
ДОКЛАДЫ И НАУЧНЫЕ СООБЩЕНИЯ

DIVERSITY OF CIVILIZATIONS AS A VEHICLE FOR ATTAINING SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL CHANGES

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The events that have been unfolding during the past 3 decades have yet to be thoroughly analyzed from the factual point of view in order to arrive at some scientific assessment, but even today it seems quite apparent that the world as a whole has entered another, colossal stage of sociopolitical and economic transformation. Actually, this is the conclusion that has been drawn as a result of its decade of work by the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations”.

Many in the world today have come to realize that all the pathos and efforts — at times, too excessive — by those who purport to create a global world with a new economy, with new politics and a new democratic structure of the world community in its Anglo-Saxon version. They have proceeded from the idea that it is possible and, in fact, necessary to speedily implement progressive transformations of human life irrespective of its civilizational context. However, it is not as simple as all that. Willingly or not, these initiators have overlooked the fact that the human community is capable of not only undergoing dynamic changes in a number of directions; more than that, it is based on the historic experience accumulated unique cultural and religious practices, traditional values and customs of different civilizations that keep intact the forms of spiritual and material life. Hence, this enables us to talk about the fundamental basics of historical processes or, to put it another way, the civilization constants that must not be ignored if we speak about observing basic philosophical laws of “unity and conflict of the opposites” and “denial of denial” in the process of constructing a more progressive, democratic, humane and integrative future.

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The shaky condition of all levels of the present-day world system demonstrates one distinguishing feature which political scientists and public dignitaries began mentioning only at the end of the 20th century. Crises in international politics and in the world economy, devastating local and world wars or widespread public discontent and catastrophes have occurred in the past, however, they were not accompanied by such a threatening growth of inter-civilization tension.

Excessive pressure and aggressive penetration by the West into traditional Muslim regions have led to the point where the first political reaction in the world to the destabilization of inter-civilization relations was seen in the emergence of the Declaration of the Islamic Symposium that was held in Teheran in 1999. In that Declaration the representatives of the heads of state and government in the Organization of Islamic Conference called for the establishment of a dialogue among civilizations in order to promote conditions for a more in-depth examination and solution of many international problems. Moreover, the Declaration mapped out a whole number of constructive vectors and problems that require international discussion to this day.

At the turn of the century, the President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami, stressed the need to launch a new project that could compete with and counteract the ideology of mistrust, enmity and confrontation among civilizations. This initiative aimed at promoting a dialogue, as well as mutual understanding and cooperation among civilizations, was supported by the UN.

General Assembly, the 53rd session of which proclaimed 2001 the Year of the Dialogue among Civilizations. Within the framework of such a dialogue, President Khatami proposed “to discuss the historical and philosophical aspects of the problem, and explore the metaphorical and literal meanings of the concept of “dialogue” and what great thinkers have thought and said about it.”¹ Khatami talked about the fundamental principles that should underlie this dialogue: equality and mutual respect among the parties involved, to be expressed in readiness to “listen to” each other, mutual tolerance and good will. In his view, a genuine dialogue is incompatible with such concepts as “subjugation” or “cultural domination”: “No civilization has the right to appropriate the achievements of another civilization as its own, nor to deny that any civilization participates in the history of common human civilization”².

Thus, the project aimed at fostering a dialogue among civilizations emerged not as an antagonist of the theory of “a clash of civilizations”, although it was proposed in polemics with the latter, but as a constructive model to create a new paradigm in international relations — a paradigm aimed at achieving such goals as “overcoming the tragic state of today’s world,” freeing humanity from wars, violence and exploitation, counteracting moral degradation and meeting the challenges of environmental disasters.

¹ M. Khatami, Speech to the annual conference of UNESCO, Paris, October 29, “Dialogue among civilizations: a Pathway to Mutual Understanding” // (Cited from a Russian edition of President Khatami’s speeches) — <http://iran.rus/knigakhatami.php>.

² M. Khatami, Speech at the University of Florence, Italy, March 8, 1999, “The Soul of the East and the Reason why the West are concentrated in Man” // (Cited from a Russian edition President Khatami’s speeches) — <http://iran.ru/rus/knigakhatami.php>.

“The Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington, an American philosopher and politologist, precipitated widespread public response. His book became a worldwide best-seller at the end of the 20th century. That bombastic and pseudoscientific publication turned out to be an attempt to practically lay the groundwork and even table a manifesto about the inevitability of a war of civilizations — something along the lines of Hollywood scenarios for motion pictures about wars with aliens from other planets. However, Mr. Huntington’s concern about the stability of world civilization has more serious and deeper roots.

