



European  
University  
Institute

ROBERT  
SCHUMAN  
CENTRE FOR  
ADVANCED  
STUDIES

## CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Co-financed by the European Union

# ***A New Immigration Policy in Azerbaijan***

**Sergey Rummyansev**

CARIM-East Explanatory Note 12/31

Socio-Political Module

September 2012



© 2012. All rights reserved.  
No part of this paper may be distributed, quoted  
or reproduced in any form without permission from  
the CARIM East Project.



## **Abstract**

Up to the late 1990s, discourse around mass emigration from Azerbaijan had to do, above all, with mass post-Soviet labour migration. During the last two decades (1990-2009) 266,000 arrived in the country as permanent migrants and 707,500 departed from Azerbaijan according to official statistics. According to official statistics the balance of migration was negative for Azerbaijan (though never massively negative) almost every year. But in the last two years more people arrived in the country than left it. On the grounds of these figures the authorities announced that Azerbaijan has become attractive for immigrants.

President Ilham Aliyev's stated: "The number of foreigners intending to visit the Republic of Azerbaijan will increase while Azerbaijan is developing. This can be considered a positive factor for our country. However, we must prefer the interests of our state, people, citizens and this must be the priority for our migration policy" on the home page of the Internet Site of the "State Migration Service of Azerbaijan Republic" in fact, there is the official declaration of changes in the migration process. These ideas have been set in state law in the "Decree by the president of the Azerbaijani Republic on the use of the 'single window' principle in the management of migration processes" (4<sup>th</sup> of March 2009).

## New Immigration Policy in Azerbaijan

2011 was the fourth year in succession in which Azerbaijan was a migration-receiving post-soviet country rather than a migration-sending one. This is the official (public) assessment of the current state of affairs. 2009 marked the most important changes in the national migration policy in the entire post-Soviet history of the Republic of Azerbaijan (RA). To the outside world, these changes are an important demonstration of how the RA authorities pay close attention to improving control over increasing immigration to Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, the new immigration policy is designed to create an image of Azerbaijan as an economic success. The authorities believe that the increased attractiveness of the country to immigrants could be an important step in positive economic changes. The country's attractiveness for immigrants is, in fact, a key indicator, which is used by the country's regime to demonstrate the success of its policies.

The authorities believe that economic success has not been halted by the global financial crisis that erupted in 2009, and the country's President is using any opportunity to underline this, *inter alia*, while addressing the "Azerbaijani diaspora". Indeed, addressing his "fellow nationals" during the International Solidarity Day celebrations in 2009 (a national holiday, celebrated on 31 December), President Ilham Aliyev stated, that "despite all our challenges, Azerbaijan continued developing successfully in 2009. The country's economic growth in 2009 exceeded 9 per cent. It is a very high rate for a crisis year<sup>1</sup>". However, during his address to his "fellow nationals" in the diaspora, Ilham Aliyev reported on economic and nation-building progress only and did not call for their return to the country. The new immigration policy is not providing a legal framework for the repatriation of emigrants, who left Azerbaijan in the Soviet and post-Soviet years. Diaspora policy, which is implemented simultaneously, is carried out on the basis that the immigrants stay in their host countries and that they contribute to diaspora formation and create political lobbies, promote Azerbaijani culture, and spread news of the success of their country of origin<sup>2</sup>. Yet the new immigration policy is aimed at forming legal and institutional frameworks to control the quantity and the "quality" of foreigners entering the country (both in terms of permanent residence and in terms of employment); we refer here to foreigners who never had Azerbaijani citizenship, and who are not ethnic Azeris.

In the context of this new policy, the net migration indicator is heavily politicized emphasizing that Azerbaijan is no longer a developing country, but an economically successful state, appealing to immigrants. The official statistics say that over the past 20 years (1990-2009), 266,000 thousand people arrived in Azerbaijan for permanent residence, and that 707,000 left the country for similar reasons<sup>3</sup>. In general, even the official data reflects the negative migration balance in Azerbaijan. Moreover, the official statistics do not reflect the fact that a significant number of working age citizens permanently or temporarily reside abroad. However, official data from 2008 and 2009, i.e. immediately before the changes in the state migration policy were announced, demonstrate that the migration balance has shifted in favour of Azerbaijan. In 2008, 3,597 thousand people arrived in the country, and 2,530 left, and in 2009, 2,292 arrived and 1,373 left the country for permanent residence abroad. The vast majority of those who arrived and left the country were nationals of other CIS countries. Thus, 2,781 of those coming into the country in 2008 and 2,155 thousand in 2009 were CIS countries' citizens. Only 816 people in 2008 and 137 people in 2009 moved to Azerbaijan from other countries. There are practically no immigrants from the developed countries. For instance, only 10

---

<sup>1</sup> President Ilham Aliyev sent his greetings to the Azeri people on the occasion of the International Solidarity Day and the New Year, 1 January, 2010. Downloaded from <http://azeritoday.com/archives/11561>, on 30 September 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In detail: Romyansev S. (2010), 'Post-Soviet Nation State as a Sponsor of Construction of the Ethno-National Diaspora: Azeri's Case', *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales (REMI)*, vol. 26, pp. 111-131.

<sup>3</sup> International Migration, 2009. [http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/demographic/en/1\\_24.shtml](http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/demographic/en/1_24.shtml), on 30 September 2011.

