

The Baku Process: A Prosperous Intercultural Platform of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This research paper examines the dynamic actions undertaken by the Government of Azerbaijan to strengthen its Cultural Diplomacy, foster multiculturalism and inter-religious dialogue under the framework of the Baku Process. The author argues that the “Baku Process” for over ten years has served as a genuine platform for global leaders to engage in a vibrant discussion and offer viable solutions to many pressing economic challenges, security concerns, geopolitical trends that are deeply affecting many communities and governments in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

As the Republic of Azerbaijan is swiftly strengthening its democratic institutions, its foreign policy and cultural diplomacy have delivered new accomplishments especially in the following areas: inducing an effective international dialogue on multiculturalism; tackling Eurasian immigration crisis at its early stages; connecting public universities (Azerbaijan University of Languages) with other international centers, foreign governments and multilateral organizations.

Keywords: The Republic of Azerbaijan; Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan); National Leader Heydar Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev; Baku Process; Heydar Aliyev Foundation; Multiculturalism; Azerbaijan University of Languages.

1. Introduction

The Republic of Azerbaijan is home of one of the earliest Christian communities in the world, the Caucasian Albanian-Apostolic Church in the village of Nic [1], the ancient temple of Caucasian Albania in the village of Kish [2], the round temple of Caucasian Albania [3], Khudavend Monastery Complex [4], the Momuna Khatun Monument [5], all of these unique religious and cultural monuments have deeply encouraged the Azerbaijani society and lifestyle to embrace a harmonious dialogue and preserve a combination of traditions and ceremonies of different cultures, ethnicities, civilizations and faiths.

The peculiar treasures, ancient historical sites, geographical position and the ethnic - national composition, make the Republic of Azerbaijan a special place where different cultures and religions can converge, harness an open dialogue and live-in harmony. Azerbaijan, the Land of Fire, has built an environment of tolerance, trust and confidence among the principal religious convictions: Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Catholicism; all of these elements of Azerbaijani society are shared throughout the world and the Baku Process plays an indispensable role towards harnessing intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism, spreading peaceful coexistence and prosperity across countries and regions.

On December 2-3, 2008, the President of Azerbaijan, H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, initiated the “Baku Process,” as an interactive international platform that encourages: a dialogue among different cultures and civilizations; promotes Azerbaijan’s Cultural Diplomacy and harnesses multiculturalism policies that ensure a healthy cultural

pluralism.

2. Intercultural Dialogue: a pillar of Azerbaijan's Cultural Diplomacy

The Republic of Azerbaijan, under the vision and guidance of national leader Heydar Aliyev, has established a solid national economy, strengthened its infrastructure and shaped an effective foreign policy during the first decade of its independence (1993 – 2003). Founded on the solid statecraft institutions and foreign policy of Azerbaijan, on December 2nd-3rd, 2008, the current president of Azerbaijan H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev established the "Baku Process" under the framework of an International Conference dedicated to: "Intercultural dialogue as a basis for peace and sustainable development in Europe and its neighboring regions", with the participation of official representatives and Ministers of Culture from over eighty different countries.

The "Baku Process" aspires to promote intercultural, inter-racial and inter-religious dialogue among individuals, international experts, journalists and government leaders, while respecting the diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds encountered throughout the five continents.

The First Baku Process Ministerial Conference was entitled: "'Baku Process" for the promotion of intercultural dialogue (2008)'; it was organized in cooperation with the Council of Europe. On this occasion the Ministers of Culture, from Europe, Asia and Western Hemisphere, discussed viable effective methods that could promote and strengthen the cultural dialogue and preserve multiculturalism policies in many regions and countries. This conference happened to be one of very few venues where European Ministers of Culture exchanged thoughts and views on multiculturalism, cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy with their counterparts from the Muslim Countries in Northern Africa, Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The Ministerial Conference of 2008 emphasized the vital role of effective dialogue, cultural policies, preservation of cultural monuments, and promotion of inter-religious tolerance and shared the values of Azerbaijani Multiculturalism Policy. The foreign dignitaries were introduced to a deeply rooted religious tolerance and cultural diversity that is presently flourishing among Azerbaijani people from Nakhchivan [6] to Baku, from Shaki to Lankaran and from Quba [7] to Tartar Region of Dağlıq Qarabağ [8] (Upper Karabakh Region). This conference was attended by representatives of the European Cultural Convention, Council of Europe, UNESCO, the International Organization of Turkic Culture TURKSOY; representatives of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development shared their views on how to further strengthen cultural diplomacy projects in South - East Europe and in other regions of Europe, Africa and the Americas. Under the framework of this event, the Ministers of Culture, adopted the 'Baku Declaration for the Promotion of Intercultural Dialogue' and established an interactive project entitled: "Artists for Dialogue." Through the platform of Baku Process, the cultural diplomacy of Azerbaijan has bolstered its presence in the world, promoted mutual understanding among different cultures and diminished the transnational perils and threats that come from extremism, intolerance, turkophobia, xenophobia and racism. According to Dr. Rashad Ilyasov; "the 'Baku Process' has tremendously strengthened Azerbaijan's geopolitical role in the global arena; modern Azerbaijan is actively contributing to the mutual development of cultures."

