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CULTURE FACTOR IN THE POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

Abstract

The article notes that the theme of culture and cultural policy for modern Iran is not a marginal issue. Culture is seen by the country's leadership as an important component of its state political and ideological doctrine. There is analyzed the role of the Islamic factor and cultural heritage in the cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran over four decades of its existence. In this context, particular attention is paid to the role of the theory of the dialogue of civilizations proposed by M. Khatami as well as to the changing attitude towards it in the public consciousness of Iranian society, depending on the situation that is developing both inside Iran and around it in the international arena. It is emphasized that the theme of "Iran and the West", which has a long tradition in the cultural discourse and attracts the attention of both government officials and the general public, is becoming particularly acute in the country today, contributing to its politicization. An attempt is being made to show that Iranian culture is increasingly becoming an important factor in the foreign policy activities of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran, contributing to the strengthening of the country's position in the world arena as a whole and the country's leading role in the region, the realization of the idea of exporting the Islamic Revolution and implementing Iranian cultural expansion outside the country.

Keywords: Iran, Islam, culture, policy, national traditions, westernization, international aspect

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Iranian culture is national heritage and an object of great love and respect on the part of the country's population, regardless of social affiliation and political views of its representatives; it is a kind of "sacred cow" that everyone worships. At the same time, Iranian culture is an important component of the state political and ideological doctrine of the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereinafter - IRI). The ideas of the importance of culture in the internal life of the country and its use as an essential factor in foreign policy in the international arena are voiced in speeches by leading political and religious figures of the IRI, as well as are touched upon in the studies of modern Iranian scientists.

The process of the development of Iranian culture, as well as the cultural policy which has been pursued in the country for four decades are influenced by a number of factors, and their relations with the authorities are undergoing significant changes.

The period of approximately ten years in Iran's development traditionally associated with the name of Imam Khomeini and distinguished by the establishment of a theocratic regime as a result of the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, is characterized by the Islamization of the life of Iranian society. It affected not only the sphere of politics, economy, social relations, but also ideology and culture. In the sphere of Iranian culture, its influence was exerted in the implementation of the Cultural Revolution initiated by Imam Khomeini, which was launched by his Decree in 1980. Khomeini repeatedly emphasized that "solving the problems of Iranian culture is one of the priority tasks, since social lawlessness in Iran is based on its cultural backwardness, and culture is the foundation of the nation." In his opinion, "the solution to a number of political, economic and other issues will depend on how sensible, self-reliant (that is independent of the West – the authors' note) and humane (that is, based on the principles of Islam – the authors' note) the overall cultural situation in the country will be³. The main task of the Cultural Revolution was the revision of everything created in the field of culture before 1979 according to the principles of Islam; and as its main slogan there was proclaimed the creation of the new, distinctive Iranian culture "farhange khishin", imbued with the spirit of Islam and based on Muslim traditions while completely denying Iran's cultural heritage. It should be emphasized that during that period, the original Iranian culture was interpreted by Imam Khomeini as culture that rejects not only its own Iranian pre-Islamic values, but also the cultural heritage of the West, its influence on the development of Iranian culture⁴.

At that time the Iranian leadership's support of the ideas of pan-Islamism, that is, the unification of the countries of the traditional spread of Islam under

3 Марина Каменева, "Хомейни о современном культурном развитии Ирана", in: *Современный ислам: проблемы политики и идеологии*, Наука, Москва, 1982, p. 255. (Marina Kameneva, "Khomeini on Modern Cultural Development of Iran", in: *Modern Islam: Problems of Politics and Ideology*, Moscow, Nauka, 1982).

4 *Keyhan*, April 19, 1979, p. 6.

the flag of “Muslim solidarity”, where the religious aspect dominates the national one, was specifically reflected in the attempts to arabize Iranian society. This was manifested, in particular, in the fact that the former emblem of Iran - the lion and the sun - was replaced by the Islamic crescent; in the speeches of religious leaders there was mainly used Arabic terminology; it was forbidden to give Persian names to newborn children; many Iranians began to write the word “sayyid” before their surname; as well as many other things that met Iran’s desire to strengthen its ties with Arab countries and feel like a full member of the Islamic world⁵. A very significant role in this process was assigned to the language factor. The Arabic language which was limited by the sphere of religious communication before the Islamic Revolution, according to the country’s new constitution adopted in 1979, took the second place in the general hierarchy of languages after the Persian language, recognized as the official, state language of the IRI⁶. At the same time, an attempt was made, to a considerable extent artificially, to give it broader social functions in the country’s public life. In addition to introducing compulsory Arabic language instruction in Iranian schools, its teaching was organized on a large scale throughout the country. There were created special comprehensive education courses at various enterprises, as well as special educational television broadcasts, the press began to be published in this language, competitions in the skill of reading the Koran were regularly held, and much more. There was an active process of Arabization of the Persian language⁷. It should be borne in mind that such a language policy was in no way pursued to the detriment of the Persian language, whose position in the country remained strong and immutable.

