

# TEAS

M A G A Z I N E



Culture | Public Affairs | Business



(Photo: Andrew Wiard)

## KARABAKH: REIGNITED

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www.teas.eu

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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](mailto:membership@teas.eu).

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

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 weeks, 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 will never be passed to third parties.

A draw of respondents will be held on 4 May, and one will receive the prize of £100 of Amazon vouchers! Good luck!

## Upcoming Events For full details of all TEAS events, go to [www.teas.eu/upcoming events](http://www.teas.eu/upcoming%20events)

### 9 May: **Premiere: Young Voices, Ancient Song (London)**

Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG  
19.00hrs. Free entry. RSVP to [editor@teas.eu](mailto:editor@teas.eu)

This world premiere features Jeffrey Werbock, President, Mugham Society of America, in his quest to find a powerful young mugham singer he heard in an internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp in the aftermath of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. After the concert, Mr Werbock will perform a lecture–concert on kamancha, tar and oud.

### **26–27 May – Azerbaijani jazz concert: Elchin Shirinov Trio (Reims and Paris)**

#### 26 May: **Sunnyside Festival (Reims)**

CCI Reims-Epernay, 5 Rue des Marmouzets, 51100 Reims  
20.30hrs (information and tickets: [www.jazzus.fr](http://www.jazzus.fr))

#### 27 May: **Festival Jazz à Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Paris)**

Maison des Cultures du Monde, 101 boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris  
20.30hrs (information and tickets: [www.festivaljazzsaintgermainparis.com/accueil](http://www.festivaljazzsaintgermainparis.com/accueil))

The pianist and composer Elchin Shirinov belongs to a young, talented generation of Azerbaijani jazz musicians. Having studied under the tutelage of the pianist Kevin Hays, he has developed a very personal approach to the music, replete with tonal colours and sonorities. His compositions seamlessly combine improvised jazz with influences derived from Azerbaijani mugham.

Following its successful organisation of concerts by fellow pianists Isfar Sarabski in 2014 and Emil Afrasiyab last year, TEAS France is continuing to uncover Azerbaijani talents for the French jazz cognoscenti – a heritage that dates back to the development of jazz-mugham in the 1960s by Vagif Mustafazadeh and was subsequently developed by Aziza, his daughter.



## From the TEAS Director

For months, there has been an increase in tension on the 'contact line', and this has been accompanied by more frequent exchanges of sniper fire.

During the first week of April, these 'routine' exchanges of small-arms fire escalated dramatically. Armenian forces started shelling Azerbaijani settlements with heavy artillery, resulting in some casualties, but also causing many civilians to flee. Some of these were Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the original conflict, who were now forced to pack up their belongings and seek security once again.

Faced with this escalation, the Azerbaijani military launched a limited offensive, recapturing three strategic hilltops to the north, south and centre of the 'contact line'. There were substantial casualties on both sides, but Armenian counterattacks were repulsed.

So, for the first time since the break-up of the former Soviet Union, the Azerbaijani military have taken the initiative, capturing and holding Armenian military positions. These actions have very much changed the realities on the ground, and hopefully might give new impetus to the stalled peace talks.

Ironically, both Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan were in Washington D.C. for the international Nuclear Security Summit when the fighting erupted. John Kerry, US Secretary of State, called for calm, but eventually it was Russian diplomacy that secured a ceasefire agreement.

The sad passing of Zaha Hadid at the age of just 65 shocked the world of architecture. She had designed many striking award-winning buildings, not least the Heydar Aliyev Centre, which is an iconic structure of the 'new' Baku. She has certainly left her mark upon the world.

**Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS**

## Azerbaijani President offers condolences to Belgium and Pakistan



Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has extended his condolences to Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel over the explosions in Brussels on 22 March at Zaventem airport and at Maalbeek metro station that claimed the lives of 32 people and injured more than 300 others.

In his message, President Aliyev wrote: "We were deeply saddened by the news of heavy casualties and injuries as a result of explosions in the city of Brussels. We are extremely outraged by this horrible tragedy, resolutely condemn all manifestations of terror and fully support the fight against terrorism. On the occasion of this tragedy, on behalf of the people of Azerbaijan and on my own behalf, I extend my deep condolences to you, the bereaved families and the loved ones of those who died, and also wish the injured the swiftest possible recovery."

A similar note of condolence was issued six days later following the terrorist atrocity in Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, Lahore, Pakistan, which claimed the lives of over 72 people, largely women and children, and injured more than 340 others.

## 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TEAS celebrated in Baku

On 16 March, prominent politicians, dignitaries, academics, journalists and athletes gathered at the Marriott Hotel in Baku to celebrate the tenth anniversary of TEAS and its magazine *Visions of Azerbaijan*. Attendees included Ali Hasanov, Head of the Azerbaijani Presidential Administration. Tale Heydarov, Chairman and Founder, TEAS, commented: "Azerbaijan is a small country, but strategically located, with a rich history and vibrant culture." He added that the country had seen a dramatic transformation since it regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, emerging as a modern, developed nation that has become a beacon for religious tolerance in the world. He stated: "We want the world to know about us."

Over the past decade, TEAS has sought to place Azerbaijan in the international spotlight through such varied activities as business forums, jazz concerts, and football charity matches, together with showcasing the famous Karabakh horses at the Royal Windsor Horse Show for the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 2012.

Its magazine *Visions of Azerbaijan*, which is also available online, offers a window into

the colourful culture of the country. Anne Thompson-Ahmadova, founding editor and former head of the BBC Monitoring Caucasus Unit explained: "The magazine has raised Azerbaijan's profile in Europe and worldwide. It breathes Azerbaijani history and culture, and has a special force field of its own."

One of the key pillars of TEAS is education and learning. The organisation founded the European Azerbaijan Schools and Azerbaijani Teachers' Development Centre that provides education and training at the highest international levels.

3Apples, the children's literature division of TEAS Press, publishes books, and aims to entertain and educate. Oxford University Press, the largest university publisher in the world, has appointed TEAS as its official distributor of English-language teaching materials in Azerbaijan.

TEAS is also supporting the *Justice for Khojaly* campaign, commemorating the worst single atrocity of the unresolved Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, which claimed the lives of 613 men, women and children in 1992.

## Novruz commemorated across Azerbaijan

A week of festivities have taken place across Azerbaijan to commemorate Novruz Bayram, designated as the International Day of Novruz by the UN as 21 March. The celebrations began when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva joined the Novruz festivities, which began in the square in front of the Maiden Tower. This was followed by the presentation of a khoncha, comprising a silver tray of samani (wheat grass), surrounded by candles and coloured eggs.

Following this, actors dressed as warriors, carrying swords and shields stood on the walls of the Old City and in the square. An actor dressed as the legendary soothsayer and bard Dada Gorgud then gave his blessing and expressed hope that Novruz would bring abundance to the Azerbaijani people.

President Ilham Aliyev then lit the Novruz bonfire over which attendees jumped to signify the destruction of the bad aspects of the past and the beginning of a bright new future. The Presidential couple went on to inspect the National Seaside Park and met the carnival characters Kosa and Kechal, who congratulated them on the occasion of the holiday. They continued by witnessing a Novruz concert, a special fair, experienced a market of local produce organised by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Agriculture and saw an exhibition of Azerbaijani carpets. The Presidential family also viewed a stand reflecting the UEFA European Under-17 Championship, to be held in Baku from 5–21 May.



