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### SECTION 18. Culturology.

## RELIGIOUS VIEWS IN MODERN AZERBAIJAN

**Abstract:** *What are the modern religious views of the Azerbaijanis? What is the degree of religious belief and tolerance in Azerbaijan? Which religions were spread in Azerbaijan? All religious confessions in modern Azerbaijan are equal before the law and have the same status within the frames of the state-religion relations. Along with the Muslims, who constitute the majority of the population in the country, the rights of the members of other religions are ensured. The religions such as Idolatry, Fire-Worshipping, Zoroastrianism and Christianity already existed in the country until Islam was spread in Azerbaijan. Nowadays, Islam is the dominant religion in Azerbaijan.*

**Key words:** *tolerance, secular state, religion, welfare, rituals.*

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### Introduction

The Republic of Azerbaijan is situated in the South Caucasus. It borders with Iran and Turkey to the south, Russia to the north, Georgia to the north-west, Armenia to the west. Azerbaijan is a secular state. Azerbaijan is a multiethnic and multi-religious country. This feature significantly affected people's religious beliefs and historical formation of tolerance. At present, the confessional structure of the population of the country is as follows: Muslims- 93.4%, Russian Orthodox Christians- 2.5%, Armenian Orthodox Christians- 2.3% and others- 1.8%<sup>14</sup>. It should be noted that, the religious affiliation of the population defined here is conventional. Most of the population of Azerbaijan is Muslim regardless of the degree of religiosity. Islam in Azerbaijan is represented by such trends as Shiism, Sunnism. Shiite Muslims live in the southern regions of the country- Baku, Shamakhi, Yevlakh, Ganja, Gazakh, Nakhchivan, especially it is among the Azerbaijanis, Talyshs, Tats and a part of the Kurds. But the Meskhetian Turks, Tatars, a part of the Kurds living in that area are Sunni. Sunni Muslims mostly live in the northern regions of the country. The Lezgins, Avars, Tsakhurs, Budughis, Khynalyqs, a part of ingiloys and Azerbaijanis living here are Sunni. When Islam was spread in Azerbaijan a part of the inqloys and udis (uti tribes) remained Christian.

### Materials and Methods

For identifying the degree of religious belief and tolerance in Azerbaijan, and the religious specificity of the Azerbaijanis, first of all, the primitive religious beliefs that existed in the country, as well as the influence of the religions on the formation of the nation's religious values must be taken into consideration. Modern national and moral values of the people were formed under the influence of religious views and historic development stages. Of course, the modern religious views of the Azerbaijanis also base on those factors.

There religions such as Idolatry, Fire-Worshipping, Zoroastrianism and Christianity already existed in the country until Islam was spread in Azerbaijan. Now Islam is the dominating religion in Azerbaijan. However, the Azerbaijanis sometimes follow primitive religious beliefs and rituals. These beliefs and rituals have lost their original value for the Azerbaijanis, and people follow them like traditions. On the other hand, people still believe strongly in sacred places in the country, although the majority of them are Muslims.

Azerbaijan has been known as "Land of Fire" since ancient times. Zoroastrian monuments found as a result of the archaeological excavations in the area of the Republic prove that Zoroastrianism had gone deep in the culture of the people. The archaeological monuments show that ancient population of



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Azerbaijan were cremating the dead person or burying him in the ground. They made a fire near the tomb. The cremation of the dead person was then replaced with burning lamp or a candle by the tomb of the dead during the period of mourning (Kerimov, Ahanchi, 2014, p.68). This ritual was followed in the regions of Azerbaijan until 1960s. Fire has the major role in Zoroastrian rituals. Fire-worshippers believe the fire to have strong and majestic power. According to the belief of the people, the "fire" symbolizes the Sun which is the symbol of the life energy and productivity. According to the widespread belief of the people, the fire has a purifying effect. So, Azerbaijan still has remainings of the traditions of fire-worshipping which are making wishes in the sacred places and burning candle there. Unlike initial fire-worshipping, Zoroastrianism is a philosophical and ethical theory that was the transition from polytheism to monotheism. Fire-worshipping had profound influence to the ethnic dignity, traditional life and culture of the Azerbaijanis during long historical period. It is displayed in popular holidays and ceremonies, wedding and mourning traditions and in a variety of welfare customs which still remains in modern times.

