

Jewish State Appoints Christian Envoy to Muslim Country

Israel's Foreign Ministry on Thursday announced the appointment of George Deek as Israel's next ambassador to Azerbaijan, making him Israel's first-ever Christian Arab ambassador, *The Jerusalem Post* reported.

According to the *Post*, Deek is a highly acclaimed diplomat and currently serves as a senior adviser to the ministry's Director-General Yuval Rotem.

"We are proud of his appointment, which perfectly symbolizes the integration of Israelis from different backgrounds in the representation of the state," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon.

Azerbaijan is one of the few majority Muslim countries to develop bilateral strategic and economic relations with Israel. Azerbaijan and Israel have engaged in serious cooperation since 1992.

The relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan is largely discreet.

Both countries see Iran as an existential threat. Azerbaijan fears Iranian Islamist influence, and Iran is wary of the influence of Azerbaijan on the 13 million Iranians who are ethnic Azeris.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had a very successful visit to the country in December 2016. In August 1997, Netanyahu, who was then serving his first term as prime minister, visited the Azerbaijani capital of Baku.

Though Deek made history, he is not Israel's first Arab

ambassador. That distinction went to Ali Yahya, who was appointed ambassador to Finland in 1995.

Approximately 20 percent of Israel's 8 million citizens are Arabs. According to the Israeli Democracy Index, a public opinion survey conducted last year by the Israeli Democratic Institute and the Guttman Center for Surveys, 65 percent of Israeli-Arabs are proud to be Israeli.

Israel is the only safe haven for Christians in the Middle East, while their numbers diminish as a result of Muslim persecution in all other areas of the region. {eo}

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