

Our Philosophy of National Intercultural Dialogue From the Ideology of Azerbaijanism to Multiculturalism

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The article analyzes the phenomenon of multiculturalism as a historical and modern philosophy of thought and life. The article conducts a comparative analysis of multiculturalism with the ideology of Azerbaijanism formed in Azerbaijan for centuries and assesses the nature of their synthesis. The general conclusion of the author is that multiculturalism as an ideology of Azerbaijanism and their main criterion, the philosophy of intercultural dialogue, is an interesting scientific problem as a research topic, as well as relevant and important in terms of application in practice.

Keywords: Azerbaijanism, Ilham Aliyev, multiculturalism, dialogue, philosophy

Main Part

The program of national ideology of Azerbaijanism, based on the historical experience of the great leader of the Azerbaijani people, Heydar Aliyev, applied in political management, can be compared in its content with the project of modern society, the development of national consciousness of 19th century Azerbaijani enlighteners. Even Heydar Aliyev enriched the concept of progress of the national ideology of Azerbaijanism, founded by our classics, in the context of world cooperation in the 20th century, intercultural dialogue, literature, culture, politics, and other areas, developing tolerance with important socio-political chords of modern times, strengthening feelings of multiculturalism. Going beyond its predecessors, it created a monolithic unity-solidarity public administration doctrine of all peoples, nations, as well as ethnic communities living in Azerbaijan.

The visual result of this principle of political leadership of the great leader Heydar Aliyev is that the Lezghins, Georgians, Avars, Talysh, Jews, Germans, Udins (on the ethnic map of the world this nation is only in Azerbaijan), Sahurs, Lahijs, Tats, Kurds, and other peoples have lived in our country for centuries. By preserving their religions, languages, and cultures, they have merged with our people, and kinship ties have been established between families. Members of different nationalities living on the basis of friendly relations under one flag have common homeland criteria, taking advantage of all the privileges of the Azerbaijani state. This living environment does not pose any threat of phobia, but rather strengthens the bridge of peoples, interethnic friendship, unity, and communication.

The political and at the same time true successor of Heydar Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, managed to develop this new concept of enlightenment of his predecessor—the

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ideology of Azerbaijanism as a multiculturalism, philosophy of national intercultural dialogue from the scientific-theoretical, and practical point of view are the realities of gaining fame as the most advanced multicultural, tolerant country.

We can say with confidence that multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, as well as the phenomenon of tolerance, which stems from Heydar Aliyev's ideology of Azerbaijanism, are perceived as the main priority area in the policy of public administration pursued by Mr. Ilham Aliyev. It is no coincidence that over the past 20 years, this ideology has become a concept of equal coexistence in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which attaches great importance to secular and human values, inter-ethnic dialogue.

This is primarily due to the Constitution of Azerbaijan, which ensures the equality of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity and affiliation, as well as legal acts to which the Republic is a party—the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Fundamental Freedoms and Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Copenhagen Document of the OSCE Conference on Human Criteria, Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, members of the Commonwealth of Independent States the Convention for the Protection of the Rights of National Minorities and the State Document on the National Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan—State for the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Minorities and Ethnic Groups, Development of Language and Culture Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

It has already been confirmed and accepted that Azerbaijan, with its ancient history, as an independent, legal Republic, has remained faithful to the traditions of multiculturalism and tolerance in its nearly 30-year history of development, upholding the principles of respect for the mother tongue and religious beliefs of different nations and ethnic groups was a guarantee that they would live in the spirit of respect for each other's traditions and culture.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has not forgotten the sense of respect and responsibility for multiculturalism in the face of global demography, migration problems and the care of one million refugees, ensured the security of the Armenian people despite the centuries-old hostility of Armenians to our religious and spiritual traditions kept his interests in mind.

It is now a well-known fact that the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, highly appreciates the ideas of multiculturalism, based on this vital cultural program in solving global cultural problems and turned it into a model of sustainable development with his professional politician, competent leader.