US-nationals moved to Azerbaijan during these two years, and 9 from Germany<sup>4</sup>. The absolute majority of those relocating to the country for permanent residence are former citizens of Azerbaijan, who have, for whatever reasons, decided to repatriate to their country of origin. However, in the context of the new immigration policy, they are treated as foreigners who have decided to move to Azerbaijan. Upon arrival in Azerbaijan for permanent residence, immigrants must apply for a temporary residence permit to the State Migration Service and then they will apply for Azerbaijani citizenship, in compliance with legal provisions<sup>5</sup>.

These developments allowed for official statements that Azerbaijan has joined a privileged group of countries that are attractive to migrants. The Head of State comments on any and all the crucial changes in the socio-political and economic life of the country. In a condensed form the official position is reflected in the President's statement, found on the State Migration Service home page. There Ilham Aliyev said, "The number of foreigners intending to visit the Republic of Azerbaijan will increase while Azerbaijan is developing. This can be considered a positive factor for our country. However we must prefer the interests of our state, people, citizens and this must be the priority for our migration policy"<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the new migration policy also regulates the stay of foreign nationals in the country, their employment, etc.

Prior to the changes in the immigration policy, gradual changes in the legislation and the governments' institutional structure were introduced in order to control migration. Yet in 2004, as a first step, the "State Programme for demography and population development in Azerbaijan" was adopted (11.11.2004). Based on this Programme, the "2006-2008 Azeri State Migration Programme" was developed (25.07.2006). Labor emigration from Azerbaijan is only mentioned in this document in passing. At the same time, the Programme already contained extensive indicators of the growing attractiveness of Azerbaijan to immigrants: "Expanding economic development increases the number of foreign nationals engaged in domestic labor market. The favorable geopolitical position of the Republic of Azerbaijan, economic reforms implemented in the country, signed contracts with the world's leading companies, the commissioning of the Heydar Aliyev Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the restoration of the historic "Silk Road", and the implementation of other infrastructural international projects – entail increased labour migration flows"<sup>7</sup>.

The most important institutional reform was the establishment of the State Migration Service (Presidential Decree of 19.3.2007). Major amendments to immigration legislation were made in March 2009: in particular, the "Presidential Decree on the introduction of the 'single window' principle in migration administration" (04.03.2009) was adopted. It is believed, that the 'single window' principle reduces procrastination and at the same time, facilitates control over migration. Before the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan assumed its functions, all the paperwork concerning the "stay and residence in the country of foreign nationals and stateless persons, their employment, and registration of the place of residence" was carried out by a variety of public services<sup>8</sup>.

All in all, the new immigration policy implies a strengthening of control over foreign nationals arriving in Azerbaijan. There are no doubts about the desire of the authorities to exercise tight control over ongoing processes in the country, *inter alia*, in immigration. Moreover, the new migration policy

<sup>4</sup> Breakdown of persons arriving and departing to Azerbaijan from foreign countries for permanent residency, 2009. <http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/demographic/en/051.shtml#s1>, accessed on 30 September 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on citizenship of Azerbaijan Republic, 1998. <http://migration.gov.az/images/pdf/8d5ee4c04f47879665cded315b74ce96.pdf>, on 30 September 2011

<sup>6</sup> Official website of the State Migration Service of the Azerbaijan Republic, accessed on 30 September 2011. <http://www.migration.gov.az/index.php?section=000&subsection=000&lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> Decree of the President of Azerbaijan Republic "Approval of the 2006-2008 State Migration Programme of Azerbaijan Republic", 2006. <http://migration.gov.az/images/pdf/a3720661d571fe6381870b2a4eac5b23.pdf>, on 30 September 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Decree of the President of Azerbaijan Republic "Introduction of a "single window" principle in migration management", 2009. <http://www.migration.gov.az/images/pdf/771e25268470385559d32db9ceae2d70.pdf>, on 30 September 2011.

is connected with the fulfillment of EU commitments. However, the main goal is to create a progressive image of the country, which is inseparable from the regime. All achievements are presented as due to the success of the regime, and yet another proof of its indispensability. That is the reason behind Azerbaijan's transformation from a migration donor into a migration-receiving, i.e. an attractive and successful country. Preservation of the Azerbaijani image as a country with mass labour emigration has become inconvenient for the regime. Therefore, the official statistics have been designed to confirm a transformation worked by the state.

We should acknowledge that economic growth is a reality. It should also be kept in mind that some part of Azeri immigrants decided to repatriate to their country of origin after facing difficulties with resettlement abroad. However, there are no credible statistics reflecting re-emigration to the country. We can only say that those who return to the country are largely immigrants occupying a niche of unskilled workers at construction sites, and the like. There is a renewed demand for them in the country of origin due to housing and roads construction. However one should not speak about the mass repatriation of emigrants. If that was the case, the current economic well-being and prosperity would quickly have given way to mass unemployment and crisis. However, in the context of the new immigration policy, these aspects do not play a noticeable role. The important point is the gradual implementation of the European integration requirements: Azerbaijan has long been a full member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). Here the attractiveness of Azerbaijan to immigrants becomes part of the authorities' populist discourse, which the regime uses to support its legitimacy and demonstrate its efficiency.