

## The Limits of Democratization in Postauthoritarian States: The Case of Azerbaijan

### Introduction

After 14 years of transition, Azerbaijan stands at a crossroads. The political leadership needs to agree on the direction the country should take in the future. There are two paths they could choose: creating a dynastic system or sharing power pluralistically. In Azerbaijan, party pluralism, which was introduced in the early 1990s, has not inevitably been accompanied by democracy. While following the path that leads to becoming an open society, Azerbaijan appears to have stopped at the stage of “democracy lite”. Institutional standards that are fundamental for democracies, such as free and fair elections, freedom of the press, assembly, expression, and information have too often been ignored and not infrequently deliberately curtailed<sup>1</sup> – most recently in the presidential elections of October 2003. Violent clashes between outraged demonstrators incited to riot and the police and the military resulted in several deaths and dozens of injuries. Arrests of opposition politicians with the appearance of arbitrariness also suggest the abuse of power. The events discredited the very idea of using free and fair elections to legitimize rule, causing lasting damage to the democratic system. Moreover, a consideration of the population’s access to TV and print media reveals a serious deficit with regard to political participation. As we shall see later, there are considerable obstacles to free opinion forming in Azerbaijan.

The presidential election in 1992 came nearest to meeting international standards in terms of organization, structure and execution. Twelve years have passed since then. And although international organizations recognize that progress towards democratization has been made, there has also been a considerable degree of backsliding into the autocracy of the former system.

The roots of the dynastic turn now also evident in the Central Asian successor states of the former Soviet Union can be traced back to 1992 and the founding of the New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni-Azerbaycan Partiyası*, YAP). This followed three turbulent years, which led from the collapse of the authoritarian communist regime in 1990 via a post-communist restoration to the government of the Azerbaijani-nationalist Azerbaijan Popular Front in 1992-3. The victory of İlham Aliev, the son of Heydar Aliev, in the 2003 presidential election represents a new high point in the concentration of power in the hands of the state. İlham Aliev is also the starkest manifestation

---

1 On the fundamentals of a definition of democracy, see: Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven/London 1971, pp. 2ff.

yet of the principle of hereditary succession. Before the election, he had not only been one of the leaders of the YAP, but also the vice president of the state oil company, SOCAR, and head of the National Olympic Committee. His appointment as prime minister by President Heydar Aliev on 5 August 2003 marked the completion of the hereditary transfer of power.

The present contribution concerns certain aspects of the democratization process in Azerbaijan. A look at the various phases of political development since 1989 provides the background before which current events are unfolding. The aim is to assess the transition process in Azerbaijan, which continues despite all the adverse circumstances, and to identify potential for future development. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – an important background factor influencing political processes and decisions – will only be treated briefly. The following analysis does not deal with economic factors – not out of ignorance of the extremely powerful and lucrative oil business, but rather simply to remain on topic.

### *Nationalism as a Government Programme*

One thing Azerbaijan certainly does not have is a long tradition of democratic elections. Between April 1920, when the Bolshevik Red Army brought an end to the Republic of Azerbaijan, and independence in 1991, Azerbaijan was ruled by Moscow. For 70 years, while the Communist Party exercised authoritarian or even totalitarian control and sought to create a single “Soviet people”, there was no place for free, fair, secret, and equal elections. Only with the arrival of perestroika and glasnost, the mass demonstrations of 1988-9, and the intensification of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh were elections to Azerbaijan’s supreme soviet held for the first time (in 1990). The 350 elected members of this “transitional parliament”, which was given the task of leading Azerbaijan to independence, were nominated either by the Communist Party or by popular organizations, such as the reform-oriented Azerbaijani-nationalist “Democratic Bloc”. In this way, a crack was opened up in the monolithic power structure of the USSR, and it was only a matter of months until this led to Azerbaijan’s departure from the Soviet Union.