Atropotena is considered the center of Zoroastrianism. Adargushnas, one of the largest temples of Zoroastrianism was located in Ganzaka (the capital of Atropatena), on the Lake Urmia. This temple was the worshipping center of the Sassanid kings. Zoroastrianism was widespread in the majority of the Asian countries (Iran, Pakistan, etc.) This religion was spread from the Aral Sea to the Nile River and from Bosphorus to the Himalayas during the Achaemenid Empire and had the status of state religion during the reign of the Arshagids and the Sassanids (VI BC - VII AD centuries). Zoroastrianism was subjected to persecution after Iran lost its independence as a result of the defeat of the Sassanids at Nihavand battle in the year of 642 AD (History of Azerbaijan, p. 133). After this, Zoroastrianism spread to the southern regions of Iran from the territory of Azerbaijan. Now "eternal flame" burns in Yazd (Iran), Mumbai (India). Yezdabad castle built by III Yezdegird, the Sassanid king, and the Ateshgah temple in the Surakhani region of Baku are the modern monuments that remain in Azerbaijan since that time. It is worth to note that Ateshgah temple in Azerbaijan is preserved nowadays by the state. It is hard to define when the first temple of the fire-worshippers was built in Surakhani. The initial temples of the fire-worshippers were built roofless. This combined the Sun and Fire. The modern architecture of that temple was formed in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to several sources, the Ateshgah temple was founded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and was built by the Azerbaijani masters with the allocations of the Indian merchants who were members of the Indian

communities of Astrakhan and Azerbaijan. Over the centuries, the fire-worshipping temple has been a place of worship of the Zoroasters (parses, gers) as well as of the followers of Hinduism (Kerimov, Ahanchi, pp. 59-65). Thus, until the Arab invasion (invasion of Arabs in Azerbaijan was in the year of 639) the population of the south-east Azerbaijan was fire-worshipper, and the population of the north was the Christian (Bunyadov, p. 35). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century the Christianity became the state religion in the Caucasus Albania. In the 4<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries Islam was the leading religion in all the territory of Azerbaijan (Yampolsky, p. 37). However, Heathenism and Christianity didn't immediately disappear with the adoption of Islam.

In modern times Christianity, which was the second largest confession, was the dominant religion in Caucasus Albania beginning from the 4<sup>th</sup> century until the occupation of the country by the Arab Caliphate. Certainly, Christianity played an important role in shaping the national and spiritual values of the Azerbaijanis. The centuries-long struggle between the Albanian and Gregorian confessor for the leadership over the church has terminated with the victory of the Gregorian Church, and the latter enforced the all Albanian church congregation to obey it. Finally, according to the decision of The Holy Synod, the Albanian church was abolished upon the request of the Armenian Catholicos in 1836 (Bunyadov, 2007, pp. 36, 116). In 2003, after the restoration of the Kish church in the village of Kish of the Shaki district, one of the most ancient Churches of Caucasus, the Albanian-Udi Christian community was restored and was officially registered. The history of Christianity in Azerbaijan goes beyond almost 2,000 years and is directly connected with the name of Bartholomew, one of the 12 apostles of the Jesus Christ<sup>15</sup>.

Many Russians began to move to Azerbaijan in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries with the development of industry in the country.

Immediately after the northern regions of Azerbaijan were included in the Russian Empire (Treaty of Turkmenchay, 1828), the Christians from Russia have moved to these areas in the 30s of the 19<sup>th</sup>. After the adoption of the Government Decree on "Transfer of the rashkolnikovs and sectarians to Transcaucasia" in 1830, resettlement policy of Tsarist Russia began in Azerbaijan. Firstly, the Russian immigrants mostly included Molokans, Dukhobors, Subbotniks, Gers, Popov supporters, Priguns and others. The policy of Tsarist Russia had two aims- to remove religious sectarians from the territory of Russia and to provide support (consisting of Christians) in the new territories of the empire. The number of Orthodox Russians had begun to grow in Azerbaijan since the second half of the XIX century. There were 21 sectarian villages in the territory of Baku province in 1868, and 13 thousand

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sectarians lived there. It is worth to note that many Orthodox Russians had been living in Baku since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Karimov, 2010, p. 10.13) even before the move of both former sectarians and spiritual Christians to the country. Unitsky Alexander, Baku province's protoier describes the lifestyle of the Russians in Baku in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as following: "The first Orthodox population of the Baku city, who tried to decorate their houses with icons and historica-holy pictures...

