



AVRASYA  
İNCELEMELERİ  
MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR  
EURASIAN STUDIES

---

## **PRESIDENT ALIYEV: MULTICULTURALISM - A STATE POLICY IN AZERBAIJAN**

-

26.04.2016

---

26 April 2016

By Seymur Aliyev- Trend

The UNAOC 7th Global Forum official ceremony took place today in Baku, where the country's President Ilham Aliyev made the opening speech.

The president welcomed the participants of the forum, in particular expressing gratitude to the founding fathers of the alliance,

He welcomed the participants of the forum.

"It is a big honor for us to host the 7th UNAOC Global Forum. We consider it a sign of appreciation of our activity and promotion of values of intercultural dialogue, multiculturalism," said the president in his opening speech.

"I'd like to express my gratitude to the founding fathers of the alliance - Turkey and Spain, President Erdogan and former Prime Minister Zapatero, for this extremely important initiative, which now lives for more than 10 years," Ilham Aliyev said.

The president went on to add that the idea of creation of the alliance was the sign of wisdom of the politicians, President Erdogan and former Prime Minister Zapatero, supported by international community.

"I'd also like to express my gratitude to the high representative UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his leadership, contribution and promotion of the values of peace, solidarity and friendship," said president Aliyev.

The president went on to say that Azerbaijan is proud to have the representatives of more than 140 countries gather in Baku to address the important issues of the alliance of civilizations.

He said that Azerbaijan, for centuries, was a place where religions, cultures and civilizations met.

"We're not only a geographic breach between East and West, but also a cultural breach. For centuries, representatives of religions, cultures lived in peace and dignity in Azerbaijan," he said. "Religious tolerance, multiculturalism - were always present here. There was no word - multiculturalism, but the ideas were always present."

Ilham Aliyev added that as a result of that, Azerbaijan today is a multiethnic, multiconfessional country, where representatives of all religions and ethnic groups live in dignity and peace.

"This is one of our biggest assets," he said. "And we're proud of our history. We are proud of our historical monuments, which reflect the creation of representatives of different cultures."

President reminded that one of the oldest mosques in the world, which was built in 743, is situated in Azerbaijani city of Shemakha.

"Also, one of the oldest churches in the Caucasus, the ancient church of ancient state Caucasian Albania is also situated in Azerbaijan, close to another ancient city of Sheki," he said.

The president said the Azerbaijani government invests in construction and renovation of mosques, orthodox and catholic churches, synagogues.

"This is our policy and this is our lifestyle," said the president. "For centuries, Azerbaijan is preserving this asset, regardless of political or social situation in the country."

Ilham Aliyev went on to add that Azerbaijan is relatively young as an independent country, only 25

years old, but it is ancient, with deep historical and cultural roots.

"Multiculturalism for us is a state policy," said the president. "We organize different events, addressing this important issue."

The president added that every two years, Intercultural dialogue forum takes place in Azerbaijan, and Baku International Humanitarian Forum is hosted regularly as well.

"The main idea is to bring the representatives of different religions together and how to establish more understanding between us," he said.

The president also reminded that Azerbaijan hosted the world summit of religious leaders, addressing important issues of interreligious dialogue.

"I think today this is one of the most important topics on global agenda," he said. "And the role of the alliance of civilizations is growing. Unfortunately, we see some very concerning trends in our region, in Europe, in the Middle East, on the area of former Soviet Union. We see clashes, confrontations, based on ethnic and religious grounds."

Azerbaijan's president said this is a very dangerous tendency.

"I think that gathering in Baku, at the UNAOC 7th Global Forum will address these issues and will contribute to the cause of solidarity, peace, mutual understanding and partnership."

"In 2008 we initiated the Baku Process, which already became the broad platform for international dialogue. Azerbaijan is one of the few countries, which is the member of the Islamic Cooperation Organization and the Council of Europe. So at the meeting of the ministers of culture of Council of Europe which took place in Baku, in 2008, we invited the ministers of cultures of the Islamic Cooperation Organization," said the president.

