

A Z E R B A I J A N



The Republic of Azerbaijan is a country at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is bounded by the Caspian Sea to the east, Russia to the north, Georgia to the northwest, Armenia to the west and Iran to the south. Its population of 9,705,600 is 91.6% Azerbaijani, 1.3% Russian, and 7.1% various others. The number of ethnic Azerbaijanis in neighbouring Iran is believed to outnumber those of Azerbaijan itself at around 13,000,000. Although not actively practised by most, the majority of the population are of Muslim background, with more than 89% being Shia.

In 1990, the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR dropped the words "Soviet Socialist" from the title, adopted the "Declaration of Sovereignty of the Azerbaijan Republic" and restored the flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic as the state flag. The modern Republic of Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence on 30 August 1991 prior to the official dissolution of the USSR in December 1991.

In 1993 Heydar Aliyev, the former leader of Soviet Azerbaijan, rose to power and in October 1998 was re-elected for a second

term. Ilham Aliyev, Heydar Aliyev's son, became chairman of the New Azerbaijan Party as well as President of Azerbaijan when his father died in 2003. He was re-elected to a fourth term as president in 2018. The president is authorized to form the Cabinet, a collective executive body, accountable to both the President and the National Assembly. The Cabinet of Azerbaijan consists primarily of the prime minister, his deputies, and ministers.

The government of Azerbaijan is based on the separation of powers among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The executive power is held by the President, who is elected for a seven-year term by direct elections. The legislative power is held by the unicameral National Assembly. Parliamentary elections are held every five years. The judicial power is vested in the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and the Economic Court. The president nominates the judges in these courts.

Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with 158 countries so far and holds membership in 38 international organizations. Its foreign policy priorities include the restoration of its territorial integrity with the elimination of the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh by ethnic Armenians.



Azerbaijan is an active member of international coalitions fighting international terrorism, contributing to peacekeeping efforts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. It is an active member of NATO's Partnership for Peace program and also maintains good relations with both the European Union, and Russia. Azerbaijan has placed a particular emphasis on its "special relationship" with Turkey.

A relatively high percentage of Azerbaijanis have obtained some form of higher education, most notably in scientific and technical subjects. According to the United Nations Development Program Report 2009, the literacy rate in Azerbaijan is 99.5 percent. Since independence, one of the first laws that Azerbaijan's Parliament passed to disassociate itself from the Soviet Union was to adopt a modified-Latin alphabet to replace Cyrillic. Other than that, initial alterations have included the reestablishment of religious education and curriculum changes that have reemphasized the use of the Azerbaijani language and have eliminated ideological content. In addition to elementary schools, the education institutions include thousands of preschools, general secondary schools, and vocational schools, including specialized



secondary schools and technical schools. Education through the eighth grade is compulsory.

Two-thirds of Azerbaijan is rich in oil and natural gas and its economy has completed its post-Soviet transition into a major oil based economy with the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. Some 90% of its export revenue is derived from Oil & Gas with 2.9% from foodstuff, 1.1% from metals and a further 1% from gemstones and precious metals. The remaining 5% is made up of cotton, chemicals and other natural resources.

In September 1994, a 30-year contract was signed between the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and 13 oil companies, among them Amoco, BP, ExxonMobil, Lukoil and Statoil. As western



oil companies are able to tap deep-water oilfields untouched by Soviet exploitation, Azerbaijan is considered one of the most important countries in the world for oil exploration and development. On 14th September 2017 the agreement on development of Azerbaijan's Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (AGC) oil fields was extended by SOCAR and its partners until 2050.

Azerbaijan has also stepped up its own Natural Gas production. It is one of the sponsors of the East-West and North-South energy transport corridors, which has seen the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line connecting the Caspian region with Turkey open in October 2017, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) become operational in June 2018, and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) delivering natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas field to Turkey and Europe expected to come online in 2020.

In the meantime, Azeriqaz a SOCAR company, intends to ensure full gasification of the country by 2021.