On his meeting with Mr. Jan Dziejczak [9], held on August 17th, 2017, Academician Kamal Abdulla [10] emphasized the importance of intercultural dialogue and noted

that: "in all international events, Poland has defended Azerbaijan's just and right position and representatives of Poland have actively participated at international events." The advanced cultural partnership between Azerbaijan and Poland is one of many concrete initiatives that have swiftly developed under the framework of the "Baku Process".

Under the guidance of President Ilham Aliyev, the Government of Azerbaijan has established the Baku Process as an effective mechanism that fosters intercultural dialogue, shapes bridges of communication and confidence among nations and cultures.

In this context an important role has been played by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a non-for-profit institution under the leadership of Dr. Mehriban Aliyeva, First Vice President of Azerbaijan that is focused on developing projects in the areas of preservation of cultural sites, intercultural dialogue, education, youth and sports. The priorities and strategic mission of Heydar Aliyev Foundation are to promote the cultural policy of Azerbaijan, foster international cultural research and promote cultural events in art galleries and concert halls. In 2014, the Arts Council of Azerbaijan worked together with the Heydar Aliyev Foundation on implementing a waste recycling project together with German and Romanian art professionals and environmentalists. [11] Such a prestigious project propelled by Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy architects, unveils Azerbaijan as a country that is committed to promote intercultural dialogue both at home and abroad; the leaders of Baku, Nakhchivan and other cities of Azerbaijan, have a track record of concrete actions that support their genuine aspiration to build bridges of dialogue and trust among civilizations and cultures using Azerbaijan's multicultural experience, interethnic dialogue, linguistic diversity, religious tolerance and historical heritage. [12] Furthermore, Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy is focused to establish an International political community that Jean-Jacques Rousseau had envisaged, as a tool to man's liberation from the tyrannies, ongoing deprivations; a community that serves as a staunch advocate of human rights, equalities, defense of liberties that have attained a great magnitude and thrust on many international conferences organized by the Government of Azerbaijan, under the framework of "Baku Process". Over the last decade Baku has served as a seedbed of pluralist dialogue, intercultural communication and incessantly serves as a platform where the consequences of constant xenophobia and regional war are diminished and in Rousseau's words: the only way of combating this war is to find a form of government that will set the law above them all." Policies implemented by the Government of Azerbaijan are a genuine example of peaceful religious coexistence, were freedom and constitutional rights dominate the functioning structure of the state and its independent institutions.

3. Baku: Center of European Cultural Policy

On October 13-15, 2009, the "Baku Process" invited more than ten European Ministers of Culture to participate in the first session of the Sixth Conference of Ministers of Culture of Islamic countries. The member states of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) organized the Ministerial Roundtable on "Fostering Dialogue and Cultural Diversity – Baku Process: New Challenge for Dialogue between Civilizations," on this venue European ministers discussed the pressing cultural issues between the Islamic and European communities. Furthermore, a special emphasis was placed to the involvement of governments, local communities

and to the promotion of multiculturalism policies throughout Europe and the Middle East; as well as active engagement of youth, elected officials and teenagers. [13]

On April 7-9, 2011, under the patronage of H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the Republic of Azerbaijan decided to host the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, supported by renowned international organizations such as UNESCO, UN Alliance of Civilizations, World Tourism Organization, Council of Europe, North-South Center of the Council of Europe and ISESCO. The objective of the 1st "Baku Process" Forum was to advance cultural initiatives promoted by Azerbaijan in the sphere of cultural diplomacy, intercultural dialogue at the regional and global levels and to mark the beginning of a consolidated International Forum that tackles cultural issues and pressing international security matters that are affecting today's world.

The "Baku Process" Forum (2011) examined the hurdles that prevent communities from engaging in an effective dialogue and tackled intercultural issues based on geographic and historical contexts. Its main theme was: "United Through Common Values, Enriched by Cultural Diversity," additional plenary sessions and workshops addressed the example of cultural diversity in Azerbaijan as a positive role model to other regions and nations that aspire to preserve cultural diversity, democratic institutions, top notch education standards, faith, and religious harmony as well as a propitious investigative journalism environment.