President Ilham Aliyev lights the Novruz bonfire in the shadow of the Maiden Tower

## Debate in the French Senate

At the initiative of TEAS France, the French Geographical Society organised a debate on Azerbaijan in the French Senate. Jacques Gonzales, Secretary-General, French Geographical Society, explained that the purpose of the event was to inform members of the Society about the history, geopolitical situation and economy of Azerbaijan.

H.E. Elchin Amirbayov, Azerbaijani Ambassador to France, stressed that his country sits on the crossroads of civilisations, on the ancient Silk Road and acts as a bridge between East and West and North and South. Outlining the history of Azerbaijan, he explained that it was the first democratic, secular state in the Muslim East, based on a judiciary. He continued: “Founded in 1918, the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR) granted the voting franchise to all women over the age of 18 years – long before France – and Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli’s *Leyli and Majnun* was the first Oriental opera. Unfortunately, the ADR disappeared

after just 23 months, and Azerbaijani only re-established its independence in 1991. However, the struggle for independence was not easy, and our country was confronted by an armed conflict.

Ambassador Amirbayov went on to outline the territorial impact of the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, saying: “Armenia continues to occupy around 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory, yet my country always seeks to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. However, Armenia has repeatedly ignored the resolutions and decisions of international organisations regarding the conflict.”

Following this, Ambassador Amirbayov went on to provide additional information on the role of Azerbaijan in maintaining world peace, European energy security, economic relations and the measures being taken to diversify the Azerbaijani economy away from overreliance on hydrocarbon revenues.



H.E. Elchin Amirbayov, Azerbaijani Ambassador to France, provided an inspirational overview of the past, present and future of his country

He continued: “The year 2016 has been designated as the Year of Multiculturalism in our country. Azerbaijan provides a platform for interreligious and intercultural dialogue and ranks amongst the few countries to be devoid of any anti-Semitism.” The Ambassador also spoke warmly of the current state of Azerbaijani–French relations, recalling the visits of French President François Hollande to Azerbaijan in 2014–15 and his role in the development of bilateral ties.

## Alonso – Baku circuit amongst F1’s “most memorable”

The fearless McLaren legend Fernando Alonso has predicted that the Baku street circuit will be the “most memorable” on the calendar this year, ahead of the inaugural Baku European Grand Prix. Alonso has been named as ambassador for the race, which will be held on the streets of the capital on 19 June. The comments came in the wake of a track walk around the tight uphill section from turns 8–12 which goes round the Old Town (Icheri Sheher). He went on predict that the race could be one of the most outstanding circuits on the calendar.

Mr Alonso continued: “It’s a real honour for me to be the first F1 driver to visit this magnificent city. The welcome I have received

from everyone since my arrival has been wonderful. I have been really impressed with everything I have seen today.

“Much like this beautiful city, the circuit successfully manages to showcase its modernity with a lovely nod to the past. Indeed, the way the track stretches along the Old Town walls, with the magnificent Flame Towers in the background, is a clear example of this. On a technical level, I am excited to test my skills on such a challenging circuit, particularly along those tight, winding corners. I really can’t wait to race here this summer.” Last week, Pirelli announced it would supply medium, soft and super-soft tyres, despite having introduced a softer compound for street races.

## President Aliyev visits Washington for Nuclear Security Summit

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev joined dignitaries from 56 countries in Washington D.C. for the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), which ran from 31 March–1 April. Its purpose was to discuss effective measures for preventing nuclear terrorism around the globe, and came in the wake of the recent terrorist attacks in Brussels and Lahore.

Speaking to ANS TV, Novruz Mammadov, Deputy Head, Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, and Chief, Foreign Relations Department, Azerbaijani Presidential Administration, spoke of the work carried out in Azerbaijan on nuclear safety and the challenges that are still to be tackled.

Mr Mammadov continued by reiterating that Azerbaijan does not seek to compete with any country – even in the energy sector – and that both its domestic and foreign policies, since regaining independence, have been focused on achieving sincere, mutual and beneficial co-operation. He said: “Azerbaijan is a country between East and West, North and South, on the border of Islamic and Christian worlds and is located in the most important point of the world – the South Caucasus.”

Samad Seyidov, Chairman, International and Interparliamentary Relations Committee, Milli Majlis (Azerbaijani Parliament) and Head, Azerbaijani–US Parliamentary Relations Working Group, informed *Trend News* that the participating countries had not been randomly selected. He said: “These states may contribute to nuclear safety. Therefore, Azerbaijan’s participation in the Summit is important, given the country’s role in seeking to ensure stability and security across the world.”

He continued by explaining that Azerbaijan, which has no nuclear weapons or nuclear power generation facilities, has been transformed by its economic potential into a state ensuring nuclear safety. The country has also joined all the international nuclear safety conventions, becoming one of the few countries ensuring stability at a high level.

Mr Seyidov went on to speak of the converse role of Armenia, which uses nuclear technologies, has a nuclear power plant, and not only fails to ensure nuclear safety, but poses a nuclear threat. He commented: “The obsolete Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant – built 40 years ago – does not meet any standards, and undermines nuclear safety, yet remains operational in Armenia.”

Rob Sobhani, CEO, US Caspian Group Holdings, believes that the invitation to Azerbaijan to participate, issued by US President Barack Obama, reflects the strategic importance of the country, saying: “Most importantly, inviting President Aliyev to Washington D.C. signals the importance of Azerbaijan on the global stage. Azerbaijan is no longer a ‘former republic of the Soviet Union’, but a responsible, trusted and reliable partner of the community of nations.”

Ariel Cohen, Founder, International Market Analysis; Director, Centre for Energy, Natural Resources, and Geopolitics; and Senior Fellow, Institute for Analysis of Global Security, reiterated that Azerbaijan is a strategically vital partner to the US on combating terrorism, ensuring secularism, nuclear and conventional security, energy, and maintaining a balanced foreign policy. He continued: “To further strengthen the

relationship, the US should become more active in ensuring Azerbaijani regional security – most notably with regard to Armenia and the resolution of the Karabakh problem, as well as possible threats from religious extremists, Russia and Iran.”

Aydin Mirzazade, Azerbaijani MP, interpreted the move from another perspective, saying: “Azerbaijan’s invitation to this Summit is an indication of the strong position of the White House regarding the anti-Azerbaijani campaign of Armenian diaspora organisations in the US.”

During his visit to Washington D.C., President Ilham Aliyev exchanged dialogue with John Kerry, US Secretary of State, who commented: “We have a lot of mutual interests that we are currently working on. We’re very grateful for Azerbaijan’s contributions towards peacekeeping, and particularly their efforts in Afghanistan. Obviously, Azerbaijan is located in a complex region right now, and I think President Aliyev has been very studious and thoughtful about how to respond to some of those needs, particularly with his leadership on the Southern Energy Corridor. This is a very important step with respect to Europe’s long-term strategic interests, as part of its endeavours to try to diversify the sourcing of energy, which is important.”