One of the first political concessions the new government made to the combined opposition groups, which were united under the banner of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (*Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi*, AXC)<sup>2</sup>, was to formally recognize them as a political organization. The AXC won its second victory in October 1991 with the government’s introduction of the *milli meclis* – or National Council. The establishment of this body – consisting of 25 representatives each of the communist government and the opposition –

---

2 The AXC only registered as a political party in 1995, since when it has been known as the AXCP (Azerbaijan Popular Front Party), although two factions have each claimed the name for themselves since a split in 2001.

was a clear sign of the shifting balance of power. In the opposition press, this was fêted as the victory of the Popular Front and an expression of the true relations of force in the country.<sup>3</sup> The Popular Front itself declared that, “After creation of the National Council, the APF [AXC] controls the legislative body. Representatives of APF are also in executive bodies of power. That’s why APF should have exact and perfect conceptions for all fields of national development. It demands to set up a special Brain Centre in APF. APF accomplished a historic mission with honour. If the National Re-generation Process at the beginning of the 20th century was connected with the Musavat Party then now this process was connected with the Azerbaijan Popular Front.”<sup>4</sup>

By now, the AXC had achieved a degree of organization and popularity that should have allowed it to assume power. At the same time, however – and in common with numerous other national-democratic parties throughout the former Soviet Union – the AXC was suffering as a result of the vagueness of its programme, which was basically limited to three points:

- Overthrowing the communist regime
- Building civil society
- Establishing a (social) market economy

With the AXC unable to function as a strategic umbrella movement, significant fractions split off and established themselves as independent political parties. Several of the decisive political forces in Azerbaijan emerged from the Popular Front:<sup>5</sup>

- The Social Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (*Sosyal Demokrat Azərbaycan Partiyası*, SDAP)
- The Azerbaijani Independent Democratic Party, (*Azərbaycan Müstəqil Demokrat Partiyası*, AMDP)
- The National Independence Party of Azerbaijan (*Azərbaycan Milli İstiqlal Partiyası*, AMİP)
- The Azerbaijani Democratic Independence Party (*Azərbaycan Demokrat İstiqlal Partiyası*, ADİP)
- The New Equality Party (*Yeni Müsavat*, Müsavat)
- The Grey Wolves (*Boz Qurd*).

While Azerbaijan’s first free parliamentary elections were postponed several times and only finally held in November 1995, a groundbreaking presidential election took place in July 1992. Not only did the AXC leader, Abulfaz El-

---

3 Cf. Azadlıq, 29 November 1991.

4 From material produced by the AXCP.

5 Cf. İsmayıl Veliyev/Cavid Hüseynov, *Azərbaycanın Siyasi Partiyaları və İctimai Təşkilatları*, in: *Azərbaycan Ensiklopediyası Neşriyyat-Poliqrafiya Birliyi*, Baku 1995, pp. 7-31.

chibey (1938-2000), receive 60 per cent of the vote to end the rule of Ayaz Mutalibov,<sup>6</sup> who came to power in a dubious election in September 1991, he also represented the claim to power of the Azerbaijani nationalists. On taking office, Elchibey presented the main themes of his presidency: Democracy, Turkism, Islam. These were the three pillars on which he believed the Republic of Azerbaijan rested. He faced criticism from the West, which alleged that the AXC leadership was taking Azerbaijan down the road of Islamism, and thus on the way to becoming the next Islamic republic, on the model of Iran. In Elchibey's view, however, the interplay of these three factors was the basis of national renewal: "We emphasize democratic values because we recognize the principle that human rights are more important than interests based on class, religion and nationality. However, the rebirth of the Azerbaijani people is closely intertwined with Panturkism and with the Islamic civilization within which the Turkic peoples developed. That is why these three principles are logical."<sup>7</sup>

In terms of foreign policy, two of Elchibey's presidential decrees pointed the way forward: They led to Azerbaijan's exit from the CIS in 1992 and the uncompromising policy pursued in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Over the years, talks convened by international organizations to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, such as the Minsk Group of the OSCE, have been dominated by the clash between two fundamental positions: Protection of vested territorial interests (Azerbaijan) versus actual possession of territory on the ground (Armenia). Both parties seek to justify their positions historically, either in legal terms by reference to old treaties that remain legally valid, or in terms of the ethnic make-up of Nagorno-Karabakh. In one respect at least, there is nothing to choose between the two parties: They are both equally convinced of the rightness of their territorial claims. These fundamental positions, which have hardened over the years, make alternative approaches to resolving the conflict politically infeasible. Representing uncompromising positions is often tied to career prospects, and moderate voices more prepared to compromise are thus not only rare but also tend to be drowned out.