Geographically located at the heart of European and Asian civilizations, equipped with outstanding religious tolerance and admirable intercultural dialogue, the city of Baku hosted 500 participants from five continents and the representatives of 102 countries, including: public elected officials, heads of international organizations, religious leaders, and heads of state. Moreover, the Intercultural Cooperation Platform was established; this venue attracted a wide array of participants and encouraged an extensive discussion on cultural issues and challenges, in this occasion the '5A' platform was established. [14] The symbolic "5A" platform marked the inception of the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue that would be organized every two years, guided by a presidential decree signed in May, 2011 by H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On May 29th – June 1st, 2013, Baku hosted the 2nd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue dedicated to generate a meaningful platform focused on cultural diversity, cultural diplomacy, intercultural cooperation, public diplomacy, regional security issues and religious affairs. The "Baku Process" Forum has emerged as a reliable juncture that deals with ongoing challenges and opportunities that derive from multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue, the following topics were discussed at a greater length on many parallel sessions: "How to build the world's future together"; "How to build a popular support for cultural diversity"; "The New Era of Globalization: Hybridity of Cultures in a Changing World"; "Supporting Intercultural Actions." Furthermore, under this framework, there were other conferences organized such as: "Global Intercultural Cities Learning Community"; a workshop on "Intercultural Dialogue through History Teaching: Best Practices and Challenges"; "Tourism as a key driver of Mutual Understanding and Tolerance among Cultures"; "Intercultural Dialogue through Faith and Science." This Forum was supported by UNESCO, UN Alliance of Civilizations, UN World Tourism Organization and ISESCO; it brought together principal national and international leaders and decision makers. The 2nd World Forum hosted for the first time a conference that brought together – in Baku – more than fifty Ministers of Culture and Tourism from Europe, Middle East, Latin America, and South-East Asia.

On May 18th – 19th, 2015, under the patronage of Azerbaijan's President H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, Baku hosted the 3rd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. This major global event was supported by the UN Alliance of Civilizations, UNESCO, Council of Europe and ISESCO. Under the main topic: "Sharing Culture for Shared Security," the international participants discussed "culture and sustainable development in the post-2015 development agenda," this was a perfect opportunity to celebrate the World Day of Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development (May 21st). In 2015, "Baku Process," highlighted once again the role of cultural policies, historical heritage, religions, faiths, immigration crisis, sports diplomacy, tertiary education, visual arts, business, university social responsibility and other aspects that promote effective intercultural dialogue; in such a convenient time when the United Nations has proclaimed the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022). A number of sessions were focused on: "Sharing Culture for a Shared Security: Cultural rights in the modern age"; "Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting Religious Pluralism and Advancing a Shared Well-being"; "Shaping a Common Global Agenda: the Role of International Organizations in Building Trust and Understanding Between Cultures."

The 3rd Forum paid attention to the current global security and the role of nations in addressing the needs of vulnerable people and immigrants at a time of significant geopolitical instability, regional turmoil, and European Union's large bureaucracy. Under the framework of this forum was hosted: the second Ministerial Conference on "culture and sustainable development in the post-2015 development agenda"; the first meeting of the new Academic Forum of UNESCO Chairs on intercultural and interreligious dialogue and was launched a book by UNESCO-Tudor Rose publication entitled "Agree to Differ." According to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev: "today, representatives of all religions, ethnic groups live in Azerbaijan and are contributing for its successful economic development; 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." The results of the Baku Forum are included into the UNESCO publications focused on intercultural dialogue and support the development of future mission and strategic objectives, including the framework of the UN Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022).

The "Baku Process" is making a prominent contribution to solve contemporary challenges and promote an international environment where living together peacefully and intercultural dialogue acquire the necessary attention to become two major pillars that guide European Countries' Cultural Dialogue and further strengthen the state of Azerbaijan's Cultural Diplomacy in the world. The "Baku Process" creates a rare opportunity for global conversations to take place between state and non-state actors; for over ten years, it emphasized practical actions and pragmatic cultural collaborations.

One of many concrete examples of such a pragmatic cultural diplomacy pivot, implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan is the organization of the visit to Baku from Bulgarian Vice President Mrs. Margarita Popova in October 2016. During her visit Popova held various meetings with the leadership of Azerbaijan University of Languages, Academician Kamal Abdulla, Presidential Administration, and other high-ranking officials of Azerbaijan.