He also reiterated: “We want to see an ultimate resolution of the ‘frozen’ conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh. This needs to be a negotiated settlement and something that has to be worked on over time.” President Ilham Aliyev went on to thank the US for trying to end the conflict, but said it could only be resolved by implementing UN Security Council resolutions calling for the “immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops” from Azerbaijan.

President Aliyev concluded: “The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and all the conflicts in the post-Soviet area and in the world, must be resolved according to the territorial integrity of countries. We’re also close partners on issues related to security in the region. Azerbaijan provides its support – particularly logistical – regarding operations in Afghanistan, including overflights and land transportation. We have almost 100 servicemen serving shoulder-to-shoulder with NATO servicemen in Afghanistan. The agenda of our relations is very broad, and I’m sure the meeting will play an important role in the further development of our friendly ties.”



John Kerry, US Secretary of State, acknowledged the role of Azerbaijan in fighting terror and ensuring pan-European energy security, and reiterated the US stance towards achieving peaceful resolution of the conflict with Armenia



In Agdam, a man sits amidst the ruins of his house, devastated by a barrage of Armenian fire (Photos: AzerTac)

## Nagorno-Karabakh – an uneasy peace is shattered

During the night of 1–2 April, Armenia launched its heaviest assault since the 1994 ceasefire in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, firing on Azerbaijani army positions along the entire ‘contact line’ between Azerbaijan and the Armenian-occupied territories and specifically targeting civilians in the densely populated areas. This led to numerous civilian casualties and damage to public and private property, making it evident again that Yerevan is not genuinely interested in seeking a negotiated, political settlement of the conflict.

The latest attacks were launched at a stage when the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs were offering new approaches and ideas for a negotiated conflict settlement. Meeting on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in the US, both sides had been urged to find a peaceful solution.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly stated that the illegal presence of Armenian armed forces on Azerbaijani territory serves to provoke a further escalation of the situation, posing a threat to regional peace and stability. The UN Security Council resolutions 822, 853 874 and 884 (all 1993) and the UN General Assembly

resolution 62/243 (2008) condemn the use of force against Azerbaijan, and the occupation of its territories. They also reaffirm the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the inviolability of its internationally-recognised borders, and call upon Armenia to withdraw its forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan immediately, completely and unconditionally.

According to the Azerbaijani Defence Ministry: “To counter the provocation and to ensure the security of the civilian population, the Armed Forces Command of the Republic of Azerbaijan decided to take response measures in the direction of Aghdere–Terter–Aghdam and Khojavand–Fuzuli.

“Due to these rapid few hours of countermeasures, the first front line, fortified over many years by Armenia, was breached in many directions, and several heights of strategic and operational importance, together with residential areas, were fully liberated from the occupying forces.

“The heights around the Talish village, posing a threat to the Goranboy district

and the city of Naftalan, together with the village of Seysulan, have been completely cleared of Armenian military. In order to protect the town of Horadiz against ceasefire violations by the occupying forces, the Azerbaijani armed units have retaken the operationally important Lele Tepe height, located in the direction of the district of Fizuli, which enables a vast surrounding area to be kept under control.”

The Azerbaijani Embassy to the UK reiterated: “Azerbaijan has always been and remains committed to a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict. The fact that Azerbaijan has been at the negotiating table and been part of the peace talks under the auspices of OSCE Minsk Group manifests our goodwill to resolve the conflict peacefully.

“However, the international community, and particularly the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, have failed to deliver a peaceful solution in accordance with their mandate. This has turned into an ineffective negotiations process, and the solution to the conflict is long overdue. It is regrettable that the Co-Chair countries have preferred to pursue their own strategic military and economic interests in the region, rather

Children, born many years after the ceasefire, show the destruction of their house



than uniting around a noble cause, which is to come up with a fair and just peace plan to end the conflict. The OSCE Minsk Group has effectively monopolised the peace process and is unwilling to engage constructively with the other institutions or interested countries that can potentially contribute to the peace talks.”

Following a ceasefire on 4 April, H.E. Tahir Taghizadeh, Azerbaijani Ambassador to the UK, wrote in *The Guardian*: “It is long overdue that the international community comes up with a plan to produce a peaceful, comprehensive solution to the conflict. However, the continuing presence of Armenian armed forces in the internationally-recognised Azerbaijani territories remains a key hurdle on the way to peace. What makes the situation even more complicated is that international mediation, in the format of OSCE Minsk Group, has turned into an ineffective mechanism, leading to stalemate.

“As a gesture of goodwill, and heeding the calls from the international community, Azerbaijan has acted responsibly and declared a unilateral halt to military operations. However, the refusal of Armenia to abide by this ceasefire is a clear reminder of the need for heightened international pressure to be placed on Armenia.”

Condemnations of the ceasefire breach were received from around the world, including from Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, European Union and Vice-President, European Commission, speaking at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. She remonstrated: “The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an obstacle to the development of both countries and the entire region...The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was central to my talks in Armenia and Azerbaijan during my visit there last month... the events around Nagorno-Karabakh are another reminder of how dangerous a protracted conflict can be. Large-scale conflict is not in the interests of anyone, and can lead nowhere.” Mrs Mogherini noted that the escalation makes it even clearer that the conflict does not have a military solution, stressing that “especially targeting civilians must stop.”



German and Azerbaijani flags are hoisted in a show of solidarity in Berlin

She continued: “We cannot settle with the status quo, and the sides have to resume negotiations under the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group. The political solution is what is needed, and our political goal must be that the sides resume negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.” Mrs Mogherini commented that the EU had always supported conflict resolution on the basis of the Madrid Principles, which have been ratified by Azerbaijan, but not by Armenia. These include a phased withdrawal of Armenian troops from the seven regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh and a high degree of autonomy for the region within Azerbaijan.

In turn, the various TEAS offices played a pivotal role in mobilising the diaspora and supporters of Azerbaijan to protest outside various Armenian Embassies. The first of these was immediately after the ceasefire was called on 4 April when around 50 Azerbaijanis protested outside the Armenian Embassy in Kensington, London. Faced by a counter-demonstration on the opposing side of the road by around 20 Armenians, directed from inside the Embassy, they made their views known in no uncertain terms, attracting coverage from the Azerbaijani and Turkish media.

On 6 April, friends and supporters of Azerbaijan, including representatives of TEAS Germany, assembled in front of the Federal Chancellery (Bundeskanzleramt) in Berlin to protest about the visit by Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan. The demonstration called upon the international community to force Armenia to release the occupied territories and implement the four UN Security Council resolutions. It raised the question of sanctions against Armenia

until it withdraws from Azerbaijani lands. It also asked why Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel was meeting one of the military commanders from the conflict, with responsibility for the Khojaly Massacre.

Shahin Namati-Nasab, Director, TEAS Germany, and chair of the demonstration, drafted a letter to Chancellor Angela Merkel, reminding her of the Armenian defiance of the four 1993 UN Security Council resolutions.

However, the peaceful demonstrations in London and Berlin were in marked contrast with those on 9 April, when Armenia brought naked violence to the streets of Paris. This saw a group of more than 20 masked Armenians, hell-bent on violence, use iron bars, bottles, ammonia and other weapons against more than 200 Azerbaijanis, friends of Azerbaijan and supporters of international law. They were making their voices known outside of the Armenian Embassy in Paris in a noisy, yet peaceful, protest. French riot police dispersed the assault and are still trying to identify the attackers, and emergency ambulances were called to attend to the wounded.