Iran’s relations with the Western world were complicated and ambiguous, which influenced both the cultural policy and the development of the Iranian culture of that period. The leadership of the country tried by all means to minimize the influence of the West on Iranian society. There was closed the access to Western music and films; items of Western fashion in clothes, such as a tie, were banned; women were forbidden to use cosmetics and jewelry in official and public places; television programs in English were closed; teaching of Western European languages was prohibited in primary school (instead, there were lessons of the Arabic language); foreign educational institutions were disbanded, and much more.

However, the anti-Western trend in the cultural policy of the leadership of the IRI did not prevent it even then from breaking off its ties with the world community and paying serious attention to the international aspect of its cultural

5 *International Herald Tribune*, October 10, 1981, p. 3.

6 “Ghanun-e asasi-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran”, Fasl-e dovvom: Zaban, khatt, tarikh va parcham, Ghanun, Tehran, 1979 (“The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran”, Article 2: Language, writing, history and flag, Ghanun Publishing House, Tehran, 1979).

7 *Keyhan*, December 14, 1981, p. 5; *Keyhan*, November 2, 1982, p. 4; *Jomhuriye eslami*, January 17, 1982, p. 2; *Jomhuriye eslami*, May 1, 1982, p. 3; *Jomhuriye eslami*, October 12, 1982, p. 2; *Ettelaat*, July 26, 1982, p. 3.

policy. According to the famous scientist and politician M. Sanai, the cultural policy of Iran at that time is nothing more than the policy of the Islamic Revolution, and in this sense it permeates the whole society. At the same time, he notes the importance of its international aspect, which, from his point of view, was formed precisely in that decade and was aimed, above all, at the states of the Muslim world and the Iranian diaspora abroad⁸.

At that time the attention of the Iranian authorities to the national problems, primarily to the granting of certain freedoms to national minorities in the cultural and language field, to the discussion of the creation of cultural autonomy can be considered as a kind of counterbalance to the anti-Western policy of the Iranian leadership. It all the more looks real, since for years to come many of the freedoms and rights granted were either completely destroyed or substantially curtailed, although the main law of the country states that “along with the Persian language, there was allowed the use of the local languages and dialects in the press, mass media, as well as the teaching of national literature at school”⁹.

This did not remain only on paper; there were taken real steps to solve a number of national problems, primarily in Iranian Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan. Less significant changes affected such small national minorities as the Turks, the Baluchi and the Arabs¹⁰.

The period of the late 1980s coincided with the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the beginning of the creative stage in the history of Iran (the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, 1989-1997 and Mohammad Khatami, 1997-2005). At that time, in the country there appeared changes in the economic policy, foreign policy guidelines were expanding, a rigid ideological course was weakening; all these factors generally contributed to an updated view of Iranian culture, the basis of which was the combination of Islamic and primordially Iranian traditions and civilization values. The statements repeatedly made in the press also met it; their main message was the idea that the inhabitants of Iran are both Iranians and Muslims. Those years were also characterized, on the one hand, by the processes of modernization and development of Iranian society and, as a result, by the formation of new cultural doctrines, including interest in the cultural heritage and history of Iran, as well as in the culture and history of other civilizations. On the other hand, this period was also characterized by a certain weakening of the anti-Western rhetoric of the Iranian leadership. And therefore, it is no co-

8 Sanai Mehdi, *Ravabet-e Iran va Asya-ye Markazi: Ravandha va cheshmandazha*, Daftar-e motaleat-e siyasi va beynolmellali, Tehran, 2011, pp. 89, 259 (Sanai Mehdi, *Relations between Iran and Central Asian States: Trends and Prospect*, Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), Tehran, 2011).

9 „Ghanun-e asasi-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran”, Fasl-e dovvom. Zaban, khatt, tarikh va parcham, Ghanun, Tehran, 1979 (“The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran” Article 2. Language, writing, history and flag, Tehran, Ghanun Publishing House, 1979).

