Program Description

The 2008 Summer School studied Islam in the Contemporary International Affairs. The academic content of the summer school was complemented with policy discussions held by the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, Ambassadors of the US, Iran and Middle East countries etc. The event was opened and blessed by Sheykhulislam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade, Head of the Caucasus Muslims Spiritual Board.

The 2008 ADA Summer School also featured presentations and discussions around the topics of Islam as a global factor and important issue in international relations; its weight and significance in the region of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Iran and Russia; its impact on formulation of relationships and foreign policy in that part of the world; as well as implications of these relationships and foreign policy for the outside world. Participants gained in-depth understanding of the Caucasus and Central Asia region, the dynamics of the current political and social challenges facing the region and their correlation to the development of Islam.

A special emphasis of the course was on cross-cultural dialogue and understanding of Islam as a religion of peace and social justice. A diverse group of Muslims, Christians and Jews lived and learned together for some two weeks. Sessions were held outside classrooms in an informal setting. Participants debated foundations of Islam inside a mosque, while also sharing food with local Muslims. Discussions in a church evolved around finding ways out of deadlock between Islam and the West. At the end of the session, all wore T-shirts reading “We are all sons of Abraham”, got on a bus and moved to Guba, a major Jewish settlement and tourist destination in northern Azerbaijan. In a synagogue, they sat down with a rabbi and heard about tolerance as part of the Azerbaijani identity.

The Summer School program was interactive in its format. Participants of the summer school were able not only debate the issues, but also took part in practical simulations, exercises and hands-on group works. Networking and small-group interaction were the essential elements of the summer school. ADA also arranged high-level meetings with the public and private sector leaders in Azerbaijan.
International Body of Participants and Scholars

The summer school featured faculty from prominent international schools, such as the Fletcher School at Tufts University, Graduate Institute of International Studies of Geneva, Middle East Technical University of Ankara, MGIMO of Moscow, CEPS of Brussels, University of Haifa of Tel-Aviv, and the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy etc.

Extra-Curricular Activities

The event was held at Retro Club, on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Retro Club is an exclusive five-star beach resort. While living and learning in Retro, participants also enjoyed a sophisticated and luxurious lifestyle during the summer. They were able to experience swimming season in the legendary Caspian Sea and easily travel to downtown Baku for night life, shopping, dining and sightseeing. Tours to Baku’s Medieval City, Karavansaray, Fire Temple Ateshgah and stone-age petroglyphs at Gobustan were arranged. They had a unique chance to witness the centuries-old tradition of religious tolerance in Azerbaijan while visiting holy places.

Testimonials

Irina Ivaskina, Latvia: “The ADA Summer School not only gives you an opportunity to discover Azerbaijan through lively thought-provoking debates and informal intellectual atmosphere, but also provides with a platform for networking with young professionals from all over the world. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of logistics.”

Steve Marcus, United States: “I found the ADA Summer School to be an excellent introduction to some of the most critical issues facing Azerbaijan and the Caucuses. The Summer School did a great job of bringing together leading academics from across the world to present on their research. The school also selected an incredibly diverse set of participants and facilitated wonderful dialogue and friendships between extremely interesting students.”