"For the first time, the ministers of cultures from more than 100 countries from these two organizations gathered in Baku," Ilham Aliyev said. "Next year, in 2009, we hosted the ministerial meeting of the ministers of cultures of the Islamic Cooperation Organization in Baku and invited the ministers of culture of Council of Europe."

"So this was named the Baku Process and we are very proud that the name of our ancient city is now also associated with a positive initiative," the president said.

He went on to add that this process is growing, getting more and more supporters.

"It is becoming a global initiative, which contributes to the cause of solidarity, mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue," the president said.

"Azerbaijan's geographic location is known, but at the same time our initiatives are aimed at strengthening the position of our country as a bridge between cultures, between civilizations, as a country which can and should contribute more to the cause of mutual understanding," President Aliyev said.

He reminded that last year Baku was very proud to host the First inaugural European Games in Baku, and next year Baku will host the Fourth Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku.

"So, in one city in two years time, European and Islamic athletes will perform. This is not only sport and achievement of medals. This is friendship, mutual understanding, solidarity, partnership," he said.

"There is nothing to divide between us," he continued. "We are all living on the same planet, all the people want to live in dignity, peace, security, to raise children, to protect their families. All religions advocate for the same values - humanity, mercy, solidarity, peace. Uniting our efforts is what the world needs to do."

The president went on to say that today's gathering, today's forum is a clear indicator that the ideas of multiculturalism are strongly supported by international community.

"As I said, more than 140 countries are present here. Multiculturalism has no alternative. We all know that there are different ideas about different views of multiculturalism - failed, or some that did not work, but there are positive examples. For us, multiculturalism is a state policy, and is our lifestyle. And looking at the alternatives, what are the alternatives of multiculturalism? Very dangerous alternatives - xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-semitism, racism, discrimination, hatred," Ilham Aliyev said.

He went on to add that strengthening the values of multiculturalism will be a very positive trend, and all the responsible politicians should contribute to this positive dynamics.

"As I said, Azerbaijan is a relatively young country as an independent state. This year we will celebrate the 25th anniversary of restoration of our independence. These were the years of transformation of political, economic system, these were the years of creation of the state," the president said.

"I think that we've met all our major targets. Azerbaijan became the respected member of the international community. It is the member of the United Nations, OSCE, Islamic Cooperation Organization, the Council of Europe, Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and many other international bodies," Ilham Aliyev said.

He went on to remind that Azerbaijan has strong international support, which was reflected in 2011, when with the support of 155 countries, Azerbaijan for the first time, was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

"That was a big victory for our country, and sign of great respect to Azerbaijan," said the president. "Within the short period of 25 years, we managed to present ourselves as a reliable international partner, as a country with independent foreign policy, country which contributes to regional development, regional security, stability and multiculturalism."

President Aliyev went on to say that the years of independence were the years of transformation of Azerbaijan's political system, creation of democratic institutions.

"We succeeded in that," said the president. "All the freedoms are provided in Azerbaijan, freedom of media, free internet. More than 70 percent of our population are internet users. Freedom of assembly, religious freedom, all freedoms are provided and this is a good foundation for rapid economic development."

He further said that economic reforms implemented in Azerbaijan were implemented in parallel with political reforms.

"Unfortunately, the creation of our state was dominated by military aggression by neighboring Armenia against Azerbaijan. The aggression that ended in occupation of internationally recognized territory of our country. Nagorno Karabakh is a historic, legal part of Azerbaijan. When Azerbaijan became the member of the United Nations, it got adopted with Nagorno Karabakh as an integral part of our country. But as a result of this aggression, Nagorno-Karabakh is totally occupied by Armenia, and not only Karabakh, but also seven other districts of Azerbaijan, beyond the administrative borders of Nagorno Karabakh are under occupation," said the president.

Ilham Aliyev noted that as a result of the occupation, Azerbaijan has more than one million refugees and internally displaced persons.

"So, we were subject of ethnic cleansing by Armenia and almost 20 percent of our territory is under occupation for more than 20 years," the president said.

---

Kaynak/Source: