

Proposal to the Ellison Center 2010 Annual Conference on Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies: "Time and Transition: Reflecting on the Past 20 Years in Russia, East Europe and Central Asia"

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Free Fall: Moving from a State-supported to a Free-market Literary Environment in Azerbaijan

What happens when a state that ties national identity to its literature stops supporting (or, closely managing) its creative writers? In this paper I give brief background on the literary traditions and conditions in Azerbaijan through independence in 1991, then move on to focus on the changes in the literary environment in the country during the last 20 years. I explore the role that literature has played in Azerbaijani national identity before, during and after independence, and the role that the state, in turn, has had in shaping that literature and literary culture. I end by taking a look at what potential the future may hold for a revitalized, socially relevant literary culture, with special attention to the place of new media in the region's love-hate relationship with literacy and literature.