Organised by the Maison de l’Azerbaïdjan in Paris, the event was supported by TEAS France alongside diaspora and student groups, who chanted such slogans as ‘Sargsyan – War Criminal’ – referring to the Armenian President’s past role as a military commander – ‘Armenian terrorists’; ‘Armenians – Leave Karabakh’; and ‘Justice for Khojaly’. There was a temporary hiatus in the chanting to listen to *Qarabag Shikestesi*, a traditional mugham composition that emanates from the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region.



The protest in Paris, outside the Armenian Embassy, was vituperative and unequivocal



The young Dashnaks in Paris were determined to undertake a premeditated attack



An Azerbaijani protestor, stunned and injured



Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS and Mirvari Fataliyeva, President, Maison de l'Azerbaïdjan, called for justice and peace

Before the violence erupted, Lionel Zetter, Director, TEAS, spoke to the assembled masses, saying: "We believe in international law. There are four UN Security Council resolutions, one UN General Assembly resolution, and one Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) resolution all saying the same thing – Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding regions belong to Azerbaijan. Just this week Pedro Agramunt, President, PACE, said: 'I am extremely worried at the reports of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh and deeply saddened at the loss of life. All Armenian armed troops must withdraw from the occupied Azerbaijani territories in compliance with the UN Security Council resolutions.' If Armenian armed forces were not in illegal occupation of Azerbaijani sovereign territory, there would be no conflict."

Mirvari Fataliyeva, President, Maison de l'Azerbaïdjan, commented: "We are here to protest against the new military provocations from the Armenian forces. These have injured many persons. This is an undeclared war, continuing that which took place from 1988–94. That resulted in around 20 per cent of Azerbaijani territory being occupied by Armenia and around one million people becoming refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), who remain in camps to this day. The victims of the war should never be forgotten, particularly the 613 victims of the Khojaly Massacre. Nothing has changed up to today. We are calling for justice." Mrs Fataliyeva then called for a minute of silence to be observed for the recent victims of the reignited conflict.

Togrul Zeynalov, President, Azerbaijan–France Cultural Association of Nantes, said: "We are here to protest against the recent Armenian military aggression against Azerbaijani land. We live in France, and France is our second homeland, and we ask that France should act against this



Both young and old raised their voices in unison in London



More than 400 raised their voices in London, calling for the British government to place sanctions on Armenia

aggression. Long live France, long live the Republic, and long live Azerbaijanis living in France!" The protesters demanded that France – an OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair – should be more active in motivating the international community to back peaceful conflict resolution.

Peace returned, and on 10 April, a group of over 400 Azerbaijanis, supporters of Azerbaijan, members of the Turkish diaspora and Londoners believing in international law participated in a vocal protest in the heart of London, co-ordinated by TEAS. This began in Trafalgar Square – a focal point for Londoners and tourists.

Waving placards and flags, and chanting such slogans as 'Stop the Armenian occupation', 'Armenian troops out of Azerbaijan', 'Sanctions for Armenia' and 'Sargsyan – War Criminal', they continued down Whitehall towards the Palace of Westminster. They eventually stood in Richmond Terrace, opposite 10 Downing Street – the residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron. One request was on their lips – that the UK should place economic sanctions on Armenia until it removes its military forces. A letter was signed by the leaders of TEAS and the various diaspora groups and will be submitted to Prime Minister Cameron.

The spectre of Armenian-perpetrated violence reappeared on 11 April, when more than 50 Azerbaijanis went to the door of the Armenian Embassy in Brussels with a peaceful demonstration. The response was so potentially violent that more than 40 riot police were called. They used their riot shields to keep some of the Armenians at bay in their Embassy. The protest was organised by the Azerbaijani–Belgian Friendship Society and World Azerbaijanis Congress, amongst other groups, and supported by TEAS Benelux.

Initially gathering in the historic Square de



Belgian riot police keep Armenians at bay in their Embassy



The protestors positioned themselves close to 10 Downing Street – the address of the British Prime Minister

Meus, they waved flags, lifted placards and shouted such slogans as 'Sargsyan – Instigator', 'Stop targeting civilians', 'Obey UN resolutions – withdraw Armenian troops', 'Stop the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh', 'We are Karabakh' and 'We are Khojaly', and 'Karabakh is and always has been Azerbaijan'.

Ayhan Demirci, Director, Azerbaijani–Belgian Friendship Society, stated: "We are very distressed about what has happened in our motherland. Our nation is distraught. Azerbaijan does not occupy the territory of any other country – we are merely protecting our homeland. We want to free our lands from the Armenian occupation so that the refugees and IDPs can return home. We will not be calm until the occupiers and external forces take their hands off Karabakh. We are not against Armenians living in Azerbaijan.

"The occupation has continued for nearly 25 years and it seems that the international community is apathetic about the issue. I see little hope for peaceful conflict resolution. We see that the OSCE Minsk Group, the UN and the EU are doing nothing to insist on the withdrawal of Armenian troops from Karabakh. As we all know, the Armenian troops fired on the civilian population earlier this month. They ignored our requests, and this was the reason for today's protest. After targeting civilians near the 'contact line' they started shooting towards Nakhchivan, but Azerbaijan has demonstrated that it can protect itself. We are together, with one heart and one hand."

The time has come for Parliaments around the world to support Azerbaijan and place sanctions on Armenia until they implement the four outstanding UN Security Council resolutions that have been on the table for 22 years, thereby enabling the IDPs and refugees who are the ongoing victims of the occupation to return home.



The protestors took the tragedy of the Khojaly Massacre to the door of the Armenian Embassy in Brussels

## Over \$220bn invested in the Azerbaijani economy over the past 20 years

During the period 1995–2015, investments in the Azerbaijani economy totalled \$220.4bn (£155.9bn), around half of which came from foreign investments, according to Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijani Economy Minister, speaking during an interview with *The Business Year* magazine. He commented that the political and economic stability in Azerbaijan and the protection of the rights and interests of investors remain indicative of the business and investment climate of the country.

Mr Mustafayev continued: “Furthermore, the geographical location, hydrocarbon reserves, rich raw resources of precious metals and building materials, and a favourable climate for agriculture and tourism create many opportunities for local and foreign investors. To increase the efficiency of transit and logistics operations, a Co-ordinating Council has been established to regulate the transit of goods. Cargo transportation tariffs have also been reduced, thereby creating favourable conditions to increase the transit cargo transportation capacity of the country.”

### Free Trade Zones – kickstarting the economy?

The first Azerbaijani Free Trade Zone (FTZ) has been inaugurated, following the signing of an order by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on 17 March. Located in the Alat township in the Garadagh district of Baku, it will incorporate the new Baku International Sea Trade Port.

The Presidential Order states that the FTZ is being established to ensure sustainable economic development and increase competitiveness, strengthen the role of the country as a logistics and transportation centre, and contribute towards the creation of a multi-vectored transportation infrastructure. In the first instance, it is anticipated that the creation of the FTZ will attract additional foreign investments, due to its special tax and customs policies, including those related to profit tax, VAT, income tax and property tax.

