

Call for Papers

International Conference

‘Caucasian Islam’ or ‘Islam originating from the Caucasus’ Caucasian Muslim Communities in France and Europe: Issues and Perspectives

University of Strasbourg, March 3–4, 2026

Strasbourg, France

Argument

This international conference aims to explore the emergence and dynamics of Caucasian Islam in France and Europe. Long overlooked in academic research, this form of Islam is characterized by its fragmentation, the influence of brotherhoods, and its anchoring in highly differentiated cultural traditions. The research examines the way in which these groups organize themselves as a diaspora, interact with other Muslim communities (particularly Turkish and North African) and integrate into European societies.

The Caucasus is a region inhabited by numerous ethnic and linguistic groups, offering great religious diversity. Islamization of the region began as early as the 7th century. The majority of the Muslim population of the Caucasus adhered to Sunni Islam (primarily Hanafī, though Shafī‘ī among northern Caucasian-speaking minorities).

Recognition of Islam as an official religion in the region dates back to the 16th century. The Safavid dynasty, founded by Shah Ismail I, marked the introduction of Twelver Shi‘ism. Once Shi‘ism was proclaimed the state religion, Sunnis became a minority, with most of them concentrated in northern communities. The Caucasus thus functioned as a transitional zone between Safavid Shi‘ism and Ottoman Sunnism.

The mountain culture of the Caucasus, influenced by a protracted history of resistance, cultivated resilient and combative identities, while also generating a traditionalist culture anchored in a patriarchal social order centred on strong family structures that persist in their influence today. Can we effectively discuss a distinctive "Caucasian Islam" or a "Islam in the Caucasian mode" from a regional perspective that acknowledges cultural diversity, similar to classifications in academic literature such as Middle Eastern Islam, North African Islam, Maghrebian Islam, Turkish Islam, or Central Asian Islam?

This work of the Interdisciplinary Thematic Institute MAKerS, as part of the ITI 2021-2028 program of the University of Strasbourg, CNRS and INSERM, was supported by IdEx Unistra (ANR-10-IDEX-0002), and by SFRI-STRAT'US project (ANR-20-SFRI-0012).

The concept of 'Caucasian Islam' has never been used in Islamic literature. The concept of 'Caucasian Islam' has never been used in Islamic literature. Nevertheless, the presence of Caucasian Muslim communities throughout Europe and the dynamic organization of these small, accepted communities is a reality that is difficult to ignore.

Differences exist among the Caucasian communities that migrated to Europe from the late 19th century onward, such as Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis. However, the concept of a 'Caucasian Muslim community' only emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the two Chechen wars which ended in the 2000s. Since then, the Caucasian community has no more been associated with ethnic groups in the South Caucasus, but rather with a confessional approach. Consequently, Caucasian Islam has gained a certain reputation in the media and European society, with religion becoming a central element of the 'Caucasian community' notion, surpassing ethnicity.

The group is nevertheless very diverse, with many communities originating from the Caucasus (Azerbaijanis, Chechens, Dagestanis, Ingush and Turkish-speaking minorities from the Caucasus - Karachays, Balkars, Nogais and Kumyks). In France, while this presence is becoming more visible, it remains devoid of centralized religious structures, unlike other Muslim communities which are often organized on a national basis. Nevertheless, the increasing number of mosques, associations and commercial activities suggests that a structuring process is underway.

In the context of an increasingly diverse landscape of Muslim religious expressions in Europe, Caucasian Islam represents an emerging reality that remains understudied despite its growing visibility. Fragmented, culturally distinctive, and historically shaped by post-Soviet conflicts, these communities challenge conventional models of integration and religious representation.

This conference aims to analyze the social, religious, legal, and political organization of these little-known populations. It will examine whether a process of community unification is taking shape, or whether diversity continues to resist such efforts.

Bringing together researchers from different disciplines (sociology, law, history), the conference will explore different approaches and offer a new reading of a phenomenon that is at once religious, social and geopolitical. The main objective will be to study the organization of Caucasian Islam in Europe and to understand its internal and external dynamics. This is all the more necessary given that the issue touches on major concerns such as radicalization, marginalization, interactions between communities and institutional recognition. Understanding these groups and their positioning in the European Muslim space, as well as their influence on local religious dynamics, is essential.

The conference also seeks to provide a platform for the dissemination of research on Caucasian Islam by fostering collaboration among experts in sociology, law of religion, political science, migration history, and religious studies.

Suggested Themes

The conference is structured around four thematic axes. Each axis will bring together researchers and experts, with presentations and discussions on the following topics:

Axis 1 : History and sociology of Caucasian Islam

Migration history, religious transmission, reconfiguration of practices.

Axis 2 : Legal and political approach

Analysis of integration policies and specific challenges related to radicalization, prevention mechanisms, and media representations.

Axis 3 : Inter-community relations

Interactions with other Muslim communities, convergences, and tensions.

Axis 4 : Contemporary dynamics of Caucasian Islam in Europe

Issues of representation, religious institutionalization, organization within the legal frameworks of religions in Europe, place in European societies.

Target Audience

Established researchers, emerging scholars, PhDs and doctoral students, members of the administration, and a broad educated public.

Submission Guidelines

Presentation duration : 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of discussion

Required format: abstract (≤ 600 words) and short biographical note (≤ 150 words)

Submission languages: French, English

Proposals should be sent to: quliyev@unistra.fr

Important Dates

Submission deadline : October 30, 2025

Notification to authors : December 1, 2025

Program release : February 1, 2026

Conference dates : March 3–4, 2026

Practical Information

City: Strasbourg, France

Institution: University of Strasbourg

Venue: Conference Room

Maison interuniversitaire des sciences de l'homme - Alsace (MISHA)

Hours: 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

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Additional Information

Possibility of publication? – Yes

Organizer

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