAE and Venezuela. Altogether, they account for 67 per cent of the world's gas reserves, 64 per cent of global liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and 42 per cent of cross-border pipeline trade.



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was re-exporting Azerbaijani natural gas to Greece, but a new agreement enables Azerbaijan to directly export volumes to Europe. Shah Deniz II will supply resources to the Southern Energy Corridor – comprising the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) – initially conveying 6bcm to Turkey from 2018 and 10bcm to an Italian interconnector by 2020. Azerbaijan also has the potential to become a transit hub for Iranian and Central Asian resources.

According to the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*, TAP currently ranks amongst the top ten investment projects of crucial importance to the world economy. Costing an estimated \$2bn (£1.4bn), it will pass through Turkey, Greece, Spain and Italy.

Dentons Client Alerts on Licensing and Taxation

Dentons Baku office – a TEAS member company – has issued Client Alerts on Licensing and Taxation. The former follows the signing of a *Decree on Certain Measures in the Area of Licensing* by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on 21 December 2015. It relates to electronic licenses, the list of licensable activities, state duties levied, and licensable activities related to national security and the relevant state duties. The full client alert can be read at <http://bit.ly/dentonslicenses>. The latter comes in the wake of amendments to the Azerbaijani Tax Code, which came into effect on 1 January 2016. Go to <http://bit.ly/dentonsaztaxcode2016> to find out more.

Since its commission by TEAS in 2012, Pierre Thilloy's evocative tone poem *Khojaly 613* – dedicated to the victims of the Khojaly Massacre – has been performed across the world

Prelude to a première – Pierre Thilloy discusses *Exil*, his tenth symphony and his championing of Azerbaijani classical music

Born in Beauvais in 1970, Pierre Thilloy began his musical studies in 1990, where he focused on composition and orchestration. He then studied compositional techniques with Professor Alexander Mullenbach from the Conservatoire of Luxembourg and the International Academy of Mozarteum of Salzburg, and 20th century musical aesthetics with Mario di Bonnaventura.

He specialises in great symphonic works and, to date, has composed ten symphonies of vast proportions, 20 tone poems and an oratorio for three orchestras, three choirs and seven soloists.

From 2003–05, he was the composer-in-residence for the Ambassador to France in Baku, and his musical experiences were charted in a television documentary entitled *Pierre Thilloy: La Montagne de Feu*. He spent 2005–08 in Uzbekistan, before returning to Baku in 2008, then working in India from 2011–13, and in Norway from 2014– to date. In 2012, he was commissioned by TEAS to compose the tone poem *Khojaly 613*, dedicated to the 613 civilian victims of the Khojaly Massacre, the worst single atrocity of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. He subsequently organised the Syam Festival, which included a wide range of Azerbaijani classical and jazz music, and is now the organiser of the *Festival de Soie et de Feu (Silk and Fire Festival)*, which opened in Paris in September and then moved to Mulhouse, comprising 11 concerts. The opening gala concert of generally Azerbaijani music at the historic Théâtre des Champs-Élysées also included the world première of his tenth symphony *Exil*, performed by the Lamoureux Symphony Orchestra. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation sponsored the festival.

Emile Nauomoff, Pianist and Composer, provided the following eulogy: “He is not a chameleon. He has really immersed himself in exotic cultures, and considers them from the perspective of his homeland. Their universality and essence is evident in his compositions.” Neil Watson spoke to him at home in Mulhouse, just prior to the gala concert, to find out more:

Please tell me about *Exil*, your tenth symphony, premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 13 September as the opening concert of the *Festival de Soie et de Feu*.

This is named *Exil*, as it is dedicated to all exiled persons around the world, particularly the estimated 875,000 refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Azerbaijan, who are the ongoing victims of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. It is abnormal that we have this kind of problem in our time. In my view, the politicians in the West never try to resolve such problems. They either don't want to see, or maybe there is an economic reason why nothing changes. In my view, there is scope for the artist to say something, and that is why I named the piece *Exil*.