In order to fully understand this, one has only to look into another study penned by this American philosopher. This study deals with challenges to “American national identity” and threats of degradation of civilized identity in the USA. Here we are talking about Samuel Huntington’s book “Who are we?” Mr. Huntington writes that America is becoming the world... that the world is becoming America... Cosmopolitan? Imperial? Nationalist? The author holds that the Americans must make their choice — a choice that will shape the destiny of the nation and the destiny of the world¹.

Therefore, it seems evident that both the American author and the participants in the Islamic symposium have expressed the same concern about the present state of intercivilization relations. The common problem facing both the West and the East lies in the following: as we witness the growing imbalances in the political and economic spheres after the end of World War II, the community of states has come up to the borderline beyond which if they do not stop in time, there may come the onset of destruction and devastation of the very foundations of the civilized structure of the world. And what lies in store of mankind beyond the existing limits of the civilized world is something that we can only guess about.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once metaphorically remarked that civilization was but a thin skin. The political essence of that metaphorical remark came to the surface during the Yugoslavia crisis. It was then that “the Iron Lady” promised the obstinate Yugoslavs “to bomb them into the Stone Age.” That threat was promptly carried out. Ever since then, bombing raids and armed interventions have become in the view of Western politicians an almost legitimate means of “bringing to their sense” all those who do not agree with Western ways of democratizing societies and liberalizing economies in their countries. Here, indeed, we witnessed the implementation of the “the rule of binding precedent” that is so highly valued by Britons. And today, 50 years after the crucial Caribbean crisis, we can once again become witnesses of such a development of events. However, in the present-day conditions a simple agreement by the leaders of two super powers on ending the confrontation is no longer enough. What is needed here is a responsible and effective dialogue.

What are the practical principles for organizing this interaction in the format of a Dialogue? For 10 years already the active practical work conducted by the World Public Forum has been built on the foundation that a Dialogue, in itself, is the basic principle fostering interaction among civilizations, as well as a principle that paves the way to harmonization of international relations.

¹ S. Huntington Who are we? P. 572.

A prime prerequisite aimed at the practical launching of “a dialogue of civilizations” has always been acceptance of a number of conditions that work in aggregate and that give the Dialogue a civilizational character and corresponding atmosphere. Such conditions include **inclusiveness** and openness, i.e., being **open** to all its participants and **including all** of them, respecting the **dignity** of each and all participants, **responsibility** of the participants for the civilization identity that they represent, as well as **trust** of the stands taken by the participants of the Dialogue. No less important are the **conditions of full representation** of the civilization’s stand in the Dialogue, and at the same time, the **rejection of in absentia assessments** of any third stands in the event that no consent has been given for this. It is important to recognize the actual role of nongovernmental structurers of the civil society in advancing the ideas of dialogue. NGOs have a historical mission and are capable of bringing the dialogue of civilizations paradigm into life while governments, their official bodies and representatives can only conduct negotiations, protecting the so called “national interests” of political elites.

In this sense, the Dialogue of civilizations has direct bearing with the activity of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs):

— INGOs may discuss the civilization foundations with local NGOs within the framework of the dialogue regimen;

— INGOs may speak out against the civilization foundations of communities and outside the framework of a dialogue with the given communities, they may conduct their activity proceeding from arbitrary extramural assessments civilization peculiarities of these or those communities.

The history of the recent decades offers glaring examples of not only harsh, but also brutal clashes in different parts of the world. In 2012 we are witnessing an armed conflict in Syria; disturbances in the Islamic world that were triggered by the emergence of the film “Innocence of Muslims”; the suppression of Christians in a number of Islamic countries; the ongoing pressure that several western countries are putting on Iran; the tension between Sudan and South Sudan, the conflict in the Sea of Japan. These clashes have been going on and are going on because in the life of human community there is considerably more natural consecutiveness than we actually thought there was. To disregard civilizational values deprives us of hope to create a favorable image of the future and to establish just governance in the world community. It is high time that the architects of accelerated global changes give up their “juvenile mediocrity” and penchant for simplicity if they hope that their objective fits in the goals of human society.

A civilizational approach to history has been a reality for already some 150 years, however, the study of history still proceeds, as a rule, along a linear paradigm that was inherited from the Renaissance epoch by Hegel and Marx. Civilization is viewed, in the given case, as a finite concept denoting the whole of mankind, in general, in its historical development, a synonym of the concept “culture.” Yet, there still another way of interpreting civilization that is more acceptable in the contemporary civilizational paradigm where civilization is viewed as an aggregate of separate plans of historical development that have emerged in a particular national-territorial soil — and, in this sense, we speak about Greek, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Russian and other civilizations. It is precisely such

an understanding of civilization that today is more in demand for analyzing the peculiarities of the world which is called a multi-polar world.

The life of the world community and processes of international interaction by no means thrive through some kind of fusion or “mixing” of culture into “something national in form and international in content.” Least helpful for the development of the world community is political “coercion of understanding and respect.” The interchangeability and substitutability of cultures and civilizations to suit political interests or certain doctrinal ambitions lead the development of civilization into a dead end.

