

All initiatives of the government of Azerbaijan serve to the promotion of cultural understanding and dialogue among civilizations

**Abulfas Garayev,
The Minister of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan Republic**

- Dear Minister, it is undeniable reality that the notion of cultural policy has become the matter of interest and discussions among our fellow citizens, scholars and politicians. Incontestably, the role played by your Ministry is exceptional in this case. In your quality of minister of culture and tourism, how you evaluate such topicality of a cultural policy?

- No doubt, increasing importance of the cultural policy can do nothing but make me glad. Indeed, it should be recognized that today, a cultural policy causes political, scientific, public and international interest. This importance will only increase over time. It is therefore necessary to outline several strategic goals that will explicitly deal with cultural politics. In this context, it is indispensable to point out such targets as supporting cultural diversity, protecting masterpieces of cultural heritage and national identity, developing artistic education that has tremendous educational importance and plays an exceptional role in the formation of aesthetic taste, creating necessary conditions for creative activities, establishing intercultural dialogue and tolerance, promoting national culture across the world, supporting innovative qualities and initiatives, undertaking measures to study and promote national culture and cultural features in general. Goals noted above inform us about the role played by a cultural policy in the sovereign development of the people and its prosperity.

In addition to the reasons given above, several more must be discussed as to why cultural politics in becoming increasingly relevant. Thus, in light of inevitable globalization processes, the importance and topicality of culture and cultural forms which are the main indicators and factors of national identity are increasing sharply. For this reason, the preservation of national culture and its development in contemporary period are deemed already as the issues of national significance.

In this context, the ongoing information war must be more fully addressed. Indeed, in the context of information war, the role played by the cultural policy is exceptional in promoting national cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani people and its recognition across the world and in preventing grab-and-own policy of Armenia pursued throughout the years. In addition, I have to underline that it is extremely important to forge a perfect harmony between the cultural and foreign policies of country in preventing grab-and-own facts and conduct effective promotion activities.

Thus, being one of the integral and the important parts of the state policy, the cultural policy is something that ensures moral, economic and social development of the nation, increases its intellectual potential, strengthens moral health status and welfare of people and makes the promotion and unity between national and classical cultural masterpieces. The targets and factors I said earlier open up good horizons by proving importance and infinite topicality of the cultural policy.

- We realize that our readers would be upset if we didn't directly address questions related to current government policy in regards to cultural politics in our interview with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Mr. Minister, we acknowledge fully, sir, that such a broad question may not be answered with ease. However, we would ask that you give us a basic answer, specifically dealing with general trends you see and the primary goals your office has in relation to cultural politics.

- In this case, I have to note that all initiatives of the government serve to the nation's welfare, improving international image of Azerbaijan and bringing back the occupied lands. Therefore, the fact of establishing the ministry of culture and tourism in 2006 on the initiative of Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan should be indeed treated that way. The creation of the Ministry is not just the outcome of structural reforms in the public political system, but it defines new strategic goals and priorities primary in public policies.

Thus, the strategic unity between culture and tourism should serve to global recognition of our republic and the formation of image of our Azerbaijan as a civil country with rich history and diverse culture and carrying out its promotion at international level.

Such approach requires radical improvement of the image of cultural field inside the society and better

understanding of political potential of cultural factor. Complicated and important goals assigned for the cultural policy make us to work out of the symbolical context of the culture observed in Soviet period.

Today, Azerbaijani realities (speedy development and integration into world) as well as ongoing information war make it important to use mainly political potential of the culture. As a result of direct attention and care of country's leadership, the cultural policy lives through the best period of its development and entails a crucial importance for the development of our nation parallel to economic, social and foreign policies.

At the same time it should be noted that the cultural policy has an exceptional significant in such issues as the development of nation and preservation of its identity which disposes immense cultural richness, great history, diverse traditions and acts as an independent country.

Social-economic and political processes taking place at global level and in principle, the comprehensive globalization trends assign such goals in the cultural policy as preservation of national moral values, analyzing the optimal ways of cultural integration, harmonizing current theoretical views and approaches in the form of a concept, promoting moral-national values and others.

It is not by accident that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan defines the area of using scientific potential as one of its priority goals.

Comprehensive scientific methods and analytical analysis serve to the strategic planning in this field, its creative management, adequate assessment of current processes, defining existing trends and development models and effective forecast of cultural events.