10 Марина Каменева, Политика исламизации в Иране и ее лингвистические последствия, *Народы Азии и Африки*, No. 5, Москва, 1981, pp. 113-114. (Marina Kameneva, *Islamization Policy in Iran and its Linguistic Consequences*, *Peoples of Asia and Africa*, No. 5, Moscow, 1981).

incidence that it was during that period of Iran's development, in 2001, that M. Khatami, who was then the president of the country, formulated a program of cultural dialogue with the Western world, towards which in Iran for a long time there was cultivated a negative and even hostile attitude, and it was considered that it was not able to bring a positive impetus to the development of Iranian culture. According to M. Khatami, "the dialogue of civilizations is an incentive for the formation of a universal model for improving international relations in order to exclude unilateral approaches and a monologue in politics and culture." In his vision of a new world, "there dominates mutual respect for the culture, civilizations and spiritual traditions of different peoples, including in the democratic competition of cultures"¹¹. The essence of the concept of the dialogue of civilizations is that, among other things, it invites to a cultural dialogue with the West. It also confirms the idea that the countries with a long and continuous cultural tradition are capable of the development in new conditions, including in the context of globalization. This theory can also be considered as a response to the trends of globalization of the cultural space and the imposition of uniform cultural standards. At the same time, the concept of the dialogue of civilizations presented by Mohammad Khatami could also symbolize a certain mitigation of the anti-Western sentiments of the Iranian leadership.

During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013), and especially in his first presidential term (2005-2009), the policy focused on the restoration of the Islamic values after the Islamic Revolution. It was also reflected in Iranian culture, where while maintaining the previous development trends, there was finally established the idea of the unity of the Islamic-Iranian culture. From 2009, that is, from the beginning of M. Ahmadinejad's second presidential term, there increased the attention in the interpretation of the concept of Iranian culture to the Iranian factor itself, which was free from religious Islamic overtone and was denoted in the Persian language by the term "iraniyat". Many media outlets noted that it was like the onset of a new stage in the activities of the president and his team¹². There is virtually no direct evidence of this fact. The indirect evidence includes the following: Iran's initiative to organize the celebration of Novruz on a regional scale, the third ceremony of which took place on March 25-27, 2011 in Dushanbe; the repeatedly addressed issue of cultural heritage - "mirase farhangi", including in the sixth five-year plan; the praise of Persian classical literature, for example, the works of Firdausi, the thousandth anniversary of his work "Shahnameh" was widely celebrated in Iran in 2011¹³, and the work of Saadi, whom President Ahmadinejad named on the day of his memory as the key figure

11 Мухаммад Сейид Хатами, *В человеке сосредоточены душа Востока и разум Запада*, Гуманитарий, Москва, 2001, p. 72. (Mohammad Sayyid Khatami, *Human Being Contains the Soul of the East and the Mind of the West*, Moscow, Humanitarian Publishing House, 2001).

12 *Etemad*, April 21, 2012, p. 2.

13 *Ettelaat*, August 16, 2011, p. 3.

in the development and aggrandizement of the Persian literature and Persian art¹⁴; as well as the creation of the Organization of Persian-speaking peoples initiated by Iran from 2010, which was officially formalized in May 2013. However, it should be noted that even the weak attempts to hyperbolize the Iranian cultural component by the president met sharp criticism from the clergy, which, for its part, came up with initiatives on the Islamization of education. This was primarily reflected in the humanities. It required gender-segregated education in higher educational institutions, reduction in the percentage of women in the total number of students, which, in general, had a serious impact on the development of culture in Iran¹⁵.

Those years were also characterized by the shift from the theory of the dialogue of civilizations losing its position in Iranian society, which is associated both with the current domestic political situation and the changing international situation around Iran. At the same time, the sanctions regime that was in force against Iran at that time prevented the development of the country's active ties with the Western world in the sphere of foreign policy, economy and finance. It should be pointed out that one cannot suspect M. Ahmadinejad of warm sentiments towards the West. However, Iran's involvement in the world globalization processes contributed to the uncontrolled strengthening of Western influence, including in no small part in the cultural sphere. The prestige of the English language is gradually growing, as well as the level of proficiency in it, especially among young people, who make up a significant part of the population of Iran. In that period, for the first time after the Islamic Revolution, there appeared on Iranian television a special news channel in English - *Iran Press*, aimed at the audience not only outside but also inside the country. Newspapers such as *The Tehran Times* and *Tehran Press* are published in English. West European languages are still taught in higher and secondary educational institutions of the IRI. Besides English, German, and French, there were added Spanish and Italian. Textbooks and teaching aids, grammars books, dictionaries, and works of world fiction are published in Western European languages. As for the Persian language, it not only preserves the existing Europeanisms, primarily Anglicisms, but also borrows new ones, turning them into an integral part of its lexical system.