The outbreak of conflict not only threatened Azerbaijan's hard-fought stability, it also boosted nationalism and the country's national independence movement. Over the years, Nagorno-Karabakh developed into a cornerstone of Azerbaijani government policy. The political fate of every government – both rise and fall – has been linked to the insistence on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the claim that Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to Azerbaijan.

---

6 After the Azerbaijani Communist Party voted to dissolve itself in August 1991, Mutalibov, now a party leader without a party, took the bull by the horns and called presidential elections for 8 September. When his only opponent, Zardusht Alizadeh, withdrew his candidature, Mutalibov's total victory was ensured.

7 *Moskau News*, July 1992, p. 5 (this and all following quotes from foreign-language material translated by the author).

Elchibey's presidency ended in summer 1993 after just a few months. This was the end of the Popular Front's period in government, which was too short to see more than the beginning of the reform process. A collapsing economy, a refugee crisis, and a lack of ideas within the party virtually incapacitated the AXC. The war over Nagorno-Karabakh exacerbated Azerbaijan's underlying problems. The AXC's fixation on retaining or winning back territory served to make the conflict situation worse. To solve the territorial conflict, which would simultaneously be the key to holding on to power, the AXC chose to follow the path of Azerbaijani nationalism. But while this encouraged patriotism, it excluded the possibility of a diplomatic solution. Thus, the party locked itself into a vicious circle.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the Azerbaijani nationalist parties, and the AXC/AXCP in particular, discredited themselves through internal mismanagement. Frequent splits, the founding of new parties, and conflict between party factions were symptoms of an intra- and cross-party power struggle that interfered with the parties' main activities and made them appear incapable of effective action.

Once the Popular Front was forced into opposition, these problems were joined by a lack of policies and the inability to form coalitions. Much stronger, however, was the tendency of the population to associate these parties with the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. It was the nationalist president Elchibey that led the country ever deeper into the war in 1992, and the population lays responsibility for the tens of thousands of dead and the 500,000 internal refugees at the door of the AXCP. Even if it did not cause the war, the party has to take responsibility for escalating the situation. Moreover, the fact that it was Aliiev, the leader of the YAP, who negotiated the 1994 ceasefire that holds to this day, thus establishing an "armed peace", deepened the population's mistrust of the Azerbaijani nationalist parties. The AXCP and its successors have lost whatever advantage they once had. A survey carried out by the International Republican Institute (IRI) revealed that 48 per cent of Azerbaijanis feared the return of war.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Old Structures – New Hierarchies*

While the once high level of support for Elchibey and the Popular Front shrank as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated, the popularity of Heydar Aliiev grew. Aliiev's long career had seen him rise through the ranks of the nomenklatura to reach the centre of power in Moscow. After falling out with Gorbachev in 1987, he spent five years as leader of Nakhichevan. His political renaissance began in November 1992 with the founding of the YAP. From the start, the party was the multi-ethnic counterweight to the

---

8 For a comprehensive analysis, see Hendrik Fenz, *Transformation in Aserbajdschan* [Transformation in Azerbaijan] (forthcoming), Part II, Chapter 2.  
9 Cf. [www.iri.org](http://www.iri.org).

Popular Front, which had a platform based on Turkism and pan-Azerbaijanism.<sup>10</sup> The ethnic make-up of the YAP's executive committee (Azerbaijanis, a Russian, a Talysh, and a Lezgi) underlined the party's political approach. The cause of the last three groups, in particular, which, as minorities in Azerbaijan, had been especially concerned about their social, cultural and political future, was taken up by the YAP, first in Nakhichevan, then in the country as a whole. Of course, this policy was also an attempt to secure the political loyalty of ethnic groups.