Thus, such short analysis informs us about the important role played by the cultural policy in the political prospective and welfare of the people.

In fact, main priorities of this policy is stemming out from goals and tasks defined for this field by Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the head of state.

Incontestably, as it goes with other fields, the cultural policy can go through some changes and correlations in its development. These changes are required by dynamically developing secular processes and the hostile environment. But there is one unchangeable reality: the richness and beauty of Azerbaijani culture. Preservation of this richness of our people and its handover to future generation prove undeniable importance of cultural policy.

- It was been awhile since the media wrote about World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue that will be held in Baku from April 7th to the 9th. This event, given its size and the prestige it has, may well prove to be the most important political event of the year. As a main organizer, what can you say about its political importance?

- First of all, I thank you very deeply for your high praise. It is true the attention paid to the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue to be held in the city of Baku by Azerbaijani society is a source of joy. Indeed, this factor, I mean, the interest of ordinary citizens prove the formation of civil society in Azerbaijan and the high level of political socialization among population. In its turn, it shows that the political system of Azerbaijan is being built on the democratic principles.

Well, even today we can very firmly say that the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue has a tremendous global importance. The Forum organized by international community and institutions is seen as a prestigious event able to churn out positive humanitarian vibes which are very necessary for the world in contemporary period.

In light of current processes of globalization and identity construction, the intercultural dialogue has an intrinsic value. It is not by accident that one of the main slogans of the Forum is: "From Dialogue to Understanding. Intercultural Dialogue serves to tolerance, long term interstate relations and in general, the application of democratic principles in international relations."

For this reason, the initiative shown by the Government of Azerbaijan to host the Forum is accepted and supported adequately by prestigious international institutions. Such organizations as UNESCO, the Council of Europe (CoE), UN Alliance of Civilizations and North-South Center of the Council of Europe and ISESCO operating in the same field will gather in Baku to take part in the Forum.

The participation of all these organizations which work to define global political and cultural trends not only enhances the ability of the Forum to have a real significance but will surely help to enhance Azerbaijan's image abroad.

Thus, the foreign policy of our state passes from regional a framework into the global one. At the same time, international attention to such events, as well as to the Forum itself can play an important role in assigning Baku the status of an intercultural dialogue capital.

I think that all the issues mentioned above provide a quite detailed guide to the political significance of the

World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. In addition to this answer, I would like to point out that many things depend on active participation of the mass media to attain effectively the goals we assigned for ourselves and to carry out successfully the promotion work in the framework of the cultural policy.

- One of important factors which demonstrate the scale of this Forum is the geography of countries to be represented in the event. Taking it into account, we kindly ask you to share information about the participating states with our readers.

- As you know, the first expression of interest that Azerbaijan showed in hosting the Forum was expressed in the 65th session of the General Assembly of the UN in New York on September 23, 2010 by President Ilham Aliyev. It is the result of such declaration by the head of state from such an important podium that today world countries focus their attention and show their interest to the Forum. Due to this statement made at such an essential area of world politics, that so many countries are interested in the Forum.

The event will bring together representatives from over 80 countries. Further, from this number, there are the culture ministers from over 20 countries. The geography of the participants covers Asia, Europe, the Americas, Australia and Africa. Besides the culture ministers, the Deputy Director General of UNESCO, the Director General of ISESCO, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Director of Development Assistance Program of the World Tourism Organization, the Executive Director of North-South Center of the Council of Europe and high ranking officials from other international institutions and non-governmental organizations will participate in the forum.

In a word, taking into account the geography of countries represented in this event and the prestige of the international organizations, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue should be considered a global event.

- What results are expected by the Azerbaijani people at the end of this prestigious event?

- Each international project, including the Forum mentioned earlier, which are implemented by the Government of Azerbaijan alter the perception of our county within the international framework. They are increasing the number of our partners in solving Nagorno Karabakh conflict.

Therefore, Azerbaijani society should take an active part in the realization of such initiatives and every single citizen should spare no effort in bringing the realities of the conflict to the international community and helping to promote the ideals of our republic notwithstanding their positions and activities.

- Making use of this opportunity, we would like to congratulate you on the declaration of the current year as the Year of Tourism and on the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue which will become one of the important places events in the contemporary history of Azerbaijan. We wish successes in attaining the goals set in the cultural policy which have such tremendous importance for the development of our nation.