B.S. Yerasov, a Russian scholar has written very precisely about the absurdity of carrying out civilizing activity by force under the flag of democracy and liberal economics. “How much *simpler* are constructs that assert the possibility of ‘*changing civilizations*’ and ‘*becoming a normal society*.’ How many societies, in history or the world today, would pass this psychiatric test? And what does it take to “change civilizations” “extremely rapidly”¹!

The coherence of world civilization and the potential for integration, quite the contrary, presume that a variety of cultures and civilizations will be preserved. First of all, each civilization must preserve its identity in the furiously changing contemporary world and make its contribution to the common treasure house (otherwise, the world “common” becomes meaningless). Secondly, preserving any identity currently means creating a certain civilizational infrastructure for interaction and dialogue, which exerts an organizing and ordering influence on the civilizations which are interacting.

To quote Yerasov again: “It is not the clash of civilizations that threatens world relations, but precisely the weakening of civilizational principles, encouraged by the West, which asserts that it’s system takes priority. This leads to the destruction... of civilizational regulators”².

The degree of disparity among models of a decent existence in today’s world, which is undergoing a crisis stemming from simplistic, approaches based on economics, is just as high as in the first years after the destruction of the system of political confrontation. In a certain sense, from 1917 until the end of the 1980s there was a dipolar bloc arrangement in which nation-states, like molecules in chaotic motion, were partially oriented under the influence of a field. Precisely this was the cause of the polarization; in other words, it fairly gently defined the model of international behavior.

Then, almost instantaneously, most of the players in international relations were forced to begin to orient their own independent projects of development to comply more strictly with the tough laws of the world market economy. Some succeeded in this kind of self-sacrifice, and some were unable to. The bipolar coexistence could not be preserved

¹ B.S. Yerasov (Erasov), “Rossiya v Yevraziyskom prostranstve” (“Russia within the Space of Eurasia”) in *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost (Social Sciences and Modern Times)*, 1994, N 2, p. 58.

² B.S. Yerasov (Erasov), *Dukhovnye osnovy i dinamika rossiyskoy tsivilizatsii (The Spiritual Foundations and Dynamics of Russian Civilization)* // Speech at the independent theoretical seminar on Sociocultural Methodology in the Analysis of Russian Society, Moscow, December 11, 1996.

in conditions of such tough competition. Only a dialogue could avert such a development of events.

The outbreak of the systemic of the liberal economic foundations of this world system has placed on the agenda the question of long-term strategies to guarantee the preservation of statehood, freedom, and the very survival of the entire system of inter-state and interpersonal relations which took shape over the millennia. It seems to me that projects with a civilizational grounding have the greatest potential to reach consensus through dialogue, regarding the basis of a more stable and just world order.

One of the consequences of the contemporary world's geopolitical problems is the rise of processes through which the cultural domain becomes more archaic and barbaric. Society itself, first and foremost, is subject to becoming archaic through a process of simplification and decline in the degree of complexity of its basic formative agencies, taking place in the context of a growing role for simple, primary types of social relations, primarily ethnic relations.

The core of barbarization is a process through which peripheral peoples and areas of habitation, which lose their connection with the advanced centers of civilization. Both at the outset and in the last years of the 20th century, these processes of increasing archaic patterns and barbarism had several dimensions: "the political, through the reestablishment of authoritarian or semi-despotic regimes; the social, through the continued propagation and strengthening of local caste and clan structures; and the civilizational, through the destruction of the common spiritual and institutional bases for the integration of a diverse population, and the strengthening of ethnical separatism"¹.

It appears that the deeper roots of today's condition of the world order, which is close to chaos, lie in the initially paradoxical-seeming interconnection and mutual influence of two, opposite ideological matrices, which maintained the 20th-century world in a bipolar, tense state of equilibrium. This meant balancing on the brink of conflict, through which the two competing systems nonetheless managed to avoid fatal clashes. The positive side of that balancing act cum competition cum opposition, skillfully regulated by both sides, was several decades of peace, and scientific-technological and sociopolitical progress that had excellent results (conquering space, the disarmament program, the WMD non-proliferation policy, etc.). Another necessary element of this two-pole world order was the so-called Third World, which received a real opportunity for modernization and was able to assert its interests after many centuries of colonial subjugation. The interests of the majority of such countries and peoples, however, had practically no protection under the conditions of unipolar globalization.

The destruction of the world order built by the two competing systems essentially shifted all the world community's problems into the transit zone of inter-civilizational relations. Within this "space," everything acquires specifically involitional and regressive valuation characteristics for civilizational identity, which is expressed in the emergence of archaic slogans and appeals to combat "axes of evil", "Islamic fundamentalism", the Iranian nuclear threat, the suppression of democracy in Russia, and so forth.