The cultural and scientific cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria are at the highest levels, and Azerbaijani students demonstrate a special interest in the history, ethnography, economic and cultural life of Bulgaria." [15] Furthermore, Azerbaijan's First Lady and president of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Dr. Mehriban Aliyeva, has played a fundamental role in strengthening the cultural and scientific cooperation between Azerbaijan and Bulgaria." [16]

Later on Dr. Nikolay Ovcharov had a working meeting with State Adviser on Multinational, Multicultural and Religious Affairs, Academician Kamal Abdulla. On this occasion Azerbaijani Academician Abdulla gave an overview of cultural events organized by the Baku International Multiculturalism Centre. Dr. Ovcharov shared the interest and possibility to have courses of Azerbaijani Multiculturalism Model be taught at various European universities, to promote the religious tolerance of Azerbaijan throughout many countries of the world. [17] Another significant partnership is the promotion of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy and multiculturalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, organized by Political and Economic Counselor Mr. Elnur Guliyev together with Prof. Dr. Sabahudin Hadžialić, a professor of communication sciences in various European Universities. [18] Furthermore on February 21st, 2020, Ambassador Mammad Ahmadzada helped to organize in Rome the Azerbaijan-Italy business forum; an influential event that helped strengthen the commercial and political ties between both countries. The Azerbaijan – Italy Business Forum was attended by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Italian Republic Luigi Di Maio. In this occasion President Ilham Aliyev delivered a keynote speech, reflecting on the historic partnership and economic relations between Italy and Azerbaijan. [19]

4. VII Global Forum of United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

On April 25th-27th, 2016, the Government of Azerbaijan hosted the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) under the main theme: "Living Together In Inclusive Societies, A Challenge and A Goal." At the official opening ceremony of this historic event, held at the heart of Baku, the President of Azerbaijan H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev stated: "It is not accidental that Baku hosts the 7th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations. Because as the land of tolerance and our commitment to multicultural values, independent Azerbaijan has an extensive experience for development of the dialogue of cultures, realization of important projects aimed at the preservation of cultural diversity and to regulate the mutual relations between civilizations and to host prestigious forums".

According to Mr. Milikh Yevdayev [20]: "The delegates flew to Azerbaijan from every corner of the world, to discuss the power of inclusiveness in a world that is overwhelmed by division and strife. Security experts, political scientists, heads of state, diplomats, organizational leaders, activists, students, and brave heroes, those who spend every day risking their lives at the frontlines of change - all came together for a meeting of their hearts and minds. Throughout the two days of intense programs and panels, the forum leaders gave particular attention to the role of religious leaders, women, youth, culture and education in perpetuating the message of building peace by actively and cooperatively coming together against hate and extremism. I saw many new faces, and also the familiar representatives of Azerbaijan's own diverse religious communities: Muslim, Christian and Jewish friends, and important leaders

in this effort. ..." [21]

On his article: "Reflections on Global Peace and the 7th Forum of the U.N. Alliance of Civilizations;" published at The Jewish Journal, Mr. Milikh Yevdayev, emphasized: "There was something very powerful about this forum and its theme, as it relates to Azerbaijan in particular. The forum's theme 'Living Together In Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal' made me feel a sense of pride. There could be no better fit for such a program than Azerbaijan. Positive inclusion is central to our national character, and also to our historical identity. We are a nation defined by our success with inclusivity, multicultural and multi faith respect - now and in times when there is so much division and hatred in various parts of the world." [22] In his analysis Mr. Milikh Yevdayev underscored: "the UNAOC program was nothing short of uplifting, after weeks of immense worry and stress especially, as our homeland Azerbaijan came under attack again. Before this, I wondered how to face the Passover Holiday while so many of my fellow Azerbaijanis were mourning their loved ones lost to the renewed aggression by Armenia in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region." [23]

In her keynote speech, the First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan Dr. Mehriban Aliyeva stressed that tolerance and multiculturalism are a lifestyle in Azerbaijan. She also informed the participants about the severe humanitarian and environmental consequences of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan and gave detailed information about the projects implemented by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in the country and abroad on the basis of public-private and civil society partnerships. The 7th Global Forum of the UNAOC was addressed by: the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, and the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo.

Furthermore this global event hosted a breakout session entitled: "Constructing Peace, Deconstructing Terror," where a number of matters in the Middle East and other regions of the world were addressed. Similarly, Baku hosted other sessions; according to Dr. Rafiq Novruzov [24] the following topics were embarked upon: "a new global social contract for regions destroyed by internal and interstate conflicts and ways to reduce attraction towards extremist behavior; effective ways to restore a sense of dignity among people feeling disempowered; the changing narrative from religious and sectarian to political and strategic dimensions of violent extremism."

In these unique panels, some of the keynote speakers were Baron John Thomas Alderdice, Former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly (1998-2004); Mr. Novruz Mammadov [25], Mr. Egemen Bağış, Former Minister of European Union Affairs, Republic of Turkey; Mr. Samir Barhoum, Editor-in-chief of *The Jordan Times*. In his remarks, Mr. Novruz Mammadov emphasized that 20 (twenty) percent of Azerbaijani lands are under the Armenian occupation. Mr. Mammadov stated: "United Nations Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territory, but these resolutions remain on paper. These resolutions demand immediate and unconditional withdrawal; in some cases, resolutions of the U. N. Security Council are being implemented within hours or days. But in our case it is more than twenty years of no action. That shows that there is a lack of political will." [26] In the framework of UN Alliance of Civilizations' objectives focused on: the promotion of cultural and interreligious dialogue; respect and mutual understanding among civilizations; encourage solutions that bring societies together based on the UN fundamental principles of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development; more than 4,000 delegates from 147

countries participated in the 7th Baku UNAOC Global Forum. This event was widely covered by 117 foreign and local media representatives. [27]