At the same time, there was actively developing the process of implementing the international aspect of cultural policy, which was formed in the first decade after the Islamic Revolution and was associated with the idea of exporting it from Iran. The expansion and deepening of this process are peculiar to post-revolutionary Iran; and it is the achievement of the political and cultural doctrine of the IRI. In order to promote Iranian culture domestically, as well as to implement the international aspect of the state's cultural policy, back in 1995 there

14 M. Ahmadinejad's Speech at a Ceremony of Commemorating Saadi, available at: <http://www.president.ir/en/21.04.2012> (accessed 06.05.2012).

15 *Iran*, April 21, 2012, p. 2.

was established the Organization for Culture and Islamic Relations. Under the auspices of this organization, Iranian culture in all its diversity is disseminated around the world and covers not only individual states, but also entire regions that differ from each other in terms of the political structure, the level of economic development, religious affiliation, and different levels of cultural development. An important role in this process is assigned to the cultural missions operating at Iranian embassies around the world - in many countries of Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, as well as in Australia. They are the real agents of Iranian culture and ideology, cultivated in the country, outside it. In many cases, the foundation for the most successful implementation of this cultural and ideological project was not only a single religious realm, but also the common historical past and cultural traditions, as well as the presence of a significant Iranian diaspora and some other circumstances.

And in this case, the leading role again belongs to the language factor – to the Persian language, which is the national heritage for the Iranians, a sign of the Iranian nation, an integrating and consolidating factor. It was the adoption by the country's leadership of the thesis that the Persian language along with Arabic is the language of Islam and Muslim civilization which was very timely. It is increasingly regarded as the second language of the Islamic world after Arabic, which contributes to the growth of its prestige among non-Arabic-speaking Islamic countries (Pakistan, Turkey and others) and the countries with a significant share of the Muslim population, such as India. At the same time, the Arabic language is losing its former position in Iran, since its foreignness and incomprehensibility to the majority of the Iranian population prevented it, like the Persian language, from acquiring wider social functions.

The years associated with the presidency of Hassan Rouhani (2013 - to the present day) are characterized by a desire to preserve the results achieved by Iran in various areas of the development of Iranian society, and to increase them in order to facilitate the country's successful progress towards becoming the largest regional power. It is no coincidence that in the election programs of the then presidential candidate, which later became the basis for the activities of his government, a significant place is given to the problems of culture and cultural policy, the issues of the development of science and education¹⁶. Many facts testify to the close attention of the spiritual leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the government of Hassan Rouhani to the cultural problems. Among them there should be noted a careful approach by the country's leadership to the selection of candidates in the first cabinet of ministers of the new president (in 2013) for the two key posts for the future of Iranian culture - the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Minister of Education. One should also emphasize the

16 Hassan Ruhani, *Barname-ye dowlat-e davazdahom "Azadi va amniyyat. Aramesh va pishraft*, Tehran, 2017, pp. 124-168 (Hassan Rouhani, *Program of the Twelfth Government "Freedom and Security. Peace and Progress"*, Tehran, 2017), available at: <http://www.isna.ir/news/96022213789> (accessed 10.06.2017).

appearance of momentous media publications in which the political elite and representatives of the higher clergy expressed their views on the state and prospects of the development of Iranian culture. Ayatollah Khamenei more than once praised its role in Iran's movement along the path of progress, noting that culture is not an appendix to politics and economy; it does not occupy frontier positions in relation to them. Rahbar attributes to culture a central role in the development of Iranian society¹⁷. It is no coincidence that in the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan of the IRI (2011-2016), guided by which the country lived including that period it was the section on Iranian culture which was placed first¹⁸. The President also considers the resort of the authorities to the cultural factor necessary in resolving issues related to other areas of the functioning of Iranian society - the executive branch, economy and social problems.

