

Azerbaijan in Modern World: Realities and Strategic Priorities

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**Dear ladies and gentlemen,
Dear conference participants,**

Let me express my deep gratitude to the organizers of the conference, especially the President of Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Good Will ambassador of UNESCO Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva for giving me a chance to participate in the work of the conference and organizing this event in high level.

Noting special importance of convening Latin Cultural Academy's XIII Conference in Azerbaijan I do believe that this event will serve for bringing closer the cultures and nations, intensification of inter-civilization and inter-religious dialogue, establishment of tolerance in international relations, strengthening of peace and tranquility, social welfare ideals.

Azerbaijan is known as historical place being perfect example of peaceful co-existence of different religious confessions, tolerant regard with regard to all representatives of all religious and nations. This tolerance is either a state policy or national treasure of our nation developed for centuries, even

we can say proudly that mutual respect and esteem for the representatives of other religions and nations is daily way of life. Azerbaijan State being adherent to the principles of religious, cultural and political tolerance, simultaneously endeavors propagation and promotion of these principles. It is gratifying that this attitude is always stressed with gratitude and sincerity by the representatives of nations who never met religious or national discrimination. At the same time, gathering eastern and western cultures and protecting national and religious values, Azerbaijan integrates to the West. To my opinion, hereafter Azerbaijan can give its contributions to the dialogue of Muslim and western culture.

After the restoration of its independence the Republic of Azerbaijan has directed the efforts to the form and reinforcement of main attributes of sovereign state and overall integration into international relations system. This way wasn't easy for our Republic, followed with different internal or external threats and dangers. However, as a result of the sagacious, purposeful and considered internal and external policy of the great national leader of our nation Heydar Aliyev, our country avoided from the threat of chaos, anarchy and civil war, and was directed to the path of stability and development. Azerbaijan is member and active participant of several international and regional organizations, and managed to establish strategic partnership and cooperative relations with the leading states of the world and is a key developed country of the region in which it is located. The successfully continuation of this policy gave an opportunity for the new stage in the devel-

opment of our country, and sustainable stability and social-economic growth were provided. We are proud of the fact that the indications of development of Azerbaijan are astonishing. Last year the economic growth in the Republic of Azerbaijan was 26%. The above mentioned achievements are based on governmental projects and programs such as creation of new jobs, reduction of poverty, social-economic development of regions, energy security, creation and improvement of transport-industry infrastructure, involvement of investments to the non-oil sector, which were adopted in proper time and consistently implemented. Although favorable geo-strategic position of our country makes Azerbaijan a place of conflict of various interests, balanced policy pursued by our state resulted in a lot of achievements. As you know, Azerbaijan has been not only an active participant, but also initiator of huge projects such as the construction of Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan, Baku–Tbilisi–Erzerum pipelines, Baku–Tbilisi–Akhalkalaki-Kars new railway connection, restoration of Great Silk Way, which are of strategic importance not only for our country and region, but also for international policy generally. Despite some threats and pressures, these projects are being implemented successfully.

Dear conference participants,

Having favorable geo-strategical position Azerbaijan at times is shown as Caucasus region, sometimes Caspian Basin region. In reality our country is in two regions, and it is a

bridge connecting Europe and Asia. The word of bridge should be understood like political, economical space, also the place combined and crossed of cultural ties. The relations of Azerbaijan with the region countries based on friendly, close neighborhood and friendship, mutual confidence, and with other countries respect, cooperation and partnership principles. At the same time our country's internal and external policy begins from principles and norms of international law, contemporary and civil conduct rules, and international obligations.

We give special attention the development and strengthening of our relations with our neighbors like Turkey, Russia, Iran, Georgia. We endeavor keeping and deepening the relations in all spheres based on mutual effective cooperation, security and confidence, respect for and maintenance the sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders. We attach special significance to the role of our partners like European Union, United States of America, Japan, and China in regional cooperation and international relations. Conforming of shown priority directions within cooperation are main factors for keeping peace in region, preservation of stability, strengthening of investment atmosphere.

Azerbaijan, who has been exposed repeatedly to terror acts by aggressive Armenia, has consistently demonstrated that we are in same front with the forces always struggling against the evil of the mankind. We have not heard the bitter results of the terror only by words. Azerbaijan was among the first countries, which joined the anti-terror coalition and

at present actively participates in the process of establishing peace and security within the international peacekeeping forces. Azerbaijan expresses solidarity with international community in overcoming existing dangers. It would be fair to emphasize the irreconcilable position of Azerbaijan against aggressive separatism, illicit trafficking in drugs, organized crime, corruption, transnational crime, illegal arm and human trafficking.

Dear conference participants,

Within the frame of foreign policy priorities of Azerbaijan, first of all I would like to draw your attention to the vital problem of Azerbaijani people and State—Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has begun as a result of unfair and groundless territorial claims and aggressive occupation by Armenia. Despite the fact that today 20% percent of Azerbaijan territories are under the occupation of Armenian armed forces and we have more than one million refugees and internally displaced persons, our country prefers to liberate its historical territories by peaceful means. In spite of the unconstructive policy of Armenia, we continue our peaceful policy hoping that potential of peace negotiations have not been exhausted. Off course, there is also a need for fair, objective and right position of the international community to the settlement of the conflict. Armenia can't deny the imperative principle of international law such as—the territory, which occupied by

force, could not be annexed. Azerbaijani people's strong will, inviolable position of our President and power of state will never give a chance to the ill wisher neighbor to realize their efforts.

After the gaining the independence Azerbaijan has chosen the path of democracy and during the past years proved its adherence to this principle. Azerbaijan has achieved noticeable achievements and progress in the way of democratic, secular state building based on the rule of law and ensuring of fundamental human rights and freedoms, has carried out huge reforms. There has been ensured the economic progress based on market economy for the sake of well-being and prosperity of our people. Along with its active participation in international organizations such as OSCE, Council of Europe year-by-year, Azerbaijan is strengthening cooperative and partnership relations with NATO, European Union and integrating to the euro-atlantic structures. Situating in the internationally important transport corridors our country actively participates in the realization of huge projects relating to the transport corridors. Strengthening of GUAM as a regional organization coincides with our integration policy into euro-atlantic organizations and we should continue our efforts. With its irreplaceable role in the development of international cooperation in the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan has laid down the foundation for making this basin the space of peace, tranquility and cooperation. Memorable Heydar Aliyev's oil strategy and Caspian policy will serve and make contribution to the prosperity and development of Azerbaijani people and to economy and world energy security for a long time.

Dear conference participants,

Since elapsed centuries the world nations have benefited from Latin culture and civilization. After the gaining and restoration of its independence twice in the XX century Azerbaijani people has adopted Latin based script and future culture, education and development have been tied to this alphabet. At present, the Republic of Azerbaijan is an observer country in the Organization of American States, our country establishes political, economical and cultural relations with Spain, Italy, Portugal and other countries which have Latin origin. In our foreign policy we attach great importance to the development of all-round cooperation with these countries. The economic development of our country, its worthy place in international arena, broadening of international relations, offer favorable facilities for the creating and strengthening of cooperative relations with the Latin American countries. For this purpose, first of all we intend to establish diplomatic representations, to intensify high level mutual visits and then to create juridical base for bilateral relations.

I do believe that participation in the conference of high ranking and distinguished guests from these countries will also give contribution to our intentions.

I wish you success in the work of the conference.

Thank you for attention.