In addition, Azerbaijan is actively working to set a single tariff for cargo transportation with the countries involved in the Transport Corridor Europe–Caucasus–Asia (TRACECA). A tentative agreement has been already reached with Georgia. Single tariff talks are underway with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Turkey. If the single tariff plans are realised, the competitiveness of TRACECA will increase considerably.

Azerbaijan has reduced the costs for cargo transportation by high-capacity vehicles by 40 per cent, and it is anticipated this will result in carriers operating between China, India and the EU paying to use these transportation facilities. It is also anticipated that the creation of the FTZ will serve to expand the range of goods available in Azerbaijan, as the increased competitiveness and removal of customs duties will result in lower prices for certain goods. To be effective, an FTZ needs good infrastructure, including the modernisation of roads, railways and ports, a programme of which is already underway in Azerbaijan.

For instance, according to Taleh Ziyadov, Director-General, Baku International Sea Trade Port, a roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) terminal will be constructed by late 2016, and the first developmental phase will end in 2017. Track, train and rolling stock upgrades are already underway, and trains will now reach speeds of 80–120km/h. It is anticipated that the Baku FTZ will be transformed into a large logistics and trade centre, standing at the crossroads of China, India, Iran, Russia and Europe.

He explained that, during 2015, the Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AZPROMO) had organised 261 events, of which 177 took place in Azerbaijan and 84 abroad. Mr Mustafayev expanded: “These events showcased investment opportunities in the country for local and foreign businessmen, promoted Azerbaijani exports, and saw export contracts signed with foreign partners. In 2015 alone, over \$20bn (£14.1bn) was invested in the economy. There are more than 7000 companies founded with foreign investment currently operating in various fields in the country.” Go to <http://bit.ly/businessyearmustafayev> to read the full interview.



Shahin Mustafayev, Azerbaijani Economy Minister, seen speaking at the Business Forum Netherlands–Azerbaijan in 2015, organised at the Maastricht School of Management in collaboration with TEAS Benelux

### TransTech Capital pushes for Azerbaijan to be considered as a ‘partner country’ for Newton Fund

TransTech Capital was invited to attend the recent Azerbaijan–UK Joint Economic and Trade Co-operation (JETCO) series of meetings in London. During the programme, the TransTech partners repeatedly raised the question as to why Azerbaijan has not hitherto been considered eligible as a partner country to the UK-based Newton Fund, particularly as Kazakhstan and Turkey are already partner countries. The Fund uses science and innovation partnerships to promote economic development and social welfare in partner countries.

Mahmut Sinoplu, Partner, TransTech Capital, has been quoted by the British Council in its *Report on the Higher Education Forum* as saying that TransTech noted “a strong interest in the high potential of intellectual property from Azerbaijan, which is often undocumented or disregarded, and encouraged the extension of the Newton Fund to cover Azerbaijan, which has very strong expertise in extractive industries-linked research.”

Simon Robeson, Founding Partner, TransTech Capital, commented: “Until the publication of our detailed research into the potential for Azerbaijan to generate GDP growth through its science and engineering academic infrastructure, practically no-one outside Azerbaijan knew this extensive and potentially valuable state asset even existed.” Go to <http://bit.ly/ttcpaz> to download the white paper entitled *Investigating the potential for Intellectual Property commercialisation in Azerbaijan*.

## Agshin Mehdiyev – representing the OIC and destroying prejudice and preconceptions



OIC Foreign Ministers debate tolerance and the denunciation of terrorism in the Jordanian city of Petra

Agshin Mehdiyev has been a career diplomat for over 40 years. Initially working as the Assistant for Economic Affairs at the Soviet Embassy in Egypt from 1971–75, he has held myriad positions, most recently as the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe and the UN and as Azerbaijani Ambassador to Cuba, Nicaragua, Jamaica and Venezuela and as Ambassador-at-Large at the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In November 2015, he was appointed as Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) to the EU. Neil Watson caught up with him in his Brussels office to find out more:

**You were appointed as OIC Permanent Observer to the EU in November 2015. What are the challenges OIC has been facing since that time?**

I wouldn't consider the challenges that the OIC faces today from a specific timespan perspective. Regrettably, the majority of the current issues have been in existence over a long period, and carry grave consequences for the Islamic world and beyond. For instance, there are armed conflicts in several OIC Member States, and millions of refugees and internally displaced persons

(IDPs) have escaped to Europe and the neighbouring countries, which has also led to the evolution of terrorist groups. The terrible actions of those groups operating throughout the world are well-known. Some shield their activities behind Islamic slogans and names and consequently tarnish the image of Islam – which is a religion of peace and generosity.

We are now witnessing an overall rise in anti-Muslim sentiment – Islamophobia – in many countries, most notably in Europe and the US. Ultimately, the rising tide of Islamophobia is fuelled by negative factors, such as some refugees behaving antisocially, and violent crimes being committed by terrorists who call themselves followers of Islam. However, this phenomenon has existed for a very long time.

Today, just as before, certain forces are interested in whipping up anti-Islamic feeling, expanding local conflicts into broader wars, and destroying civilisation. Knowledgeable and understanding people are well aware that terrorism has no nationality or religion – in fact, most victims of terrorism are Muslims. The same is true



Ambassador Mehdiyev has taken up the role of as Permanent Observer of the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) to the EU at a particularly challenging and pivotal time



Lyad Ameen Madani, Secretary-General, OIC discusses strategy in New York with Frederica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy



Lyad Ameen Madani, Secretary-General, OIC, speaks at the Leaders' Summit in New York on tackling ISIL and violent extremism

for refugees. These people are not fleeing their homeland on a whim. They are forced out by such factors as war, poverty and wanton destruction. However, the fact remains that these issues exist, affect all, and should be solved jointly.

In brief, these challenges are faced today in our daily work, but this constitutes only part of what we do. Our main task is to broaden and deepen comprehensive co-operation with the EU, and boost future partnership in political, economic, cultural and other areas between OIC Member States and EU countries.

**What do you feel makes an Azerbaijani diplomat particularly suitable for this position?**

Firstly, I'd like to stress that my nomination for the position of OIC Permanent Observer to the EU was decided following a recruitment competition announced by the OIC, and not as a representative of Azerbaijan. Furthermore, other diplomats from Egypt, Bangladesh and Nigeria also competed for this position. Following an assessment by a Special Commission of the OIC, my candidature was approved.

Returning to your question, an important element is the location of Azerbaijan that, everyone knows, stands at a 'geopolitical crossroads'. We are Muslims yet, simultaneously, part of Europe. Representatives of different nationalities and religious confessions enjoy peaceful coexistence in Azerbaijan. The blend of Muslim mentality and European lifestyle that is emblematic of our society serves to create a balance in which we pride ourselves. Naturally, I'm not suggesting that these tenets are unique to Azerbaijanis. However, in certain situations, we adjust more easily to the realities of non-Muslim majority societies. As you understand, for diplomats this is by far the most important factor, enabling us to fully undertake our duties.