On 15 June 1993, Aliev celebrated his return to Baku as the newly elected speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament. Three days later, fearing for his life, Elchibey fled to his home region of Nakhichevan. What followed was a clever political manoeuvre: In the president's absence, it is the speaker of the parliament, in this case Aliev, who assumes his duties. When President Elchibey refused categorically to return to Baku, the National Council waited only a few days before transferring all presidential powers to Heydar Aliev, on 24 June 1993. In effect, the elected president was overthrown. Aliev's presidency was given the seal of approval by the Azerbaijani public in a referendum held in August 1993 and a presidential election called at short notice in November 1993, which he won with 98.8 per cent of the vote, a figure reminiscent of the communist era.<sup>11</sup> Aliev set about immediately to rebuild his power. Decisions made by the Popular Front, such as the intention to sign a major international agreement for the exploitation of Caspian oil, were revised, while Azerbaijan's accession to the CIS, which had been shelved in 1992, was quickly implemented. The most significant achievement of Aliev's first year in power was the ceasefire with Armenia in 1994. He consolidated his hold on power by surrounding himself with loyal appointees. In statements that also display autocratic tendencies, Aliev revealed – with no hint of modesty – the role he imagined for himself: “They believe in me. Or, more exactly, they believe in me in the religious sense. It is a desperate belief, perhaps the last belief, in a politician as the messiah, in a politician who can free his entire people from need.”<sup>12</sup> And: “I built huge factories here, power stations, roads, bridges, apartment buildings. Here in Baku within a single year, I built one million square meters of apartment buildings. Do you see all these buildings? They all were built by me.”<sup>13</sup>

While Aliev saw himself as the builder of Azerbaijan, the new regime used repressive measures such as arrests, bans on newspaper, and the occupation of AXCP headquarters to force the opposition, and particularly the

---

10 Cf. Ebulföz Elçibey, *Bütöv Azərbaycan Yolunda*, Ankara 1997.

11 Cf. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Azerbaijan presidential election*, at: [www.csis.org/ruseura/caucasus/pubs/cew\\_030605.pdf](http://www.csis.org/ruseura/caucasus/pubs/cew_030605.pdf).

12 Vek, 28 January/3 February 1994, cited in: Rainer Freitag-Wirringhaus, *Kurzbiographie Haidar Aliev*, in: *Orient* 1/1994, pp. 5-14, here p. 5.

13 Interview with Heydar Aliev, in: *Azerbaijan International* 3/2001, pp. 14ff., available at: [http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/93\\_folder/93\\_articles/93Aliyev.html](http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/93_folder/93_articles/93Aliyev.html).

Popular Front, out of the political process.<sup>14</sup> It was no coincidence that the opposition newspaper *Müxalifet* published an open letter accusing the president of being the enemy of Azerbaijan's deliverance.<sup>15</sup> If Aliev's domestic stance was uncompromising towards the opposition, his foreign policy looked beyond partnership with Turkey and sought to intensify relations with Russia. Azerbaijan's return to the CIS fold reopened the gateway to the Caucasus for Moscow's interests. This meant, however, that the government of Azerbaijan thus gave room on its unstable ship of state to a partner driven above all by its own economic and strategic military considerations.

### *Elections: Benchmarks of Democracy*

The table on page 172 aims to provide an overview of turnout and the share of the vote in presidential elections. Two figures in particular may require explanation: The results of the 1991 and 1993 elections, in which one candidate (Musalibov and Aliev, respectively) received over 98 per cent of the vote, can be explained with reference to the context in which the ballots took place. While competing candidates succeeded in winning a significant portion of the vote in 1992, 1998, and 2003, the rulers (not yet presidents in name) stood without serious opposition in 1991 and 1993.

Only the 1992 election, in which Elchibey won 60.9 per cent of the vote to beat his opponents, can be considered a free and democratic ballot in the strict sense. In contrast to the contests that followed, there was far less control over the media, which meant the population was provided with far better access to information. It is thus possible to view the result – which would have been seen as humiliatingly low in Soviet times – as illustrating the growing willingness of the population to participate politically.

The three elections held within 24 months in 1991, 1992, and 1993 reflected Azerbaijan's domestic instability. As well as feeling the effect of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the state was undergoing a fundamental transformation from one system to another. Only with Heydar Aliev's assumption of the presidency in 1993 do we see the start of the political stabilization process that appears to have continued into the rule of his son.

For the 2003 election, the nationalist opposition formed the "Our Azerbaijan" alliance, to try once again to unseat Aliev and change the balance of power by democratic means. However, a meeting of opposition parties (Müsavat, AMİP, AXCP) held in London in late August 2003 proved unable to agree on a common candidate. Unable to pool their resources in the campaign, the opposition parties lost.