How would you describe the piece in musical terms? Does it incorporate any local melodies or traditional songs?

Yes – it incorporates such elements, although I aimed to make the piece as universal as possible. I did not want it to focus on the problems of solely one country. The plight of refugees and IDPs is found in many countries across the world. However, I am very much involved with Azerbaijan, so the piece begins with some mugham elements on the tar and kamancha – two Azerbaijani national instruments. I also incorporated some folksongs from Azerbaijan, but thereafter applied the anagram system to create melodies, where one letter represents one note. The anagrams represent historical descriptions and poetic phrases, which are known to the composer – they are a form of personal code.

How is the music from the KORDS electronic group integrated?

It is impossible – or substantially different – if the piece is performed without electronic music and video, the former providing the foundation of the soundscape and the entirety of the symphony impacting all senses in a telluric manner. Furthermore, it is inextricably connected to the accompanying visuals, projected alongside the symphony. The film is perfectly synchronised with the orchestra. This is an inherent element of the symphony, and is like a silent film without people or actors, but produced using archival images and subliminal elements.

Will the film be projected during the performance?

Yes – the film will provide the centrepiece to the performance. The audience will sit in darkness, the only illumination being small lamps on the music stands. My intention is that this will be unlike any other concert. In my view, it is very strange that we hear music when the lights are fixed. I wanted to create a symbiotic connection between the public and the mood of the music, so I wanted darkness in the auditorium and on the stage to create the right ambience. The images should become a living and intelligent light for the mind.

How are the Azerbaijani national instruments used?

Malik and Elshan Mansurov, respectively, played the tar and kamancha. I used three mugham modes, including *Chahargah* and *Shur*, and two violin soloists join the national instruments. I never leave one solo instrument – my objective is that the instruments are in dialogue with each other. The soloists do not have a virtuoso role. They are there primarily to enact a friendship, and are incorporated in the work as a token of this. In my opinion, friendship provides a basis for hope. I only use three mugham modes – and these are used to build a new mugham, with a transition from the opening mode to the final closing mugham. The application of mugham is very important, as the music emanates from the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan or from the historic city of Sheki.

Furthermore, my intention in writing *Exil* is to demonstrate that we must connect with the region to achieve peace in Azerbaijan and across the world. For me, this is very personal, so I have also incorporated some themes from Judaism and Russian Orthodoxy. I wanted to demonstrate how many religious communities are present in Azerbaijan, and to represent the inherent religious tolerance of the country. I aimed to demonstrate that the country is accepting and open, and that the conflict with Armenia is abnormal and atypical.

To what extent do you go beyond the Armenian–Azerbaijani situation?

There are many conflicts and geopolitical situations around the world that have resulted in the creation of refugees and IDPs. There are myriad peoples affected in this way, from Israel and Palestine, South America, Africa and Asia. We all suffer with the same problem. I think such situations are against the better nature of humanity.

Given the current migrant crisis, the piece is very timely. In the second movement, I use a very old *Gradual*, which was brought by the Jesuit missionaries. I aimed to incorporate music from all regions of the world in the same piece as an initiation towards understanding their common human issues. The audience should be permitted to experience a subjective response.

What will the rest of the programme comprise at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées?

The remainder of the programme will be performed in a more traditional way, and include some of the foremost pieces of Azerbaijani classical music, played by the Lamoureux Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the esteemed Azerbaijani conductor Ayyub Guliyev. The programme includes the *Koroglu Overture* by Uzeyir Hajibeyli; *Waltz* from *The Seven Beauties Ballet* by Gara Garayev; the *Concerto for Tar and Kamancha* by Haji Khanmammadov; the *Piano Concerto* by Vagif Mustafazadeh, father of Azerbaijani jazz-mugham; and the *Piano Concerto* by Fikret Amirov/Elmira Nazirova. In addition to my piece, which can then be considered as a link between our two cultures, the other French work on the programme will be *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* by Paul Dukas, which has a special relevance to the Lamoureux Symphony Orchestra, a complex work that appropriates musical forms from earlier eras, and is ideal as the concert opens the new season for the orchestra.