In the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations was adopted the Baku Declaration during the high-level ministerial meeting. This document emphasized Azerbaijan's role as the host country of the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations under the name "Living Together in Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and A Goal", as a way to bind multiple perspectives and strengthen inclusiveness and diversity throughout many countries and regions. According to Mr. Sarkhanbay Khuduyev [28]: "the Baku Process, started in 2008 under the guidance and leadership of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, whose aim is to develop inter-civilizational dialogue and address intercultural convergence beyond the boundaries of Europe; the Azerbaijani head of state is raising the current multiculturalism matters at the global level."

5. IV World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

On May 5-6, 2017, Baku hosted the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, under the main theme: "Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New Avenues for Human Security, Peace and Sustainable Development." This major global event focused on the role of faith, religions, migration, human security, sports diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, sustainable development and on ways to curtail violent extremism. [29] The Forum provided a platform to discuss the best practices that ensure genuine respect for everyone, including freedom of religion, equal employment opportunities, good governance, effective healthcare systems and economic growth. Heads of governments, ministers, representatives of various international organizations, senior policy makers, cultural diplomacy professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists, participated throughout the sessions of the 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. According to Prof. Mehmood - Ul - Hassan Khan [30]: "the IV World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue has already prioritized its agenda by placing intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity higher on the international agenda, it is critical for human security and a prime responsibility of our time. Prof. Ul - Hassan Khan emphasized: "[Previous] World Forums have reached remarkable achievements by bringing together heads of governments, ministers, and leaders of various international organizations, senior policy makers..." to discuss pressing challenges of our time.

6. Conclusion

The Republic of Azerbaijan is a very special country where various ethnic groups, cultures, religions have coexisted for centuries since The Byzantine Empire. The favorable geographic location of Azerbaijan has exposed this country to admirable features of European and Islamic Civilizations, making Baku, Nakhchivan, Shaki, Dağlıq Qarabağ [31] and Quba, to become genuine archaeological and ancient commercial routes between the East and the West, as well as from the North to the South. Azerbaijan, the Land of Fire, unlike any other country in the Eurasian landmass has preserved cultures of many ethnic groups and has become a candid bridge among millenary cultures, multiculturalism and religious dialogue.

Under the patronage of H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, over the last ten years the "Baku Process" has hosted the following major

events [32]:

- The I World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue held on April 7-9, 2011; addressed matters pertaining to intercultural dialogue with the participation of 500 representatives from 102 countries from all continents. The main topic of the Forum was: "United Through Common Values, Enriched by Cultural Diversity."
- The II World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue held on May 29 - June 01, 2013, tackled ways on: "How to build a global future together"; "How to build a popular support for cultural diversity"; "Matters on the New Era of Globalization: hybridity of cultures in a changing world"; "Supporting intercultural actions." Another important session was focused on: "Tourism as a key driver of mutual understanding and tolerance among cultures." The main topic of the Forum was: "Living together peacefully in a diverse world".
- The III World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue held on May 18-19, 2015; reflected matters on human security, the importance of sharing different cultures; understanding that human security must be a fully shared responsibility among community leaders, educators and spiritual leaders. The main topic of the Forum was: "Culture and Sustainable Development in the post 2015 Development Agenda."
- The IV World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue was held on May 5-6, 2017, tackled the role of faith, many religions, immigration policies, human security, cultural diplomacy, education, sustainable development and other matters. The main theme of this Global Forum was: "Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New Avenues for Human Security, Peace and Sustainable Development."

All of the aforementioned major international forums have generated tangible results in the realm of Azerbaijan's Cultural Diplomacy and strengthened the role of the Government of Azerbaijan in the implementation of its foreign policy at the bilateral and multilateral platforms.