---

14 According to Human Rights Watch, at least 137 members of the opposition were arrested in 1993. Cf. [www.hrw.org/reports/1994/WR94/Helsinki-02.htm](http://www.hrw.org/reports/1994/WR94/Helsinki-02.htm).

15 Cf. *Müxalifet*, 28 October 1993, p. 1.

*Percentage share of the popular vote in presidential elections*

	1991	1992	1993	1998	2003
Ayaz Mutalibov, AKP	98.5	-	-	-	-
against Mutalibov	1.5	-	-	-	-
Elbufez Elçibey, AXÇ(P)	-	60.9	-	-	-
Nizami Süleymanov, AZDİ	-	33.8	-	8.2	-
İlyas İsmayılov, ADİİH	-	0.7	-	-	0.8
Rafiq Abdulayev, XCP	-	0.5	-	-	-
Tamerlan Qarayev		1,6			
Yaqub Mamedov, independent	-	1.7	-	-	-
Heydar Aliev, YAP	-	-	98.8	77.6	-
Zakir Tagiyev, AHP	-	-	-	-	-
Kerar Abilov, VAP	-	-	1.02	-	-
Etibar Mamedov, AMİP	-	-	-	11.8	2.0
Firudin Hesenov, AKP	-	-	-	0.9	-
Eşref Mehdiyev, QP	-	-	-	0.9	-
Xanhüseyn Kazımlı, SRP	-	-	-	0.3	-
İlham Aliev, YAP	-	-	-	-	77.97
İsa Gember, Müsavat	-	-	-	-	11.91
Lala Şövkət, Milli Birlik	-	-	-	-	3.22
Sabir Rüstəm xanlı, VHP	-	-	-	-	0.76
G. Hasanguliyev, XC	-	-	-	-	0.44
H. Hacıyev, Yeni Müsavat	-	-	-	-	0.32
Others	-	-	-	-	2.58
“None of the above”	-	2.4	-	0.3	-

Source: Florian Grotz/Raoul Motika, Azerbaijan, in: Dieter Nohlen (ed.), *Elections in Asia and the Pacific*, Oxford 1999, pp. 348-369, here: pp. 363f. See also [www.ifes.org](http://www.ifes.org).

As Arif Hajiev, the deputy chairman of the Müsavat party was correctly forced to conclude: “The parties’ leaders have come to a common opinion that they need cooperation to prevent monarchy in the republic.”<sup>16</sup>

The governing YAP party also played a tactical masterstroke in the selection of their candidate. By waiting until the last minute to withdraw the candidature of the seriously ill President Heydar Aliev they not only gave the opposition no opportunity to take concerted action to react but, by fielding

16 Cf. [www.bakutoday.net/view.php?d=5922](http://www.bakutoday.net/view.php?d=5922).

only a single candidate, namely Ilham Aliev, they also improved his chances of victory. Even discounting the electoral irregularities frequently denounced by international observers – which ranged from simple ballot-paper forgery to threats against candidates and their representatives – Aliev’s victory would almost certainly have been assured.<sup>17</sup>

With 77 per cent of the vote, Aliev’s margin of victory appears comfortable. However, there are two reasons why it can be seen as thin enough to stop the new president from resting on his laurels. First, power struggles between the wings of his party are likely. If the party was previously held together by the charismatic former president – a master of every political and diplomatic trick in the book – Ilham Aliev faces a legitimation crisis. This carries a real risk of a split within the party, although the external “push factors” that tend to encourage party unity may be strong enough to prevent the worst from happening. The second problem is that the YAP party is also entangled in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However much the current situation may also be seen as a political deadlock, it nonetheless still represents the lowest common denominator acceptable to the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia and a “minimal solution”, on which they have fallen back. To threaten this could set in motion dangerous and uncontrollable forces.

As the long-serving vice president of the SOCAR oil company, Ilham Aliev is likely to possess adequate financial lubricant to keep the engine of his presidential apparatus ticking over. If reference is commonly made to “his” offices, thus implying that “offices” are private property, this point of view reflects an understanding of power widespread in Azerbaijan. In that country, as in many other Soviet successor states, power is never simply institutionalized but is always personalized. This was again revealed clearly in the 2003 presidential election campaign: a contest between personalities, where vicious polemics had to stand in for the lack of policies. The party manifestos contained little more than close-up images of the candidates and, at best, slogans such as “Bread, Work, Karabakh”.