Every Sunday and during each holy feast, the head of each family was praying with the whole family in the morning before going to church "(Unitsky, p.49-50). N. A. Abelov, the researcher writes: "The Russians gained fruitful lands and tolerance (religious tolerance towards them) in the new country... They were peaceful and hard-working farmers" (Abelov, p. 11-12). The construction of the Russian Orthodox churches began to be built with the arrival of the Russians in the country, in such major cities of the country such as Baku, Ganja, Shamakhi. The first Russian Orthodox Church was decided to be constructed in Baku according to the order dated January 1, 1815. Diocese Chair was established in 1905 with the expansion of the Orthodox Christian community in Baku The History of Christianity). The first Roman Catholic Congregation was established in the 50s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the exile of the military catholics to the Caucasus by the Russian Army. The Congregation was under the Roman Catholic military Congregation in Borchali (Georgia). The Baku Congregation was independent in 1882. The Church of the Holy Cross was built in Baku in 1903. The new Church of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary was established in Baku in 1909-1912 (Ahadov, 1991, p. 21). The history of coming of the Germans to Azerbaijan also starts in the nineteenth century. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries there were eight German colonies in the country: Annenfeld (1819, now a part of Shamkir city), Georqsfeld (1885, Chinarli village of the Shamkir region), Augenfeld (1906, Irmashi, Tovuz region), Helenendorf (1819, now the Goy-Gol region), Alekseyevka (1902, present Hasan-Su), Grunenfeld (1905/1906, now the Samad Vurgun settlement), Elizabethinka (1924, present Khatai) and Traubenfeld (1942, present Tovuz) (Karimov, 2008, p.360). Germans are Protestant Christians. Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Baku was their cultural and spiritual center. The German-Swedish Evangelical-Lutheran Congregation was created with the increase of the Germans who came to Baku to work in 1912 (Gumbatova, p.210-213).

Nowadays, the Christians in the country are mostly non-Azerbaijanis- Russians, Armenians, Georgians, Poles, Greeks and the representatives of other nations. One can meet Azerbaijanis converted in christianity as a result of the activity of the

Christian missionaries from foreign countries after the collapse of the USSR.

The Judaism is another widely-spread religion. There are 3 Jewish communities in Azerbaijan - Mountain Jews<sup>i</sup>, European (Ashkenazi) Jews and Georgian Jews. According to the religious beliefs, the Mountain Jews are the rabbani. Mountain Jews are mostly living in Baku and Guba, European Jews live in Baku and Sumgait cities. Nowadays the Mountain Jews make up the majority of the Jewish Diaspora in the country. There are several synagogues of mountain Jews in Baku, Oghuz and Guba. The Red Settlement in Guba is the only place where the Mountain Jews are densely settled throughout the whole post soviet region. There are three synagogues and a mikvah which was built in the town for religious ceremonies. In addition, there is also a Georgian Jews synagogue in Baku. A new synagogue was opened in Baku in March 9, 2003. This is the biggest synagogue in whole Europe. A Jewish school has been operating in Azerbaijan since 2003.

615 religious organizations has been registered in the country since 2009, 594 of which are confessionally Islamic, 21 are non-Islamic (12 Christian; 6 Jewish; 1 Hare Krishna; 2 Bahai).

Hence, in modern times, religious communities of Christianity, Krishnaism and Judaism also operate in the country along with the Muslim communities. Christianity is represented by Protestantism (Baptism, Seven-Day Adventist Church, 50<sup>th</sup> ("A star in the East", "Temple of the God"), Charismatic ("Word of Life", "Nehemiah", "New Life"), Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Evangelism, Albanian-Udi church (the Albanian-Udi Christian religious community of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Oguz city Albanian-Udi Christian

*Mountain Jews<sup>i</sup> or Caucasus Jews also known as Juhuro, Juvuro, Kavkazi Jews. The beginning of the 20th century were called "Caucasian Jews" in the scientific literature.*

Religious community), Catholicism (Apostolic prefecture of the the Roman Catholic Church in Azerbaijan), Orthodox (Georgian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Church (Baku and the Diocese religious institution)), spiritual Christianity (Molokanism, Dukhoborism), Restoration Movement (Witnesses of Jehovah, New Apostolic Church). There are Baku and Azerbaijan Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, "New Life" Bible Christian religious community, "Molokan Christian" religious community in Sumgait city, "Molokan Christian" religious community in Baku, "Molokan Christian the religious community in the village Hilmilli of Gobustan region, the Albanian-Udi Christian religious community of the Azerbaijan Republic, Albanian-Udi Christian religious

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community in the city of Oguz, "Saint George Church" Georgian Orthodox Christian religious community in Gakh region, "Saint Nino" Church, Georgian Orthodox Christian religious community in the Alibeyli village of Gakh region, Savior Evangelical Lutherans religious community of Baku, "The Apostolic Prefecture of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Azerbaijan" religious organization, "word of Life" Christian religious community.

