

Ilshat Gafurov's keynote address at the plenary session of the "Civilizational choice of the peoples of Russia" conference (March 28, 2015)

Esteemed colleagues and guests!

We are glad to welcome you here, in one of the oldest Russian universities with a history spanning for 210 years.

We decided to hold this very representative gathering here not only to share our achievements in humanities and social studies but also to signify once again that our university has always played a huge role in the nation's self-identification. Kazan University has always been on the forefront of drawing bridges between the East and the West, establishing Russia's role a beacon of Eurasian intellectualism.

Our gratitude goes to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Kazan Seminary, Russian Islamic Institute for organizing the event. This is another step in implementing our cooperation agreements signed last year.

I also want to thank our colleagues from Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Ufa, Yekaterinburg, Makhachkala and many other cities for finding time in their schedules and coming here to discuss pertinent matters of Russia's history and its current place in the world.

Today we have a large number of gentlemen of the cloth present. Russian Orthodox Church and Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation are two very important federal bodies providing constant dialog and cooperation between Eastern Orthodox and Muslim communities, participating in the matters of current social agenda. Cooperation between academics and clergy is another sign of the possibility of fruitful communication between science and faith. We all know that religion is undoubtedly one of the important parts of a civilizational structure that is crucial for nations' self-identification as well as for individuals.

Russia is a unique blend of cultures and traditions none of which has dissipated in the last centuries, all of them creating a very special nation-civilization. The collapse of the USSR, which, according to President Putin, was "the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 21st century", calls for reintegration of the post-Soviet international community on a newly formed basis.

The emerging polycentric international power balance stimulates us to search for a civilizational identity. I think that civilizational choice (or, more precisely, choosing) is a continuing historical process. This has special implications for our country which is a part of both Europe and Asia.

Persistent attempts to enforce someone's values on others – which we can witness today – have very negative repercussions for regional and global security. The only way to ensure peaceful development is to promote communication and partnership of civilizations in their concerted efforts to address rising challenges.

In this turbulent time our academic community feels a special responsibility for making timely evaluations of the global crises, for educating our new generations about the most efficient ways to achieve sustainable development. Russian and Volga region experience of peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups and faiths is invaluable in this matter.

We in Kazan University pay our diligent attention to these questions and always stimulate our academicians in social sciences and humanities to make efforts in this direction.

We aim to revive and develop our glorious traditions in Oriental studies that once made the University a world-renowned institution in this field. The middle of the 19th century saw Aleksander Kazem-Bek and Ilya Berezin working in the University, Shihabetdin Marjani and Khusain Faizkhanov – in madrasahs, Gordiy Sablukov and Mikhail Mashanov – in Kazan Clerical Academy.

We believe that our city's historical experience of academic advancements, theology, peaceful coexistence of Christianity and Islam gives a great example of a multiethnic and multicultural community evolution.

Dear colleagues, I know that you have made some serious advancements and have formulated some recommendations in the course of this conference. Hopefully, Kazan Federal University will become a popular forum for civilization and culture studies.

I wish all of you new achievements, well-being and best of luck.