

Conference Session 4.1: Media - Publications
Traditions of tolerance in Azerbaijan
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At end of XX century the world cannot be characterized by only changes on the political map of the world. Beside with economic, ecological and demographic problems, there were *spiritual problems which* caused by loss of moral values. At the same time, it had developed the theory of clash of civilizations and found the supporters, (S.P.Hantington.The clash of civilization (1)) leaning in a certain degree on the distinctions existing among world religions.

Under such conditions adjustment of dialogue between cultures and religions for preservation of cultural diversity of a human civilization is very actual and in this connection, the experience of countries and regions where the traditions of tolerance and toleration are strong, can become indicative. In this connection, Azerbaijan represents a unique example of peaceful co-existence and cooperation of many people and religious faiths. In Azerbaijan beside with Islamic religion existed both Christian religion, and Judaic throughout centuries and they exist now. And the same picture could be observed in the Caucasus. We consider that people who irrespective of their belonging to any religion, have to respect all other cultures, religions, moral values, have to be tolerant to their customs, traditions, even for them which whom they don't like. (H. Aliyev) Roots of this tradition disappear deeply in history, after all on the Azerbaijani land still found a haven the Jewish immigrants who escaped from the plundered Judah kingdom after the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylon tsar Navukhodonosor II (586 BC). According to historical messages, during this period it appeared to 40 thousand captives in Babylon.

In the middle of the first century of our era to Azerbaijan ran the first followers of the Christianity who have laid the foundation for the subsequent formation here the Albanian autocephalous church. With Islam arrival the tradition of toleration on our ancient land even more became stronger. At the heart of Muslim tolerance stands the Koranic postulate: "There is no coercion in religion". Speaking about tolerance, we would like to express our position on the relation of the term "tolerance".The Latin origin "tolerance" term bears in itself sense "tolerations. By our opinion, application of this term to Islamic religion, isn't absolutely right. The Islamic religion had always called to treat faithfully to all religions. It is possible to bring into confirmation to told numerous ayats from the Koran. For example; " Truly, to believers, and also Jews, Christians and sabiyas which believed in Allah and in the Last day and arrived justly, the award at their Lord is prepared. They don't know fear and won't be grieved. " (Surah al-Bacharach, ayat 62) (3)

This is not simply tolerations certificate, but it is most likely a question of the religious culture which being an essence of Islam. For this reason, the Islamic religion found numerous followers and widely extended in short time. In our opinion, usual searches of idea of tolerance in religions leave divine essence of religions in a shadow. For this reason would be more true to use the concept "religious culture" or "traditions of religious culture" instead of the term "tolerance", that will allow to keep the ethical maintenance of religions.

Let's return to a subject of our report. According to numerous certificates of historians, at the VII-VIII centuries the Muslims of the Caucasus validly and tolerantly treated to followers of a Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrism. For example, Dagestan directly adjoined to Islam in the VII century, "the governor of Derbent Shakhrbaraz... " was prayed with Muslims on Friday, with Jews – on Saturday, and with Christians – on Sunday ".(3)

An important value for formation of strong communications between the numerous ethnic and religious groups living in the territory of Azerbaijan, was played by a factor of the general destiny. Throughout history the people of Azerbaijan quite often got under the power of the powerful states, and the general adverse conditions forced them to look for rapprochements, without attaching significance to distinctions in outlook.

After disintegration of the Soviet Union, the people of the former federal republics, beside independence, found an original freedom of worship. Within modern Azerbaijani model of the

state and religious relations all faiths received the identical status, being equal before the law. Along with ensuring the rights of the Muslims which are the vast majority of citizens of the country, (95% of the population of the country are Muslims) the state shows care of all traditional religions which have gained distribution in the republic. Today there are 1802 mosques, 11 churches and 6 synagogues function in the country. As example of tolerance it is functioning 525 Islamic and 34 not Islamic religious communities. In 1920 in Baku the Russian Orthodox Church was closed. On May 27, 2001, during visit to Azerbaijan, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alex II made great consecration of Russian Orthodox Church and gave it the cathedral status.

The Catholic community in Azerbaijan was registered in 1999. Now in the capital of the republic there is a construction of the Catholic church which project is coordinated with Vatican. On the appearance it will remind earlier existing in the city of Baku the Catholic temple.

The Jewish community of Azerbaijan has centuries-old traditions in the republic. To Jews it is possible to judge attention already to that at the Baku state university, at oriental studies faculty, the Hebrew office, and Institute of ethnography of Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, together with the Russian fund of preservation and development of the Jewish culture was open, I started book "Jews in Azerbaijan" creation. The Jewish community of Azerbaijan has centuries-old traditions in the republic. It is possible for Jews to judge attention already to that at the Baku state university, at oriental studies faculty, the Hebrew office, and Institute of ethnography of Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, with the Russian fund of preservation and development of the Jewish culture was open, had started creation of book "Jews in Azerbaijan". In addition, in April, 2001 the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan held the international seminar on a subject "Mountain Jews of Caucasus. Speaking about respect for Jews in Azerbaijan, it is necessary to mention the settlement the Red Settlement, perhaps, is the only place on the former Soviet Union where Jews (about 4 thousand people) compactly live. Before the establishment of the Soviet power in Azerbaijan at the settlement there were 11 synagogues. In Soviet period there was only one operating temple. After 1996 the state gave back to a community the buildings of two more synagogues. The unique experience of Azerbaijan in formation and strengthening of interreligious dialogue and cooperation was highly appreciated also recognition abroad.

Historical visit to the republic of the head of Catholic Church of John Pavel II (on May 22-24, 2002) became the certificate of it. During the visit the pontiff especially emphasized historical traditions of toleration in Azerbaijan, after all exactly the first Christians escaping from prosecution of the Roman authorities here found a shelter.

In April, 2003 Azerbaijan was visited by the Patriarch of Rome Bartholomew I. Achievement of understanding and consent on many questions disturbing followers of various faiths, for further strengthening of dialogue between civilizations was the purpose of visit of the head of orthodox church of East Rome. Having visited three Muslim countries before visit of Azerbaijan, the patriarch recognized that the state and confessional relations, and also the relations between traditional and nonconventional faiths in the republic are exemplary. "I am satisfied with tolerance level here. In Azerbaijan everyone can practice religion and send ceremonies voluntarily", - Bartholomew I told. At the presentation of Certificates on the state registration of the Roman Catholic church, Claudio Gudzhherotti noted that Azerbaijan always adhered to the principles of tolerance. He told that the agreement which signed between the Sacred Throne and Azerbaijan is the first document of this sort, because Vatican still didn't sign such agreement with any other country. From this point of view it is an agreement and first government which has signed it of Azerbaijan which can be considered as an example for other countries:

"Azerbaijan once again confirmed that is it the tolerant country. Now the whole world is the witness of it. It is sure that this document which caused a positive resonance in the international community, remains in memory as an important historical event. For all this on behalf of the Sacred Throne I thank the president Ilham Aliyev and the government of Azerbaijan". The ambassador of Germany in Azerbaijan Claus Grevlikh repeatedly noted that the value of unique model of the state and religious relations in Azerbaijan within which representatives of religious

communities not simply adjoin, but also interact. "The model of Azerbaijan in the field of relationship of the state and religion can be exported to other countries. Religious tolerance and tolerance are richness of the republic."

According to the proposal of the chairman of the State committee on work with religious formations (GKRO) of the Azerbaijan Republic Hidayat Orudzhev in Azerbaijan will be created the national center of tolerance.

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