However, the Azerbaijanis sometimes follow primitive religious beliefs and rituals. These beliefs and rituals lost their original value for the Azerbaijanis nowadays. Azerbaijan also cooperates with the United Nations, UNESCO, ISESCO, OSCE and other organizations to propagate and promote the practice of tolerance in Azerbaijan and the values of the international community. Thus, not all the Azerbaijanis fully comply with all the rules of the religion (mostly Namaz praying), but they respect them all and most importantly, they believe in God and consider themselves Muslim.

The mosques, churches and synagogues closed during the Soviet reign, have been restored and new ones have been built since the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In modern times, there are 2054 mosques (135 of them are located in Baku), as well as 13 churches, 7 synagogues, at the same time 748 sanctuaries in Azerbaijan. 25 sanctuaries are located in Baku-Absheron region<sup>13</sup>. 814 mosques have been built in the country since 1990. 306 mosques are preserved by the government as a historical monument. Nearly 410 mosques were renovated, 16 mosques have been restored, 10 mosques have been built or completely renovated by the expenses of the government in the years 1993-2013 region<sup>13</sup>. Other mosques were built and restored by wealthy citizens. Now, the operation of a large number of mosques, churches and synagogues is a sign of constant ethnic and confessional conditions and of religious tolerance.

As it was mentioned previously, the Azerbaijanis have their specific religious beliefs. Azerbaijanis and other Muslim nations living in the country consider themselves Muslims, along with their primitive religious beliefs as the signs of shamanism, idolatry, Zoroastrianism. There is a statement about the primitive religious beliefs in Holy "Koran": "Don't worship to the Sun and the Moon, but if you believe, worship the God who created all this" ("Koran", p. 41, verse 37). However, the Azerbaijanis, besides considering "Koran" as Holy, visit sacred places, perform religious rituals which have nothing to do with Islam.

The following forms of primitive religions exist in modern Azerbaijan - the stone ritual, water ritual, tree ritual, fire ritual, cosmogonic beliefs, and so on. The above-mentioned rites are closely related with animism, magic, totemism and fetishism. Ethnographic observations show that people still follow the primitive religious rituals of

animism. Despite of the different reasons and essence of creation of sanctuaries in modern times, the main object of worship via any holy person is God. There are Pirs related to the cult of wood, stone, water and other subjects, and also Pirs, which were built in honor of holy people in all regions of Azerbaijan (who were the most respectful ones and homes and tombs of those, who are considered to have supernatural power). The word "Pir" in Azerbaijani language means "elder", "the founder of the religious community", "head of family", "holy"; the word "ocaq" means "the place where the fire was made", in broader sense means "home", "family" and the words "ocaq" and "pir" have the same meaning. (Yampolsky, p.31-32).

Visitors made 3 or 7 times a turns (they believed since ancient times that three and seven are the holy figures) around the "pir", made a wish and did alms. They performed here different primitive religious rites. For example, the visitors of the Pirsaat Pir in Shamakhi damped the aching part of their body with the water in a special copper jar and rubbed small stone near it to the aching part and asked for help. It is interesting that modern Azerbaijanis read the prayers of "Koran" in the pir along with the primitive religious rites of water and fire. The sacrifices are also mainly brought in these sanctuaries. Islamic ceremonies are also performed in a number of pirs along with primary religious rites. The visitors performed idolatry rituals in the sacred places regardless of their origin.

The Pirs of Azerbaijan maintain some similar features of ancient astral religions, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. Shamanism is one of the first religious views of ancient Turkic tribes. They believed to heal illness playing drums, singing and dancing, and contacting the spirits through the rituals. Since ancient times, there have been healers, who were believed to treat the diseases with the soil, stone, water of the pirs; people used to tiekerchief, a piece of cloth on the holy trees etc. These facts are connected with the belief into the spirit of the tree, fire, stone, etc. People believed that the candle is the symbol that represents the perishability of human life - which is similar to the holy light going into the sky (to the Sun). These beliefs are present in the wedding ceremonies of the Azerbaijanis as well. For example, red ribbon is tied around the waist of the bride and her dowries in the wedding ceremony to protect the bride from evil forces. This tradition is followed until nowadays. The traces of Shamanism express themselves in the welfare of the Azerbaijanis in modern times.