This programme is designed to form a gala concert, with the Azerbaijani pieces providing the fireworks, and the two French pieces – particularly my *Exil* symphony – exemplifying a philosophical vision.

How did you decide on the classical pieces in the programme? Were you aiming to exemplify the various facets of Azerbaijani classical music?

I aimed to represent the development of the symphonic school in Azerbaijani classical music, and to demonstrate how this evolved throughout the oeuvres and harmonic developments of Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Gara Garayev and others, and showing how such national instruments as kamancha and tar can be used in a symphonic music context. I also invited leading Azerbaijani jazz pianist Emil Afrasiyab to perform Vagif Mustafazadeh's *Piano Concerto*, as I thought it was important for jazz to be included. I wanted to demonstrate the impact of all influences on Azerbaijani music to the audience.

Is this the first time that Azerbaijani music has been presented at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées?

This is not the first time that Azerbaijani music has been presented

there, but it is the first time the music of the country has been performed as part of the official orchestral season. It is more challenging to organise a concert as part of an official orchestral season than as a private event, and it is particularly complex to arrange such concerts in France. My objective is for Azerbaijani music to be programmed alongside that of Beethoven and other great western composers. I am hoping the concert will be a voyage of discovery for the listeners.

It is very difficult to get little-known or unfamiliar pieces programmed in France, even if the organisers have a great deal of financial backing. It is necessary to persuade both the orchestra and the theatre that there will be an interested audience. I am also delighted that the concert will be broadcast on Radio Classique – the biggest classical music station in France.

The remainder of the Festival de Soie et de Feu takes place in Mulhouse. Why did you select that town?

First and foremost – I live in Mulhouse and, for the first time in my life, there is no requirement to take a flight or TGV train to organise a concert. I can give the organisation of the festival, the musicians and the music my complete personal attention, as I live only five minutes' walk from the main concert hall. Furthermore, Jean Rottner, Mayor of Mulhouse, has given me excellent support. His town is twinned with the ancient Azerbaijani city of Yevlakh, so he has a good understanding and appreciation of the country. It would be impossible to organise such a festival without the endorsement and full support of Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijani First Lady and President, Heydar Aliyev Foundation, together with the Azerbaijani Embassy in France. Their support for such a project is invaluable.

The concerts in Mulhouse feature an excellent range of classical, jazz and mugham music. How were the performers and repertoire selected, and what audience do you expect to attract?

Organisation of the first edition of a festival is always very challenging and complicated. In many instances, the concerts are already completely full – notably the two aimed at children, where the 800 seats have been sold. All the concerts are very popular, but the closing evening of Azerbaijani jazz-mugham from the Elchin Shirinov Quintet and the fascinating programme by the Baku Chamber Orchestra, comprising works by Georges Bizet, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Astor Piazzolla, alongside such Azerbaijani composers as Fikret Amirov, Gara Garayev and Farhad Badalebeyli, under the baton of the outstanding Azerbaijani maestro Fuad Ibrahimov, have excited particular popular interest.

Are you working on any further pieces connected to Azerbaijan?

In January, there will be the première of a new piece entitled *La Femme de Soie (The Silken Woman)*. At the end of August, I was in Poland, and my piece *Les Terres de Feu (The Lands of Fire)*, for piano quartet, was première.

I began writing *Exil* a year or so ago, and initially worked on it for between six and eight months. Work was interrupted by many other projects, but nonetheless I completed it this summer. Like Gustav Mahler, I finished my tenth symphony during the summer but, unlike him, I did not die and managed to orchestrate the symphony.

Go to www.pierrethilloy.com to find out more on Pierre Thilloy and his work; for information on the *Festival De Soie et de Feu* visit www.de-soie-et-de-feu.com; and for a trailer to *Exil*, his tenth symphony – complete with exciting electronic visuals – go to <http://bit.ly/exilthilloy>.

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