The profound thoughts of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, expressed in the following quote, fully revive the content and essence of the model of multiculturalism of the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan:

Multiculturalism is a way of life in Azerbaijan. True, this term is relatively new. But for centuries, there have been multicultural societies in Azerbaijan. Friendship and solidarity between nations are a clear example of this. We are still trying to make a positive impact on the processes in the region and the world on our own initiative.¹

Azerbaijan has become an object of serious research in the field of socio-political, humanitarian sciences, and multiculturalism as a topical field and topic.

¹ Speech by President Ilham Aliyev at the official opening ceremony of the 4th Baku International Humanitarian Forum on October 2, 2014 <https://bakuforum.az/speech-by-president-of-azerbaijan-mr-ilham-aliyev/?fid=23>.

The implementation of the tasks arising from the provisions of the international forums on multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue organized in Azerbaijan, the conventions to which our country is a party, along with the integration of our country into the world, clearly confirms our people's commitment to hospitality, neighborliness, friendship, brotherhood, and humanity.

Mr. Ilham Aliyev's remarks at the official opening of the 3rd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue on "Today, representatives of all the religions, ethnic groups live in Azerbaijan and contribute to the successful development of our country. I think this is one of our biggest assets. And we are proud of that. Therefore we organize numerous international events to promote the values of multiculturalism, values of peaceful cooperation, mutual understanding. I think the world needs this kind of events, needs open discussions, exchange of views in order to strengthen the positive tendencies. Multiculturalism has no alternatives. Mr. Ilham Aliyev added in his speech that "Therefore, our cultural and ethnic identity together with influence from Europe created an absolutely special atmosphere in our society. Throughout the centuries we have managed to protect our values, and we lived in different political, social and public environments. We were part of other countries and empires. Now we are independent, but this positive trend is still here. We are very committed to the course of promotion of these values.

We are glad that young generation of Azerbaijanis wants to learn, improve their capabilities in order to find their proper place in the life and in order to strengthen the potential of Azerbaijan. At the same time, we are proud that our young generation is very patriotic. And patriotism means that people love their country. At the same time, in our opinion, patriotism is also the factor which strengthens the unity between countries and nations. We always think that respect to your own nation, your country, your own religion starts from respect to religion and values and traditions of your neighbors. Only this can lead to success.

Unfortunately, now we need to talk more about that because what we see now in different parts of the world is the divisions based on ethnic religious, sectarian ground. It is disastrous"².

Indeed, as Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the strong leader of the Azerbaijani state, said: "We are a country of people of traditions, culture.

Today Azerbaijan is a respected member of the international community, we play a very positive role on the regional scale. Our initiatives are aimed at strengthening regional cooperation. Political, economic issues related to energy security, of course, are in the center of attention. Our initiatives and projects, which we initiated, go far beyond our region to connect countries and continents. If you look at issues related to energy security, Azerbaijan is already playing an important role for the energy security of Europe. If you look at the transportation infrastructure, we actually are restoring the historical Silk Road. Building a new railroad connection between Europe and Asia, actually we invest in not only economic development and in better transportation facilities, but also in people-to-people contacts. Historical Silk Road was crossing Azerbaijan. So we are now restoring it with the modern technologies, and with participation of our neighbors. So all our projects related to economic and social development strengthen regional cooperation, strengthen mutual understanding between the countries and the peoples.³

² Speech by President Ilham Aliyev at the official opening ceremony of the 4th Baku International Humanitarian Forum on October 2, 2014 <https://bakuforum.az/speech-by-president-of-azerbaijan-mr-ilham-aliyev/?fid=23>.

³ Speech by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at the official opening ceremony of the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue "Cultural Exchange for Common Security" in Baku. <https://en.president.az/articles/15172>.