**How does the OIC interact with the EU and how do you see this developing?**

In September 2015, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the OIC and the EU. This document outlines the partnership framework between the two organisations, and contains recommendations regarding the mechanisms for regular political consultations amongst the leadership, but also the relevant structures of the OIC and the EU. There have previously been working meetings between officials from the two organisations, but I am now hopeful these will be held in a regular and systematic manner. This will undoubtedly

enhance further multifaceted co-operation with the EU.

Participation with international bodies provides both organisations with the opportunity to co-operate in the framework of various forums and events, including the UN General Assembly and the Istanbul Process. Our mission is constantly in contact with the EU and its structures.

**What is OIC doing to combat Islamophobia?**

It is impossible to effectively treat Islamophobia by implementing forceful or administrative measures. It affects brains like a malignant tumour, obscures peoples' minds, and distorts their perception of reality. Therefore, the only means to root out Islamophobia is by presenting accurate educational information on Islam, Islamic culture and the history of Islamic countries and peoples. Collaborative work with communities, mass media and NGOs should be intensified. Priority attention should be given to co-operation with youth, as the latter are most vulnerable to the teachings of extremist and radical movements.

Certainly, the carriers of Islamophobic ideas are the absolute minority of those populations amongst which this phenomenon is encountered. Nevertheless, the efforts of the OIC are insufficient to combat prejudice. The struggle against Islamophobia should be daily work for all Muslims in Islamic countries.

**You represent 57 Muslim states, both Sunni and Shi'a, and ranging vastly in doctrine from Albania to Saudi Arabia. How difficult is it to gain a consensus of opinion?**

In fact, the OIC comprises 57 members from different continents. They are widely dissimilar in terms of economic growth and power, with the ethnic composition of populations sometimes belonging to different branches of Islam, non-identical cultures and widely varied historical backgrounds.

I must agree with the premise of your question – in these circumstances, reaching consensus is a difficult task. In similar situations, the leadership, Secretariat and all parties concerned must demonstrate the flexibility to develop a joint solution. In most cases, Islamic solidarity, which is the fundamental principle of the OIC, surmounts disagreements and facilitates the building of consensus.

**The most recent development was the implementation of the Iranian nuclear deal and the removal of sanctions**

**against Iran. What is the impact of this on the Islamic world?**

The OIC welcomed the deal and we hope that the parties to this process will respect their commitments and obligations. The OIC and all Islamic countries greeted the news with enthusiasm, and hope it will contribute to regional peace and stability.

**Many Islamic states are hydrocarbon producers. What has been the impact of reduced revenues on their economies, peoples and relations with the wider world?**

It is undeniably true that oil-producing countries have been adversely affected by the significant oil price reduction. The latter will certainly have a negative impact on their economies, resulting in budget reductions and many other socio-economic implications. Necessary measures will definitely be taken by these states to minimise the negative consequences for the mass of the population, and, most importantly, for the underprivileged. We hope they will manage to emerge from the crisis with minimal losses.

It is also apparent that the majority of oil-producing nations require serious structural and economic reforms. They need to unburden themselves of the high degree of reliance on oil revenues. The non-oil sector should be developed, external economic co-operation expanded and exports diversified. In the current situation, I anticipate more active co-operation amongst oil producers and others to seek measures to counter the crisis.

**You have previously served as Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe and the UN, and held many other positions, including diplomatic posts in Yemen and Egypt. How does your current position differ, and what is particularly satisfying about this role?**

It is an honour to represent the interests of such a large international organisation to the EU. I appreciate the trust accorded to me, and will make every effort to justify my selection. As the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe and the UN, I acted in the interests of one country. Unlike my previous positions, I now represent 57 countries, including my homeland. This is a considerably greater responsibility, and much needs to be done. The Islamic world faces many challenges to which we must respond promptly and effectively. I believe that we will achieve the desired results.

Visit [www.oic-oci.org](http://www.oic-oci.org) for more information on the OIC.

## Going digital – a conversation with Suad Garayeva Maleki of YARAT

The YARAT Contemporary Art Space in Baku is a non-profit-making arts organisation dedicated to contemporary art exhibition and dialogue. It was established by the artist Aida Mahmudova in 2011. From 24 September–9 January, it hosted *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* at its Contemporary Arts Centre, a group show bringing together recent and new digitally-focused art that explores how networked images of bodies and characters serve to structure and transform viewers' identities. The exhibition was co-curated by Suad Garayeva Maleki, Chief Curator and Collection Director at YARAT and Michael Connor, Artistic Director of Rhizome at the New Museum in New York.

The exhibition featured the international artists Neil Beloufa, Hannah Black, Camille Henrot, Parker Ito, Bunny Rogers, Jasper Spicero and Lu Yang, all of whom explored the themes of ownership, visual identity, and the relationship between a society and its images. The central hub of the exhibition was Pierre Huyghe and Phillippe Parreno's seminal project *No Ghost, Just a Shell* (1999–2002) which explored the artistic reuse of an animé character. Although Mr Huyghe was drawn to his character's seeming emptiness, the more recent works in the exhibition amplified the concept that the onscreen image is more than a mere shell – fictional characters can have real-world effects and affects.

In several of the works in the exhibition, artists explore the methods whereby onscreen images can begin to define a fan's identity or even physical body. Artist Bunny Rogers portrays herself in the guise of characters from two animated television series, transported to the setting of the Columbine High School library in the US, site of a devastating 1999 school shooting – an incident that was often portrayed as a consequence of the perpetrators' excessive identification with video games. Hannah Black presents a newly-commissioned video work made with professional and amateur bodybuilders in Baku, whose bodies emulate digitally-manipulated fitness magazines and CGI film superheroes.

Works in the exhibition also highlight the methods whereby onscreen images permit bodily norms to be distorted and transcended. Camille Henrot's drawings are inspired by a music video featuring popular American musician Nicki Minaj, highlighting the way we play with and against the ghosts of colonialism, exoticism and racial stereotypes in contemporary onscreen culture. In an exploration of similar themes, Lu Yang's installation includes a video game starring a character created by the artist – a heroic, anthropomorphic uterus.

Furthermore, the exhibition highlights how affinities with onscreen characters can play an ambivalent role that is simultaneously liberating and limiting. For example, Jasper Spicero's works are fantastical narratives set in bleak, hopeless environments. Parker Ito's site-specific installation comprises

paintings combining layered text and imagery hanging from chains, together with sculptural works, providing an all-encompassing environment that offers hallucinatory escape, even as it entangles the body. Similarly, Neil Beloufa presents a film that portrays teenagers in the Canadian city of Banff as subjects of study for a team of statisticians, serving as a metaphor for how all the hopes, fears and attachments we form in the age of social media are subject to surveillance and targeted marketing. Mrs Garayeva Maleki oversees the YARAT permanent collection and temporary exhibition programme. She previously worked as a curator and specialist in Contemporary Art from Russia and the CIS at Sotheby's, London, where she spearheaded the pioneering *At the Crossroads* exhibitions, which introduced contemporary art from the Caucasus and Central Asia during 2013–14. She also headed Russian and Eastern European Contemporary Art sales.