A few concrete results are:

- On November 18th, 2016, Mr. Aslan Aslanov, Director General of Azerbaijan State News Agency (AZERTAC), was elected as the new president of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA) for a three year term (2016-2019). AZERTAC in cooperation with the Heydar Aliyev Foundation hosted on November 16-18, 2016, the 5th News Agencies World Congress and the 22nd session of the Council of CIS Heads of News Agencies. Furthermore, on this occasion AZERTAC hosted the 16th General Assembly of the Organization of Asia-Pacific News Agencies (OANA). [33]

Mr. Vugar Seyidov, Special Correspondent of AZERTAC in Germany was elected as OANA Secretary General. [34]

- The Government of Azerbaijan has helped inspire a number of regional governments, and international bodies, to pursue an active role towards strengthening their multiculturalism policies and religious dialogue, as well as intensify – and shape – these nations' respective efforts in reducing religious violence, acts of terrorism and improve regional immigration policies. In this context it is valuable to indicate a few recent events that are held in Europe: the 2nd International Conference on "Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East," held in Athens (Greece) on October 30-31 (2017) [35]; organization of the 1st Ministerial Meeting of the Ancient Civilizations Forum, held in Athens on April 24-25 (2017) [36]; and the establishment of "Ancient

Civilizations Forum” or GC10 [37]. In September 23rd, 2015, leaders of European governments met in Brussels to try to shape a common action “plan on refugees following months of recriminations and amid a sense of spiraling momentum of which the leaders have lost control.”

It is certain that the Republic of Azerbaijan has always harnessed an avant-garde foreign policy that addresses many global challenges that are deeply affecting Europe and Asia today. Baku has supported, and become a global player, on all efforts led by the international community right at their inception stage; the Government of Azerbaijan under President Ilham Aliyev has proactively brought together Nobel Prize winners, heads of state and cultural experts to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue – always intertwined with the world’s pressing challenges and obstacles of today and of the future.

The nation of Azerbaijan, with its tolerant attitude and admirable acceptance of other cultures, upholds the special values of intercultural and interreligious dialogue; characteristics that are essential to foster regional peace, economic development and ensure respect for international law. The “Baku Process” will continue to promote intercultural dialogue between governments and nations, strengthen cooperation among many ethnic groups and encourage cultural partnerships among people living on different continents. The victory of glorious Armed Forces of Azerbaijan in the forty-four days of Patriotic War, in the Second Karabakh War (September – November, 2020); a military campaign that liberated over twenty percent of sovereign territory of Azerbaijan from the ruthless Armenian Armed Forces, is substantially the positive result of Baku Process, the world’s most important platform that tackles security, geopolitical, geoeconomics and cultural matters. Furthermore, the visionary leadership of President Ilham Aliyev has made the nation of Azerbaijan into a developed economy and a prosperous logistical center.

“Dear Shusha, we are back!” - These were the words articulated by the greatest leader of the Azerbaijani people, Azerbaijani commander of all times, President Ilham Aliyev. He has proved to the entire world the power, gallantry, geopolitical pivot, and economic potential of Azerbaijan. Today the entire world may appreciate the culture, intellectual level, combat capability and diplomatic strength of the Azerbaijani people. The Chancellor of Azerbaijan University of Languages Kamal Abdulla, one of the greatest European writers, recently stated: “May Allah rest the soul of our great national leader Heydar Aliyev. We thank God to have such a brilliant commander, such a great president. We are all proud of our army, our victorious soldiers, martyrs, veterans, and citizens, who have mobilized and glorified Azerbaijan. Today we have a lump in our throats. Today we have tears of joy. “Dear Shusha, we are back! - May these words be eternal. “Dear Shusha, we are with you!” - May these words last a lifetime. Long live Azerbaijan, long live our victorious leader Ilham Aliyev, long live the Azerbaijani soldier! Long live Azerbaijan!” Cultural Diplomacy and Policy of Multiculturalism will always remain as the main fulcrum of Azerbaijan’s Foreign Policy. -

Notes and References

[1] The village of Nij (Nic), is located in Azerbaijan’s Gabala district, it is home of an ancient church of Caucasian Albania, named Cotari, the autochthonous Alban - Udin religious community lives in this area.

[2] Also known as the village of Kiş located in the District of Shaki, north-western Azerbaijan. The Church of Kiş was founded in the 1st century by St. Eliseus who was one of the promoters of Christianity in Azerbaijan. Eliseus made an apostolic journey around many parts of Caucasian Albania; he also visited Kiş, near the town of Shaki. The most interesting discovery is that of a grave vault located under-ground in the western end of the church. The excavations and archaeological explorations of this monument's foundation have provided convincing evidence that the present walls date back in the V century. Furthermore, archaeological sources confirm the existence of a 1st century religious monument located underneath the very same walls of the present-day structure. It is a rare cultural monument of Azerbaijani-Albanian architecture.

[3] The round temple in Shaki is located inside the castle of Shaki and nearby Khan's Palace (Azerbaijan's Shaki Region). Built in the VIII century AD, by Caucasian Albanians, it has impressive architectural features. (<https://bakuprocess.az/baku-process/about-process/>)

[4] Also known by the names: Khudavang or Dedevang; it is located in the Vang village of Kalbajar Region (sovereign territory of Azerbaijan) on the left riverbanks of Terterchay river. It is one of the largest and most beautiful examples of Azerbaijan's Christian Architecture. The complex is believed to have been founded in the 4th century; it was mainly constructed in the 13th century, during the reign of King Vakhtang, a Caucasian Albanian ruler. The monastery campus (currently under the occupation of Armenian Armed Forces, since 1987), includes more than twenty buildings and ruins. The main church was built in 1214 by Arzu Khatun, wife of King Vakhtang. The church is one of the Caucasian-Albanian Christian masterpieces of architecture. It is believed that Arzu Khatun and her daughters have done the interior mural paintings and early medieval frescoes.