In his speech, President Ilham Aliyev stressed the importance of integration into the world in the young independent Republic of Azerbaijan, noting that our country began the challenges of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism in the new world several years ago and successfully continued this historic task:

In 2008, the Baku Process began on our initiative. It was our initiative to invite the ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Council of Europe. This was the first case. Because Azerbaijan is one of the few countries that are members of both organizations. Then, in 2009, the Ministers of Culture of the Council of Europe were invited to the meeting of the Ministers of Culture of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. These were our initiatives and it has already been called the Baku Process. Today, issues related to intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue and multiculturalism are included in the Baku Process. We will continue our efforts, and the fact that representatives from more than 100 countries are visiting Baku to discuss these important issues gives us optimism about achieving our goals. We will strive to contribute to friendship, peace, partnership and cultural diversity.⁴

It is no coincidence that Mr. Ilham Aliyev, guided by Article 109, Paragraph 32 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, issued a decree declaring 2016 the Year of Multiculturalism in order to “preserve, further develop and widely promote the traditions of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan”.

The decision of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to hold the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Baku in 2016 also stems from Azerbaijan’s special emphasis on the philosophy of human intercultural dialogue—multiculturalism.

Addressing Islamophobia, which has become a global anti-ethical and anti-cultural problem, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev called for strengthening Azerbaijan’s systematic philosophy of life-multiculturalism “in order to strengthen Azerbaijan’s unique position in establishing Islamic solidarity”.

Decided to declare 2017 the Year of Islamic Solidarity in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The IV Islamic Solidarity Games held in Baku that year and the announcement of Nakhchivan as the capital of Islamic culture in our historical region in 2018 confirm the commitment of official Azerbaijan to Islamic solidarity.

The subject of Islamic solidarity in the field of science has paved the way for fundamental scientific research for many years. At present, scholars in the field of humanities, especially in the field of social sciences, are studying and analyzing many different topics of Islamic culture in Azerbaijan, based on thousands of years of history.

For example, the development of topics covering the role and importance of Islamic solidarity in intercultural dialogue and the development of the ideas of multiculturalism in a philosophical context expands the scope of socio-humanitarian scientific thought. Establishment of the Center for Multiculturalism in the Republic,

Opening of “Philosophy of Multiculturalism and Tolerance” department at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of ANAS, the launch of large-scale cultural, scientific and mass events across the country also indicates the dynamics of the model of multiculturalism in public policy.

It is the strong sense of ownership of the Islamic religion, Islamic morals and culture of the citizens of Azerbaijan that for many centuries has created conditions for living in a neighborhood, mutual respect for the civil rights, moral feelings and traditions of other peoples, nations and ethnic groups. From this point of view, since the moral values, such as solidarity, unity, peace, love, friendship instilled in Islam have a permanent place in the minds of the dominant sentiments in Azerbaijan, there is no misunderstanding or tension in solving the problem of cultural diversity in the current stage of globalization is not.

⁴ Idem.

In addition, the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan was elected a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, ISESCO, as well as other organizations uniting Muslim countries. The announcement of Baku, the capital of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as the capital of Islamic culture in 2009 is a clear example of Islamic solidarity.

The support of the first vice-president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Mehriban Aliyeva for the development of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism is highly appreciated not only in our country but all over the world.

Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva is the initiator of a wide-ranging event, which includes important tasks arising from the mission of these high-ranking official bodies of which she is a member, and at the same time, makes a great contribution to strengthening eternal human dialogue through her practical activities.

It is no coincidence that in the direction of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism, Mehriban Aliyeva managed to include Azerbaijani mugam, ashug art, Azerbaijani women's headscarf, Lahij coppersmith school, carpet weaving, as well as the national holiday Novruz in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage. This great service Mehriban Aliyeva to its people is the focus of attention not only in our country, but also in the most advanced countries. First Vice President of our country Mehriban Aliyeva has been repeatedly awarded prestigious orders and medals for her services in this field.

The events of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism held in Azerbaijan, as well as in various countries of the world on the initiative, organization and leadership of UNESCO and ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador Mehriban Aliyeva are writing the history of the important role of this human factor in the life of our people.

Speaking at the international conference "Azerbaijan: Past and Present of Dialogue among Civilizations" held at the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in 2006, First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva commented on Azerbaijan's policy of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism:

It is known that this Today, humanity is facing a very complex dilemma. This is a problem in both the political and scientific spheres. Some modern scientists talk about the clash of civilizations and try to substantiate it scientifically.