Mrs Garayeva Maleki has been a long-time collaborator of YARAT, and has worked on numerous international exhibitions, such as the Azerbaijani National Pavilion at the 53rd and 54th Venice Biennales. Most recently she curated YARAT's official Collateral Event at the 56th Venice Biennale, entitled *The Union of Fire and Water* (see *TEAS Magazine*, November 2015, pp.8–9). She is also a member of the Russian and Eastern European Acquisition Committee at Tate Modern, London. Neil Watson caught up with her at home in Baku to find out more:

**YARAT is currently hosting the digital arts exhibition *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. Why did it decide to focus on digital art at this time?** Digital art is a very interesting new artistic school that we wanted to explore, as digital media has provided great scope for artists. The drift towards digital art also reflects contemporary youth culture, as young people are increasingly spending more time online.

**Who made the selection of works, and why?**



*Self-portrait as clone of Jeanne d'Arc* by Bunny Rogers (2014) Fine Art Print on Hahnemühle PhotoRag Ultrasmooth 305g (Courtesy: The artist and Soci t , Berlin 1)

Suad Garayeva Maleki, Chief Curator and Collection Director of YARAT Contemporary Art Centre, at *The Union of Fire and Water*, YARAT's collateral project at the Venice Biennale 2015

The selection was made by Michael Connor, Artistic Director, Rhizome.org, and myself. Rhizome is an organisation based in New York, dedicated to research and the promotion of digital art.

**The Heart is a Lonely Hunter comprises installation artwork and figurative drawings alongside digital animated films. How close is digital artwork coming towards gaining acceptance equalling that of more established media?**

It is the most recent development in art, and reflects our daily lives and preoccupations. As the latter becomes more digitalised, it becomes decreasingly possible to imagine any sphere of activity without the employment of digital media. It remains a young experiment in art, but increasing numbers of artists are now adopting it as a medium.

**How has the exhibition been received in Baku?**

Very well – the work has attracted considerable interest, especially from younger members of the public. Many artists have expressed great interest in the new forms employed by their overseas colleagues.

**It is notable that no Azerbaijani artists are represented in the exhibition. Are there many Azerbaijani digital artists?**

As this is a very new sector, few Azerbaijani artists are focusing on such work at the present time. However, some young artists are experimenting with such media, such as Nazrin Mammadova and Farhad Farzaliyev.

**Given the advent of such new technologies as Apple i-Glass, how do you see digital art developing?**



My Anaconda Don't by Camille Henrot (2015) Watercolor on Paper (Courtesy: The Artist and YARAT)

I think it will become more prevalent in the coming years, as artists are no longer working in just one medium, such as painting, sculpture or photography, but are focusing on interdisciplinary practices. Digital media is an exciting new opportunity for them. Of course, some art is also developed exclusively online, and this is something that I see gaining importance in the future.

**The Heart is a Lonely Hunter was at YARAT Contemporary Art Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan, 24 September 2015–9 January 2016. [www.yarat.az](http://www.yarat.az)**

## Heydar Aliyev Centre architect Zaha Hadid passes away

The world-renowned Iraqi–British architect Dame Zaha Hadid, whose crowning achievement was, arguably, the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku, has passed away at the age of 65. Her death occurred on 25 March in Miami, where she was being treated for bronchitis. During an illustrious career, her buildings were commissioned around the world and she was the first woman to receive the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Gold Medal.

A statement released by her company read: “Zaha Hadid was widely regarded as the greatest female architect in the world today.” Meanwhile, plaudits and tributes poured in. Fellow architect Lord Richard Rogers recalled: “She was a great architect, a wonderful woman and wonderful person. Amongst architects emerging in the last few decades, no-one had any more impact than she did. She fought her way through as a woman. She was the first woman to win the Pritzker Prize.”

The architect Daniel Libeskind said he

was devastated by her death. “Her spirit will live on in her work and studio. Our hearts go out.”

London Mayor Boris Johnson tweeted: “So sad to hear of the death of Zaha Hadid; she was an inspiration and her legacy lives on in wonderful buildings in Stratford and around the world.”

Known under the sobriquet of Queen of the Curve, one of Zaha Hadid’s most unhindered and creative projects was the Heydar Aliyev Centre, located close to Central Baku. Featuring a fluid undulating form, the design radically breaks away from the norms of Soviet-era architecture. Commenting on the design, Zaha Hadid said: “The design of the Heydar Aliyev Center establishes a continuous, fluid relationship between its surrounding plaza and the building’s interior. The plaza, as the ground surface; accessible to all as part of Baku’s urban fabric, rises to envelop an equally public interior space and define a sequence of

event spaces dedicated to the collective celebration of contemporary and traditional Azerbaijani culture.

“Elaborate formations such as undulations, bifurcations, folds, and inflections modify this plaza surface into an architectural landscape that performs a multitude of functions: welcoming, embracing, and directing visitors through different levels of the interior. With this gesture, the building blurs the conventional differentiation between architectural object and urban landscape, building envelope and urban plaza, figure and ground, interior and exterior.” Visit [www.zaha-hadid.com](http://www.zaha-hadid.com) to see the remainder of Zaha Hadid’s remarkable body of work.

Commissioned in 2007, and completed in 2012, the Heydar Aliyev Centre is now an iconic structure on the new Baku skyline, and garnered the Design Museum’s *Design of the Year* award in 2014.



The love of the curve and use of natural materials extended into the auditorium/concert hall (Photo: Oleksandr Cheban/TEAS)

## A Miracle victory – InshAllah?

The 21-year-old singer Samra Rahimli has been selected to perform *Miracle* – the Azerbaijani entry for the Eurovision Song Contest in Stockholm, initially performing in the first semifinal on 10 May. The composers of the song – a power ballad – are the established Swedish Eurovision songwriting team of Amir Aly, Jakob 'Jakke' Erixon and Henrik Wilkström. Born in Baku, Samra spent parts of her childhood in both Azerbaijan and Russia, before eventually settling in Baku.

Her first foray into the music industry began with the Eurovision Song Contest, following the 2011 Azerbaijani win, when she took the stage for the first time in the national selection competition for the 2012 contest at the age of 16 years. After impressing audiences as the youngest contestant in the competition, Samra enrolled at the Azerbaijan State University of Culture and Arts to study music formally and pursue a singing career.

Samra returned to the spotlight in 2015, when she reached the quarterfinals in *The Voice of Turkey* talent show. When *The*

*Voice* finally came to Azerbaijan in autumn 2015, she sang Miley Cyrus' *Wrecking Ball* during a blind audition. Samra's performance left coaches speechless and the audience stunned, and she reached the finals of the competition.

*Miracle* is a dramatic song about the breakup of a relationship and Samra commented: "I've only been through a similar experience once. It's never easy to let someone go, but you have to stay strong and keep moving. For me, it's the anthem of a strong and brave girl. I hope it can inspire those who lost their love to take the right decision and move on. May this become a real *Miracle* for me!"

Azerbaijani broadcaster ITV selected the song from over 400 submissions received from international and local composers and songwriters. The final choice was based on a closed ballot decision by ITV, comprising an opinion survey of more than 100 music and television industry experts and a cross-section of Eurovision fans from over 35 European countries.