[5] Located in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan, the Momuna Khatun Monument is a unique historical landmark of Azerbaijan, erected in 1186 by the order of Mahammad Jahan Pahlavan, a masterpiece that represents the architectural renaissance of an ancient land with a rich architectural tradition established by Ajami Ibn Abubakr Nakhchivani, a renowned architect of great influence in Europe and the Middle East.

(<http://www.eurasiareview.com/31102017-shaki-azerbajians-ancient-agera-of-multiculturalism-oped/>)

[6] The Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan is a sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. Under the leadership of Supreme Assembly Chairman, the Hon. Vasif Talibov, there have been restored many important cultural and religious monuments and castles in this region of Azerbaijan. Nakhchivan is the birthplace of: National Leader Heydar Aliyev (first president of modern Azerbaijan) and the city where the current national flag of Azerbaijan was established.

[7] The region of Quba (also known as 'Guba') is located in northern Azerbaijan, with a population of 40 thousand inhabitants. In April-May 1918 more than four thousand local civilians, women and children of Guba (of the following ethnic groups: Azerbaijani, Lezghin, Tat, Avar) were brutally massacred; hundreds of villages and mosques were totally destroyed and burned to the ground by the Armenian Nationalist Forces, who aspired to decrease the indigenous Muslim population of Azerbaijan and establish a 'Greater Armenia' (Source: <http://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/90/3777/Quba.-Aprel-May-1918-ci-il.-M%C3%BCs%C9%99lman-q%C4%B1r%C4%9F%C4%B1nlar%C4%B1s%C9%99n%C9%99dl%C9%99rd%C9%99/> | Accessed on 11/08/2017).

[8] Dağlıq Qarabağ is a sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, under the occupation of Armenian Armed Forces (for over twenty-eight years), also known as: 'Nagorno-Karabakh'. Before the inception of Armenian Occupation and Destruction of Dağlıq Qarabağ Region in 1987 - 1988, the various religious communities were living in peace and harmony, in this region of Azerbaijan, since the early Medieval Times.

[9] Jan Dziejczak is the Polish Secretary of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Polish Community Abroad and Public Diplomacy

(http://www.mfa.gov.pl/en/ministry/senior_officials/jan_dziejczak/)

[10] Prof. Dr. Academician Kamal Abdulla (Abdullayev Kamal Mehdi oğlu) is the Chancellor of Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL)- (<http://adu.edu.az/en/2017/06/rektor/>)

[11] http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/culture/policy/international-cooperation/documents/country-reports/azerbaijan_en.pdf

[12] <https://en.azvision.az/news/59621/mehriban-aliyevs-cultural-diplomacy-what-she-did-for-azerbaijan-and-world.html>

[13] <http://bakuprocess.az/baku-process/about-process/>

[14] An acronym that originates from the first letters of each continent's name in Azerbaijani language: "Avropa, Asiya, Amerika, Afrika, Avstraliya."

[15] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/12102017-baku-slavic-university-promotes-languages-of-europe-and-the-caucasus-oped/>

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https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Oregon_State_Legislature_commends_Azerbaijan_039s_exemplary_model_of_interfaith_tolerance_and_harmony-930291

[16] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/1002999>

[17] https://azertag.az/en/xeber/State_Adviser_on_Multinational_Multicultural_and_Religious_Affairs_meets_Bulgarian_advisor-1003193

[18] On Friday, October 20th 2017, in the newly inaugurated amphitheater of the International University Travnik in the city of Travnik, with the attendance of a totally full audience of students and academic staff of the institution, Mr. Peter Tase held a guest lecture focused on: "Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina; multiculturalism, religious tolerance and bilateral co-operation". Prof. Tase had come exclusively from the United States of America, to share his thoughts on the current developments in the Republic of Azerbaijan and its relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina. His lecture was also attended by the Chief of Azerbaijani Diplomatic mission to Sarajevo, Counselor Elnur A. Guliyev, the first accredited diplomat who had conducted a working visit in the newly inaugurated campus of IUT. After the introductory remarks made by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sabahudin Hadžialić from IUT, after expressing a gratitude to Mr. Guliyev for his presence, the representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Head of the Diplomatic Mission to BiH, Counselor Elnur Guliyev, made a special gift of books in Bosnian and English language to the main library of the university.