The assessment of Peter Eicher, head of the ODIHR election observation mission during the 2003 election, is unambiguous about the limitations on the democratic process in Azerbaijan: “This election was a missed opportunity for genuinely democratic elections.”

#### *Azerbaijan and Ilham Aliev*

To the extent that this can be judged only a few months into his presidency, Ilham Aliev appears to be using both his father’s tried-and-tested methods and his own business contacts to consolidate his political power. In doing

---

17 Cf. ODIHR, *Final Report on the Presidential Election in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 15 October 2003 (12 November 2003), at: [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1151\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/11/1151_en.pdf).

this, he can make use of a party machine that is extremely closely integrated with the state and its institutions. The party is far more than just a political organization: It is a giant job-creation scheme, and its members are interested in remaining in power simply for the personal benefits it brings them. Here we find one of the causes of the corruption that affects every aspect of life in Azerbaijan. Although, in the 1970s, Heydar Aliev understood the importance of fighting corruption and nepotism, Azerbaijan has once more reached the point where a lack of legal security makes investing in the country a gamble.

International organizations such as Transparency International, Freedom House, and Human Rights Watch credit Azerbaijan with making a certain degree of progress towards creating an open society. Azerbaijan's admission – alongside Armenia – in 2001 to the Council of Europe was also a reward for the country's reform efforts. However, Europe's geopolitical interest in the South Caucasus – and in Azerbaijan in particular, thanks to its oil reserves and its strategic location north of the Islamic republic of Iran – casts a political shadow over the accession, and awakes the suspicion that the admission of Azerbaijan is about more than the promotion of democracy. The influence of the centralized power structure inherited from the communist era remains too strong – and is not even perceived by the population as deeply undemocratic. As a result, Azerbaijan came a poor 140th (of 146) in Transparency International's 2004 corruption index. A 2003 survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI) tells a different story: Only four per cent of Azerbaijanis even consider corruption as a problem, although the population is highly critical of developments in Azerbaijani society. Only 19 per cent believe that the situation in Azerbaijan is now better than during the Soviet period.

The following table reveals the total dominance of the government in the state-owned media during the 2003 election campaign. While the two Alievs received the undivided attention of the media in the form of two hours and 36 minutes of TV airtime (Ilham Aliev) and 46 minutes (Heydar Aliev), respectively, the opposition candidates shared a grand total of twelve seconds. Expensive advertising campaigns and omnipresent coverage of the government candidates in the media – something the opposition had no chance of matching – critically influenced popular opinion in the run-up to the election. The survey of press freedom carried out by Freedom House is also clear on this matter: Azerbaijanis enjoy neither free access to the media, nor freedom of assembly and opinion. Azerbaijan's press is described as “not free”<sup>18</sup>

---

18 On a scale of 1-100 (from very good to very poor), Azerbaijan received a very weak 73.

#### *Access to the media*

	<i>State TV</i>	<i>Private TV</i>
Ilham Aliev	2:36	10:51
Heydar Aliev	0:46	-
All others	0:00:12	0:24

The president's power monopoly is also accurately mirrored in the Azerbaijani press. Although significantly more opposition newspapers are sold (34,000) than pro-government organs, only the latter are available throughout the country.

#### *Newspaper reach*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Distribution</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Political stance</i>
Yeni M <span>ü</span> sav <span>at</span>	19,500	Baku	M <span>ü</span> sav <span>at</span>	Opposition
Echo	6,000	Baku	Private	Independent
Zerkalo	4,500-6,500	Baku	Private	Independent
Azerbaycan	8,700	Nationwide	State	Government
Respublika	9,500	Nationwide	State	Government
Xalq	3,500	Nationwide	State	Government
Bakinski Rabo <span>ç</span> i	3,300	Nationwide	State	Government
Azadlıq	6,500	Baku	Private	Opposition
525	2,500	Baku	Private	Opposition
Millet	5,000	Baku	AMİP	Opposition
H <span>ü</span> rriyet	10,350	Baku	DP	Opposition

Source: ODIHR

#### *Parliamentary Hesitancy and Extraparliamentary Opposition*

In 1997, the Pan-Azerbaijani Union (*Bütüv Azerbaycan Birliği*, BAB) was formed in an attempt to occupy the political middle ground that had separated government and opposition since 1993. The new party aims to capture ideological ground from the existing nationalist parties, especially the AXCP, which are seen as ideologically contaminated. The BAB is the creation of the nationalist opposition, and the Popular Front and Müsavat in particular. The party members chose as their leader the former anti-Soviet dissident, one-time president of Azerbaijan and nationalist, Abulfaz Elchibey, and he is the inspiration for the uncompromising fixation on territorial questions in the party's programme. The BAB seeks not only the incorporation of the Azerbaijani provinces of Iran, but also parts of Iraq, Dagestan, Armenia and, of course, Nagorno-Karabakh.