Others believe that our rich diversity is the greatest asset of mankind. They are in favor of dialogue, and we agree with these people. In order for such a dialogue to take place, concrete work must be done in each country. We know very well that the environment in society, the traditions that are formed, are able to make people either enemies or friends against each other. I would like to emphasize education and culture, which are the most important factors in this direction. Today, we must try to build an education system that can educate citizens who are able to live with dignity in the modern world, who are committed to the ideas of humanism and peace⁵.

All this gives reason to say that the dialogue of nations and peoples united under one common sky—multiculturalism is accepted as a priority concept of state policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan and confidently moves forward in the context of a philosophy of sustainable life, which is important as a celebration of Azerbaijan's model of multiculturalism is important.

At the same time, the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism is dynamically developing not only as a solution to the problem of social progress, but also as a scientific idea and methodology. This confirms that it is no coincidence that the philosophy of multiculturalism, which is ideologically interested in world public opinion and determines the world order, is evaluated as a science, and also opens the doors of the world "Philosophy of Dialogue" to scientific research in this topical and interdisciplinary context.

⁵ Speech of Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva at the international conference "Azerbaijan: past and present of the dialogue between civilizations". <https://mehriban-aliyeva.az/news/node/844700>.

From this point of view, the reports and speeches of Kamal Abdulla, a full member of ANAS, Etibar Najafov, one of the scientists, and other scientists, who constantly analyze the issues of Azerbaijani multiculturalism, give great impetus to the development of Azerbaijani multiculturalism as a science.

Academician Kamal Abdulla's thoughts in the following quote express the essence of the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism and the country's firm position in the implementation of this cultural program:

It is useful for everyone to know this. At the same time, as political dynasties and states replace each other throughout history, the multicultural reflexes that take place in the political sphere of Azerbaijan create fertile conditions for the proper assessment and study of these values. In particular, the existence of multicultural political values, which have come to the present day in a retail form, from time to time makes the realization of the idea of their system and integrity inevitable. (Azerbaijan Multiculturalism, 2017, p. 15)

The ideas of Professor Etibar Najafov, summarized in the following quote, also cover many areas of scientific research in this field in our country, such as philosophy, history, law, economics, ethnography, culture, art, etc.

Multiculturalism, which is formed as a social phenomenon, affects other social events (politics, economy, culture, spirituality, various forms of public consciousness, etc.) and interacts with them. In addition, multiculturalism as a social phenomenon is one of the concepts such as social justice, equality of opportunity, democracy. Thus, the protection of the rights and freedoms of every ethnic, racial, religious and cultural group, ensuring their equality before the law meets both the requirements of social justice and the norms of a democratic society. (Azerbaijan Multiculturalism, 2017, p. 15)

Approaching the issue from this aspect, we can say with confidence that multiculturalism, which considers all the problems of cultural diversity in terms of religion, language, traditions and adheres to serious principles to solve it, is of great importance as a scientific system and only in the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan. The relevance of multiculturalism from the political and social point of view, as well as from the scientific point of view, is confirmed by real facts.

We consider it necessary to draw attention to one issue when concluding the article.

The Result

Thus, the President of the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev has been supporting the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism in the world political arena by applying the ideology of Azerbaijanism in synthesis with the idea of multiculturalism for at 18 years. The reality confirms that systematic work has been done in this area in our country. The teaching of the Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism in 19 countries of the world is a clear result of the contribution of our people to the phenomenon humanistky of multiculturalism and the science of "philosophy of dialogue" in the broadest sense.

All this confirms that the model of multiculturalism in the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan, to which the rulers of the world attach special importance among the countries with significant power in the Caspian-Black Sea basin and the South Caucasus region, stems from the traditions of human dialogue, humanism and tolerance.

At the same time, the model of Azerbaijan's multiculturalism is primarily based on the ideology of Azerbaijanism, which is based on and applied by the great leader of our people Heydar Aliyev in political governance.

Which comes first: the ideology of Azerbaijanism or the model of Azerbaijan's multiculturalism? In our opinion, it is impossible to find the first or second place among them. Because both of these phenomena are constantly evolving as a way of life in synthesis in the Independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

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