Throughout his presentation, while pursuing an interactive fashion of direct dialogue with students; Prof. Tase answered carefully all of the questions raised. Furthermore Prof. Peter Tase, as a respected journalist, and a visiting professor at several public universities in Latin America, Europe and the United States delivered to the audience the opportunity to better understand the relations between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Azerbaijan, He spoke about multiculturalism in Azerbaijan, the present armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and its seven surrounding districts (crimes against humanity committed by Armenian Armed Forces for over 25 years), the Khojaly Massacre, the Economic Blockade imposed by Armenian Government against the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan (Azerbaijan). During the Question-and-Answer session, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sabahudin Hadžialić raised an important matter pertaining to the possible cooperation between IUT and Azerbaijan University of Languages as well as focused on the cultural cooperation between both governments. In his presentation Prof. Tase also elaborated on the architectural accomplishments and inventions of Ajami Nakhchivani, a famous medieval architect of Azerbaijan. Moreover the keynote lecture was focused on the archaeological, historical and cultural sites of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Ordubad Region, Sheki Region, Ismailli District and Baku.

(<https://sarajevo.mfa.gov.az/en/news/3085/prof-peter-tase-from-united-states-held-a-lecture-for-iut-students-and-academic-staff>)

[19] <https://en.president.az/articles/35905>

<https://apa.az/en/xeber/foreign-news/Rome-hosted-Azerbaijan-Italy-business-forum-313343>

[20] Mr. Milikh Yevdayev is the Leader of Mountain Jews Community of Azerbaijan (since 2012).

[21] http://jewishjournal.com/current_edition/185395/reflections-global-peace-7th-forum-u-n-alliance-civilizations/

[22] http://jewishjournal.com/current_edition/185395/reflections-global-peace-7th-forum-u-n-alliance-civilizations/

[23] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/951563>

[24] Prof. Dr. Rafiq Novruzov is Vice-Chancellor for Scientific Affairs, Baku Slavic University.

[25] Prof. Dr. Ambassador Novruz Mammadov, Ph.D., was the Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration, Head of the Foreign Relations Department in the Executive Office of the President of Azerbaijan; Former Prime Minister of Azerbaijan (2018-2019). (<https://www.azernews.az/business/105047.html>)

[26] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/946571>

[27] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/947042>

[28] Mr. Sarkhanbay Khuduyev was the Head of International Projects Department, Baku International Multiculturalism Centre, Government of Azerbaijan (2016-2018).

[29] <http://bakuprocess.az/forums/baku-forum-2017/introduction/>

[30] Prof. Dr. Mehmood - Ul - Hassan Khan is a University Professor from Pakistan, expert on geopolitical issues and international affairs.

[31] <https://www.azernews.az/culture/105696.html> | http://www.azerbaijan.az/_Karabakh/_History/history_01_e.html

[32] In cooperation with UNESCO, UN Alliance of Civilizations, UN World Tourism Organization, Council of Europe, ISESCO, North-South Center of the Council of Europe. The 4th WORLD FORUM ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE was held on May 5-6 in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan. Opening ceremony of the Forum was held on May 5th, 2017. <http://bakuprocess.az/forums/baku-forum-2017/introduction/>

[33] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/1011824>

[34] <https://azertag.az/en/xeber/1011824> | <http://nawc.az/node/193>

[35] <http://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/speech-of-the-minister-of-foreign-affairs-kotzias-at-the-opening-of-the-proceedings-of-the-2nd-international-conference-on-religious-and-cultural-pluralism-and-peaceful-coexistence-in-the-middle-east-athens-30-31-october-2017.html>

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[36] <http://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/top-story/press-conference-of-the-1st-ministerial-meeting-of-the-ancient-civilizations-forum.html>

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[37] <http://www.mfa.gr/en/foreign-policy-issues/cultural-diplomacy/ancient-civilizations-forum-athens-24-april-2017.html>

<https://adu.edu.az/en/xeberler/xeberler/4475.html>

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- [3] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/24082017-the-apex-of-islamic-culture-in-the-land-of-fire/>
- [4] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/03052017-ntercultural-dialogue-reflected-in-nakhchivans-cultural-monuments-oped/>
<http://foreignpolicynews.org/2017/04/30/intercultural-dialogue-reflected-nakhchivans-cultural-monuments/>
- [5] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/06032017-albantapa-akhura-kultapasi-unique-azerbajani-archeological-monuments-oped/>
- [6] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/27122016-ordubad-a-cradle-of-religious-tolerance-in-caucasus-oped/>
- [7] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/29102016-nakhchivan-azerbaijan-a-journey-in-the-land-of-shah-ismayil-oped/>
- [8] <http://www.eurasiareview.com/01092016-the-nakhchivan-van-urmiye-painted-pottery-of-the-middle-bronze-age-oped/>
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