Samra's power ballad is an anthem for strong women everywhere (Photo: EBU/Kate Kondratieva)

## The spirit of mugham at SOAS



Jeffrey Werbock performs mugham on his kamancha

On 9 May, the Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS) will resound

to the passionate sound of Azerbaijani mugham during the premiere of *Young Voices, Ancient Song*, a new TEAS documentary. The film charts the journey across Azerbaijan of Jeffrey Werbock, President, Mugham Society of America, in his quest to find the young boy he heard singing in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp for those who had lost their homes due to the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The film focuses on the phenomenon of young, untrained children singing mugham in the most passionate manner. However, it also demonstrates how the genus of mugham is

inextricably interwoven with the Armenian-occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh and particularly the town of Shusha, known as the Conservatoire of the Caucasus.

Mr Werbock started learning mugham on kamancha, tar and oud in 1973, and the evening will include a short lecture–concert where he explains the development, structure, modes and microtones of mugham. Venue: Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG. Time: 19.00hrs.

Register at <http://bit.ly/werbocksoas>

## Ali and Nino celebrated in London

The forthcoming premiere of the \$20m (£13.9m) big screen adaptation of the enigmatic Kurban Said's novel *Ali and Nino*, directed by the UK-based Asif Kapadia, has been heralded with an event at the Rich Mix in Bethnal Green, attended by around 150 people. This saw the world premiere of the companion documentary *Baku: The City of Ali and Nino*, directed by Teresa Cherfas, which contextualises the events of this romantic novel, much of which is set during the time of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (ADR) from 1918–20. The documentary incorporates footage of many locations mentioned in the novel, much of which is anchored by the exuberant Azerbaijani historian Fuad Akhundov.

The screening was followed by a discussion between Ms Cherfas, Thomas de Waal, a Senior Associate with Carnegie Europe, specialising in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus region, and hosted by Josephine Burton, Artistic Director, Dash Arts. Ms Cherfas said: "In my bones, I am an historian, and one of the aspects I love most about the novel was how it seems to come at history from offstage. It tells you about events of world importance, affecting the Russian and Ottoman Empires, but they are all 'noises off', with news being conveyed by messengers or through newspapers. It is as if we are looking at history through the wrong end of the telescope. My film seeks to add the context to the novel. It was fascinating to unravel

the story and understand the real events to which Kurban Said was making reference."

Thomas de Waal commented: "For me, *Ali and Nino* has always been there. In the 1990s a group of us came to love the Caucasus, but there was very little to read, and it became our 'cult' book. The book found a western audience before it reclaimed an audience back in the Caucasus. It is reasonably definitive now that the author was Lev Nussimbaum, who grew up in Baku and came from a Jewish family. He adopted the *nom de plume* of Essad Bey, went to Germany and Austria and published this novel in 1937 under the name of Kurban Said to disguise his Judaism. He died in Positano,

Italy, in around 1942. It is such a brilliant novel, and electricity flows from it. You can pick up the novel, and there's not a dull sentence in it."

Josephine Burton said: "There is something wonderful about a book that brings together East and West and Muslim and Christian, written by someone who comes from neither community, yet is part of the cosmopolitan world of Baku at that time. This serves to enhance the myth and story, and it is excellent that this is now regarded as an ethnically Azerbaijani novel." The event was followed by a lively question-and-answer session.



A rare moment of calm in the big screen adaptation of *Ali and Nino*, featuring Adam Bakri as Azerbaijani noble Ali and Maria Valverde as Georgian Princess Nino

## The creativity of Azerbaijani cinema celebrated in Paris

For the fifth consecutive year, TEAS Paris has collaborated with Europa Film Akt (EFA), organiser of the eleventh *L'Europe autour de l'Europe (Europe around Europe)* film festival, bylined with the phrase *Chaos and Harmony*. The evening brought three outstanding short films, all of which were receiving their European premieres, to around 70 Parisian cinephiles.

Screened on 7 April at the long-established multi-disciplinary Parisian literary arts hub known as L'Entrepôt, founded in 1975 by Frédéric Mitterand, former French Minister of Culture. The evening was introduced by Irina Bilic, Director, EFA, who commented: "The *L'Europe autour de l'Europe* festival is collaborating for the fifth year with TEAS, which does much to promote Azerbaijan in the cultural domain. Tonight's films



Marie-Laetitia Gourdin, Director, TEAS France, outlined the role of cinema in reflecting contemporary Azerbaijani society

encompass the period since the country gained independence up to today.

"The Soviet style is very recognisable in the final film, *Fransiz (The French)*, whereas the two other films – *Shanghai, Baku* and *My Grief is Light* – achieve another rapport with the viewer, featuring another type of humanity, language and semiology. The work of young Azerbaijani directors has been presented at the Cannes Film Festival. Contemporary Azerbaijani cinema differs to what preceded it for many reasons, featuring an alternative view of the world, with a different style, narrative technique and type of script."

Marie-Laetitia Gourdin, Director, TEAS France, remarked: "For TEAS, cinema is the most efficient method of taking the temperature of a society or a country. Over the two-decade span separating these Azerbaijani films, shot between 1995 and 2015, it is possible to see the evolution of a country that had only recently achieved independence from the Soviet Union.

"Although very different in their styles, the films indicate some of the challenges in Azerbaijani society, particularly on how tradition does (or does not) impact the national mentality, and the position of youth in modern Azerbaijani society."

The first two selections had only recently been completed. *Shanghai, Baku*, directed by Teymur Hajiyev, was based on Chekhov's *The Naughty Boy*, transplanted to a slum known as 'Shanghai', located close to central Baku. This documentary-style film featured handheld, sometimes unfocused camerawork, semi-improvised dialogue and used nonprofessional actors to achieve a verisimilitudinous impact. Hajiyev's earlier film *Torn* was shortlisted at the Director's Fortnight of the Cannes Film Festival in 2014.

*My Grief is Light*, directed by the Moscow-based Ru Hasanov, featured some stunning cinematography that served to capture the essence of youth culture in Baku. The story focuses on a nihilistic young man, renowned for his musicianship. He is disparaged by everyone, yet is given the chance to prove himself at a high society party. He has to make the choice between music and family; and money and creativity. Once again, the use of zip pans, rather than edits between shots, gave the film a documentary edge, and the opening sequence of slow-motion young clubbers demonstrated the importance of music and togetherness in contemporary Baku. Hasanov's debut film *Chameleon* was shortlisted at the Locarno Film Festival in 2013.

The screening concluded with *Fransiz*, directed by Vagif Mustafayev, one of the most prolific Azerbaijani directors, formerly Azerbaijani Vice-Minister of Culture, and Secretary of the Azerbaijani Film Directors' Union. Dating from 1995, this satirical comedy appropriately concerns the story of Alibaba, who has studied in France. French culture and language have completely displaced his mother tongue and language. He returns to Azerbaijan, being completely unable to communicate or relate to his family, and hides in the rafters of his own house. The plot revolves around the multifarious attempts of his family to assist him in reassimilating his culture, and cleverly pokes gentle fun at some of the cultural elements that have been reasserted to reconstruct the Azerbaijani national identity. The film cleverly used surreal acting, sound effects and distantiating devices to create a hyperreal world.

This evening of ingenious and engrossing films demonstrated the excellent quality of Azerbaijani cinema, and indicated the need for greater international distribution of films from the country.

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