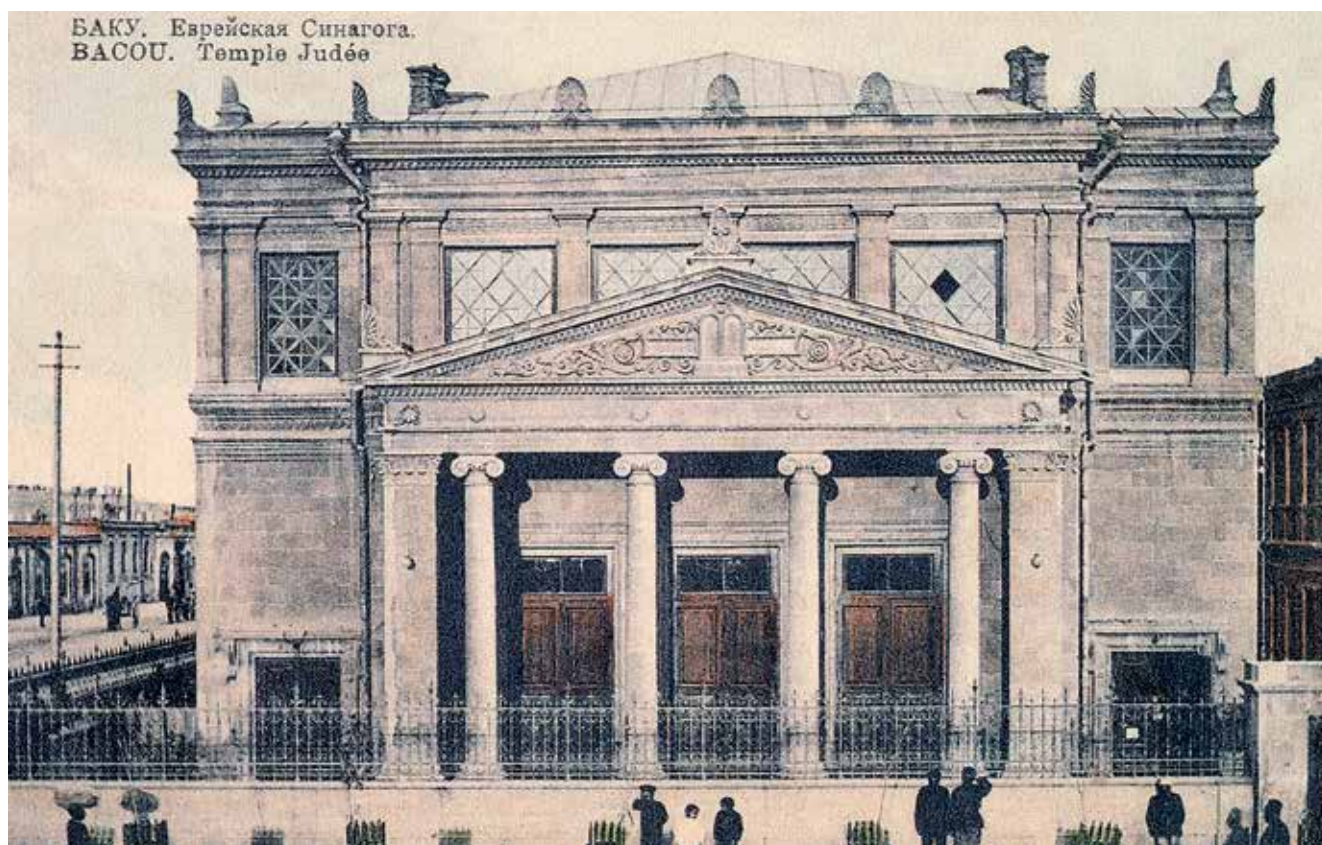


# MUSLIM AZERBAIJAN: BUCKING THE ANTI-SEMITIC TREND IN EUROPE

*Synagogue. Baku. 1900. The postcard of the beginning of the XX century*



*Family of Mountain Jews.  
Photo of the beginning of the XX century*

For many years, we have defended Jews in what are now the 15 independent states of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Today, we're as concerned about intolerance and extremism as we've ever been. As happens so often in times of turmoil, Jews are becoming the scapegoats for economic, social and political instability, as well as the conflicts in the Middle East. Anti-Semitic incidents are increasing alarmingly, not only in Eastern Europe but also in France, Germany, Belgium and even the Scandinavian countries.

In one former Soviet Republic, in South Eastern Europe, on the Caspian Sea, there is a remarkable exception to the rising tide of anti-Semitism – the secular, moderate, Muslim-majority nation of Azerbaijan.

With a new Congress taking shape, now is the time for Congress' many friends of Israel to learn more about Azerbaijan, where the Jewish community recently celebrated the High Holy Days in peace and with official greetings from President Ilham Aliyev. Once they do, they will see that Azerbaijan is an example for other countries to follow with respect to supporting Israel.





*Jewish merchant house in Oguz.  
The beginning of the XX century*

Having lived in Azerbaijan for 2,500 years without persecution and numbering some 35,000, the country's Jewish community enjoys full dignity, respect and religious freedom. As the former Israeli Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Rafi Harpaz, said unlike in European countries, there is no anti-Semitism in Azerbaijan.

Praising Azerbaijan's tolerance in the midst of turbulence, Harpaz declared, "Azerbaijan can be a model for other countries in terms of attitudes towards Jews." In fact, Harpaz is the sixth Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan, which has maintained diplomatic relations with Israel for 27 years.

Azerbaijan's tradition of peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Christians and Jews, as well as its role as a bridge-builder between East and West, exemplify its unique and essential role on the international stage.

A rarity among nations with Muslim majorities, Azerbaijan maintains strong diplomatic, economic and military ties with Israel. In an example of their close relationship, Azerbaijan and Israel plan to implement visa-free travel for those with diplomatic passports traveling between the two countries.

Azerbaijani-Israeli links extend beyond diplomacy to



*Jewish house in Guba. The beginning of the XX century*

*Collection of Mountain-Jewish fairy tales «Golden Chest», published in Baku*



*Collection of works by Nizami Ganjavi, published in the Mountain Jewish language. Baku, 1940*



economics and security. Azerbaijan supplies 40 percent of Israel's oil needs through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Israel is Azerbaijan's third largest trading partner, with commerce between the two countries totaling \$4 billion.

On the security front, Azerbaijan is acquiring 12 Coast Guard vessels from Israel, adding to the \$1.6 billion in high-tech weapons it has purchased from Israel since 2012.

The new Congress should do all it can to support allies that are deepening their security, economic, and diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. A strong congressional statement in support of Azerbaijan's strategic energy role —, which helps both Israel and Europe — would show Azerbaijan much-needed US support in the face of regional pressures from the likes of neighboring Iran. ✦

*Mountain-Jewish dance «Khars»*