One of the most popular cults in Azerbaijan is a tree cult. According to the ancient views, the spirits of the dead people pass to the trees and the latter become sanctuaries. Tree sanctuaries are widespread in all regions of the country. Walnut tree, iron tree, dagdagan tree, oak tree, fig tree, mulberry tree, plane



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tree, fir-tree and other trees were considered sacred. It was a sin to break, cut and burn such trees. It is worth to note that regardless their social status, age and sex, the Azerbaijanis consider sin cutting the trees in the pirs until today. There is a belief among the people: "The family of the person who cut and burned the sacred wood in his house will be destroyed".

Most of the holy places experienced some changes from the ancient times up to now. The people visit sacred sites and perform certain rituals regardless of their social status. But in the modern time, people visiting the holy places primarily call only God for help and they there say prayers from Holy Koran. They make mostly wishes and tie a piece of cloth or a kerchief to the tree. According to the belief, if the cloth or kerchief is untied by itself, it means the wish will come true. In the modern time the sanctuaries of Azerbaijan maintain some features of old astral religions, idolatry, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. At the same time, both Muslims and Christians visit the same holy places, particularly those located in Nagorno-Karabakh. Undoubtedly, this can be justified by the fact that those holy places had been sacred for the population of that territory before Christianity and Islam. Nowadays, some Muslims go to church with a wish (mainly, during Easter holiday of the Orthodox Christians) and to take holy water. They drink that water, damp on themselves or splash it at home with the intention to heal a disease or the realization of any affairs. So, they think to be protected from evil forces. This tradition was widespread among the Azerbaijanis in ancient times. The reason why Azerbaijanis are very tolerant to other nations and why they visit the holy places belonging to other religions can be explained with the existence of various religions and religious beliefs in the territory of Azerbaijan throughout the history and the major role of these religions in the formation of its national and moral values. In general, religious syncretism is observed in Azerbaijan.

Modern Azerbaijan is a secular state, where only a small part of the population follows the basic conditions of Islam. However, to be Muslim has more cultural and ethnic value for the Azerbaijanis more than religious one. It is worth mentioning certainly that other important indicators of the attitude of Azerbaijanis toward Islamic religion are sticking to religious rules and the role of Sharia in daily family affairs. Sharia laws became important in the life of Azerbaijanis. One of the important factors stipulating the presence of Muslim spirituals in public administration was related to the special role of the religion in the life of Muslim community. Both secular and religious problems were interpreted from the Islamic point of view. These laws, which were regulating the economic life, norms of morality and ethics, Muslim ceremonies and holidays, were

determining the behavior of the religious people, and the lifestyle of the whole Muslim community were united in a single system. On the other hand, determination of the single legislative functions in religion increased the role of the mosques in the life of the Muslims. Unless the Shaira law is not at a state level in the modern era, it is preserved in the culture of the people's welfare.

Religious tolerance in Azerbaijan is also supported by the policy of the state in this field. The main legislative act regulating the religious activity in the country is the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic and the law "On Freedom of belief". This law says: "Everyone determines his attitude to the religion independently and he/she has a right to choose any religion individually or together with others, to express and spread their beliefs related to their attitude to the religion". According to the Article 18 of the Constitution, "Religion is separated from the State in Azerbaijan Republic". All the religions beliefs are equal before the law; distribution and promotion of the religions (religious movements) humiliating human dignity or contradicting the principles of humanism are prohibited; national education system is secular"<sup>4</sup>.

It is very difficult to define the degree of religiosity of the population after nearly 70 years of atheistic policy of the Soviet Union. According to the results of the social survey among the Azerbaijanis in 2008 in various regions, including Baku city, only 62.7% of the people would consider themselves religious, only 6.4% of them are fully religious. According to the results of the survey of the "Pew Research Center" in 2015, although more than 90% of the population of the country is Azerbaijani, only 8% of among them was in favor of implementing sharia laws by State<sup>12</sup>. According to the results of the survey of the Religious Research Center named "Islam in Azerbaijan" (2014), the vast majority of the population in Azerbaijan (97.2%) considers himself/herself as Muslim. 92.9% of the respondents considered themselves believers (absolute believers are 22.4%, those who believe in religion - 70.5%). 2.2% of the population stated that they do not believe in religion. 4.9% of them was skeptical about religion (Islam in Azerbaijan, p. 56).