¹ Ibid.

The world cannot stay poised indefinitely in a state of strained equilibrium, fraught with the danger of tensions and conflicts. The world needs a future of greater certainty and predictability, as well as the foundations for long-term relations based not only on pragmatic interests, but also on profound spiritual aspirations.

We are now witnessing the destruction of the illusions of the unipolar world before our very eyes. In this situation it is important for us to understand that a transition to the new realities of a multipolar world does not happen by itself: when the illusions are destroyed, the desire to preserve unipolar influence in the world remains.

It seems to us that a way out of the dead end of the collapsing “ideology of globalism”, in addition to preserving the real content of the integrative processes of world development, is to be found, above all, in recognizing the primacy of international law in a polycentric world. The problem of the form in which this will occur can be resolved in dialogue. But it is absolutely obvious that its foundation must finally include recognition of the uniqueness and the special historical and cultural features of various civilizational images of the world.

What is especially important today is to foster mutual understanding among peoples in the humanitarian and public spheres. Today we are witnessing the conclusion of spontaneous globalization. The outcome of that epoch seems to place into question the conviction that there exist some kinds of absolutely universal forms of humanistic values.

If we speak about the concept of “democracy”, we see a general tendency to the formation of democratic regimes that do not much resemble, for example, the ones in North America where the very idea seems to have already passed through the process of total devaluation and has acquired the status of a commodity that can be sold, bought or rammed into some kind of standard (commodification of democracy). If we speak about human rights, it is worth listening to the opinion that the institution of a formal set of civil rights and freedoms at the national level should serve to promote implementation of the conception of the dignity of the human individual that is proper to the civilization involved. In any events, human rights should not suppress or contradict the conception of human dignity on which a given civilization is based and which constitutes its human essence.

These different versions, however, do not in my view mean that the world is entering a period of values relativism. It only means that the world is entering a time of true civilizational diversity. And we ought to recognize this and learn to live in this reality.

In conclusion I would like to read two quotations:

“The United Nations itself was created in the belief that dialogue can triumph over discord, that diversity is a universal virtue, and that the peoples of the world are far more united by common fate than they are divided by their separate identities”, said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, one of the initiators of the dialogue of civilizations, in 2001. “What that history should teach us also is that alongside an infinite diversity of cultures there does exist one global civilization, based on shared values of tolerance and freedom. It is a civilization that must be defined by its tolerance of dissent, its celebration of cultural diversity, its insistence on fundamental, universal human rights, and its belief in the right of people everywhere to have a say in how they are governed. It is a ci-

vilization based on the belief that the diversity of human cultures is something to be celebrated, not feared. Indeed, many wars stem from people's fear of those who are different from themselves. And only through dialogue can such fears be overcome"¹.

"The standard of international law is not the homogenization of social and economic relations, but the creation of a framework for the existence of multiple social and political experiments. We now that a number of economic and social experiments have been politically discredited or outlawed in the past. We need to create a new order that precisely defines this multiplicity", said Alfred Gusenbauer, the former Federal Chancellor of Austria, in his speech to the World Political Forum on September 9, 2010².

In our view, only a broad public movement will be capable of making practical progress toward the objective of broadening the domain of dialogue and transforming it into an effective international process.

This talk has touched on the basic principles upon which the World Public Forum — Dialogue of Civilizations relies in its work toward achieving consistent and peaceful intercultural interaction among different nation-states and societies.

If conclusions are to be drawn on the basis of what has been said here, two tendencies are worth noting. In the scientific and political world there seems to have already crystallized an objective understanding about a dominating paradigm in the world today that the "post-industrial globalized" development of the world is already limited and has exhausted itself. However, at the same time, the desire to preserve "the status quo" in favor of the outgoing paradigm is fraught with diversified challenges for the whole world community. Here we are talking about a tendency of "slowly" replacing the given paradigm by forces in the West and, first of all, by the USA with paradigm of "total domination" in the newly formatting world "protected by arms of aggressive consumerism" (as defined by Jagdish Kapur).

Today's multipolar world has largely been shaped in the context of two basic theories: the clash of civilizations and the dialogue of civilizations. Moreover we can see that the financial and economic crisis was caused primarily by a crisis of a certain social type of organization and of the liberal model of economic growth; this crisis, in turn, has triggered global transformations in all areas of civilization, society, and mankind. In our view, it is the optics and tool chest of the dialogue of civilizations, as they have been created and developed over the past ten years, that make it possible to diagnose inclusive societies correctly together, and to chart pathways in possible scenarios for their development.

¹ <http://www.un.org/russian/dialogue/sgstat.htm>

² http://2010.gpf-yaroslavl.ru/layout/set/print/sections/new_challenges/Al-fred-Guzenbauer-Stremlenie-k-gomogenizacii-nikogda-ne-prinosilo-udachi