The BAB can be seen as a collective political movement, whose supporters share a dedication to Azerbaijani unification. Although it is currently not an explicit goal, it seems possible that the BAB may eventually develop into the party of Greater Azerbaijan.<sup>19</sup> The BAB leadership consists largely of members or sympathizers of nationalist Azerbaijani parties. Since the end of its time in government, the AXCP remains committed to a nationalism that includes South Azerbaijan, i.e. the Azerbaijani provinces of Iran. The YAP, on the other hand, limits its national claims to Azerbaijani state territory. The BAB was thus founded in the run-up to the 1998 presidential election, as the nationalist opposition sought to form a coalition capable of breaking the power of the Aliev cartel.

A significant proportion of BAB supporters were once members of the Popular Front government. This government, which lasted from 1992-3 had a strong Azerbaijani nationalist tendency, something also reflected in the current BAB programme. Can the BAB therefore be seen as the long arm of the Popular Front, or as its nationalist *avant garde*? If one reads the BAB's manifesto and compares it with statements made by the late President Elchibey, there can be no doubt. The BAB co-operates closely with organizations such as the World Azerbaijani Congress (*Dünya Azərbaycan Konqresi*, DAK) and the Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (*Güney Azərbaycan Milli Oyanıb Herekatı*, GAMOH). Contacts to Iranian organizations demonstrate that the potential for concerted action also exists there.

### *Outlook*

If Heydar Aliev, who died in December 2003, stands for the dynastic retention of power, the Azerbaijani nationalist opposition around Abulfaz Elchibey, who died in 2000, symbolizes freedom from the Soviet Union and “actually existing socialism”, but also for an extreme Azerbaijani nationalism. Despite considerable initial successes, the opposition remains weak, divided, and its platform – to the extent it has one – has an extremely narrow focus. At the same time, the YAP is using both its own power and the resources of the state to safeguard its own interests.

Does democratic pluralism – an open society – currently represent a realistic alternative to the monopoly of the YAP and the central figure of Aliev? Even if the answer is yes, it is not enough for the opposition parties to have this aim in mind if they lack the leadership, willingness to achieve consensus, and tactical and strategic will to form a coalition.

---

19 This was at least the cautious opinion expressed by several BAB functionaries in conversation with the author in March 2001.

The nation-building process in Azerbaijan has come so far that we can speak of consolidated state building in the sense used by Linz and Stepan.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, the republic is on the way to establishing popular sovereignty. On the other, the recourse to nationalism – as helpful as this was in encouraging democratization in the early 1990s – and the enforcement of ideological orthodoxy on democratically legitimated institutions are barriers to progress. On the continuum of political systems, Azerbaijan stands between defective democracy and a semi-authoritarian system.<sup>21</sup> A strong civil society will not be established as long as the elites (and not only those in Azerbaijan) remain fixated on the state monopoly of power and see political pluralism and the rule of law as a slippery slope that leads to the collapse of the state. But it is precisely here that democratization offers the best hope. Only a reduction of centralized control can enable a “dehierarchization of relations between state and society”<sup>22</sup> so that civil society organizations can enjoy greater (and ideally better) opportunities for political participation.

---

20 See Juan J. Linz/Alfred Stepan, *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation*, Baltimore/London 1996, pp. 15ff.

21 Wolfgang Merkel, *Systemtransformation* [System Transformation], Opladen 1999, pp. 54f.

22 Aurel Croissant, Demokratisierung und die Rolle der Zivilgesellschaft in Südkorea, Taiwan und auf den Philippinen [Democratization and the Role of Civil Society in South Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines], in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* B48/1998, pp. 25-33, here: p. 31.