According to survey of the Center of Religious Research, 40% of the respondents consider themselves Muslim without being Shiite or Sunni, 15% stated that being Shiite or Sunni does not have any importance. According to the survey, 33% of the respondents consider themselves Shiites, 11.5% - the Sunni (Islam in Azerbaijan, 2015. p. 63). According to the survey of the Religious Research Center, more than half of the respondents (56.1%) follow more or less the rules of Islam (32.3% follow some rules, 16.3% follow most of the rules, 7.5% follow all the rules). 42.5% of the respondents stated that they do not follow any rule of Islam (Islam in Azerbaijan,

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p.63). Another indicator of the traditional religiosity is the religious process of marriage (kabin). Although the Soviet power struggled with religion, the majority of the Azerbaijanis had religious marriage (kabin) along with the civil registration. After the collapse of the Soviet Union this tendency increased even more. According to the survey of the Religious Research Center, 71% of the respondents had both secular and religious marriage, 14.2% - only secular marriage, and 3.5% - only religious marriage. As it is observed, religious marriage is important for the Azerbaijanis (Islam in Azerbaijan 2015. p.70). Notwithstanding that the majority of people in Azerbaijan aged between 65-85 years stated to believe in God in general, the degree of worship is not high. The religious perception and the degree of worship of the people aged between 45 and 65 is quiet low since their youth and adolescence years fell on times prior to independence (during Soviet-era).

The degree of belief of Azerbaijanis in Islam may be set as following: a group of people not following any religious rites and religious rules. Some of them respect certain religious rules due to certain influence of their families or national traditions. For instance, they go to mosque on religious holidays, and they sign religious kabin when they marry. Thus, they consider themselves Muslims. Other group of people has incomplete religious life. They only pray on Fridays (Cuma Namazi) and fast on some days of Ramadan. Despite of this, they all consider themselves Muslims.

All religious confessions in modern Azerbaijan are equal before the law and have the same status within the frames of the state-religion relations. The rights of the representatives of other religions are ensured, along with the Muslims constituting the majority of the population of the country. The relations between the state and religion are regulated by the civil norms; the principle of freedom of conscience, the environment of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and stable tolerance are provided. The state policy on the inter-religious dialogue certainly establishes conditions for preservation and further development of the traditions of tolerance of Azerbaijanis. For instance, Conference of Ministers of Culture of Council of Europe named "Intercultural dialogue as a basis for peace and sustainable development in Europe and its neighboring regions" held in 2008, international

conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on the 40th anniversary of the organization named "Inter-civilizational dialogue: Insight from Azerbaijan" held on November 11, 2009, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue and other events are of great importance from this standpoint. One of the most important events aimed to promote the state policy on religion in Azerbaijan, and also to promote the support for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue on the international scale and spread the practice of tolerance of the Azerbaijanis was the World Summit of Religious Leaders held in Baku, on April 26-27, 2010. The representatives of the most influential religious centers of the world, as well as the leaders of Russian Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic Churches and the authoritative religious figures of the Vatican Constantinople Patriarchate and the most authoritative religious figures of the Islamic world attended the summit. Azerbaijan also cooperates with the United Nations, UNESCO, ISESCO, OSCE and other organizations in order to spread and promote the practice of tolerance in Azerbaijan, and also disseminate these values throughout the international community.

For sure, there are cosmopolitan and atheist people in the country. Atheist policy in former USSR, and modern globalization processes also have affected them. At the same time, Islam plays an important role in the life of Azerbaijanis. The Islamic factors are preserved in many spheres such as marriage and family relations, upbringing of the children, society and approach to life. In modern times, traditional religious mentality plays an important role in preservation of the tolerant environment in Azerbaijan. Currently, there is no any religious conflict in Azerbaijan. It is worth to note that the notion "Muslim" in the present article does not always mean a wholly devout one. In conclusion, the majority of Azerbaijanis does not follow the Islamic traditions, does not consider essential going to mosques, does not pray Namaz massively and perform elementary religious rituals. However, every Azerbaijani respects all the rules of Islam, even one does not entirely fulfill his/her Muslim obligation. Moreover, they believe in Allah and consider themselves Muslims. It establishes the basis for their internal worldview, ethics and morals.

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### Biography

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