At the same time, the country's leadership increasingly understands the need to strengthen ties with the West and takes real steps in this direction. There is a gradual, but to a large extent graduated decrease in the intensity of anti-Western sentiments. It was the 2015 Vienna Agreements, that is, the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's Nuclear Program, that provides for the subsequent gradual lifting of sanctions from the country, and as a result opening up greater opportunities for cooperation with Western countries, which contributed to the decrease in the intensity of the anti-Western sentiments of the Iranian leadership. There was a series of meetings of H. Rouhani with senior European politicians in Tehran. The interest in establishing the dialogue with the West is evidenced by the fact that the president made a number of visits to European countries – France and Italy already at the beginning of 2016, as well as by their results. Noteworthy is also the fact that in the materials based on the results of these visits, to a greater or lesser extent, there is addressed the problem of the development of bilateral cultural ties. Thus, for example, there was reached an agreement with the Italian side on the creation of joint programs in the field of culture, education and research. It was proposed to cooperate in the sphere of protecting cultural heritage and archaeological sites, in organizing archaeological exhibitions based on the exchange between the Iran-Bastan museum in Tehran and the Milan Museum. The parties also agreed to translate works of Persian and Italian literature, to develop academic cooperation and relations between educational institutions, the exchange of students and faculty¹⁹. Hassan Rouhani's visit to France was also significant, where among the 20 documents signed on mutual cooperation there were also those that touched upon the issues of bilateral cultural relations - on cooperation in the field of education and academic

17 "Rahbar: Daneshgahha be hich dalil-i julangah-e jarayanha-ye siyasi nashavad" (Rahbar: Universities under no Circumstances Should become an Arena of Political Struggle), available at: <http://www.asriran.com>, December 11, 2013 (accessed 08.01.2014).

18 "Barname-ye sheshom-e panjsale-ye towsee-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran" (The Sixth Five-Year Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran), available at: <http://www.majlis.ir.com> (accessed 02.02.2012).

19 Official site of Iran's President, available at: <http://www.president.ir/en/91585>, (accessed 27.01.2016).

activity and on cooperation between the Louvre and the Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization. Of particular importance for establishing a cultural dialogue between the two countries during the visit of the Iranian president to France was his meeting with the leadership of UNESCO, which confirmed the country's readiness to cooperate with this international organization²⁰.

It should be noted that Iran's cooperation with international organizations at that time is one of the important directions of the cultural policy of the country's leadership. Iran has established relations, often primarily in the cultural sphere, with such organizations as the UN represented by UNESCO, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Organization of Cultural Cooperation of Persian-speaking peoples. There is also planned Iran's participation in the implementation of the cultural programs of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in which it is still represented in observer status. The level and intensity of Iran's cooperation with each of these organizations is differentiated depending on the current situation in the world and Iran's place in the system of international relations, as well as on existing relations within them. It is with UNESCO and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation that the IRI has the closest and established cultural contacts. One should consider less successful the consolidation in the framework of the Organization of Cultural Cooperation of Persian-speaking peoples, which unites the countries with similar cultural and civilization traditions, whose relations, however, at the bilateral and trilateral levels face political and partially religious contradictions²¹.

At this time, favorable to Iran from the point of view of the international situation that has developed around it in the public and political consciousness, there is being revived the theory of the dialogue of civilizations. Thus, the famous Iranian scientist and politician M. Sanai notes the demand for the existence of dialogue between peoples. He writes that the struggle and strife on the world stage do not help the dialogue between civilizations and emphasizes its necessity, since there is no other way out of a series of crises and problems. In his opinion, "the era of the dominance of geopolitical factors has ended, and whereas once the relative order in the world was ensured in such a way, then today it is no longer a way to establish peace and stability"²².

In the last decade, the issue of westernization graduality has largely been a matter of confrontation between the Iranian reformers that include the president, and the conservatives, led by the spiritual leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who is an ardent anti-Western person. In the cultural sphere, this was reflected in

20 Official site of Iran's President, available at: <http://www.president.ir/en/91675>, (accessed 28.01.2016).

21 Марина Каменева, Иран и международные организации: культурный аспект, в: *Иран во втором десятилетии XXI века: вызовы и перспективы*, ИВ РАН, Москва, 2016, pp. 181-190. (Marina Kameneva, Iran and International Organizations: Cultural Aspect, in: *Iran in the Second Decade of the XXI Century: Challenges and Prospects*, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Moscow, 2016).

22 Мехди Санаи, *Мусульманское право и политика. История и современность*, Садр, Москва, 2016, p. 156 (Mehdi Sanai, *Muslim Law and Politics. History and Modernity*, Sadra, Moscow, 2016).

several public discussions. Their main object was the English language, the language officially recognized as the world language and an important component of globalization processes that Iranian anti-Westerners consider to be an instrument of the “corrupting influence of the West and its values.”

Rahbar has repeatedly stated that English should not be taught in the country's educational institutions, since it is the legacy of the last Iranian shah, and its spread contributes to the growth of “Satanic America.” He persistently drew public attention to the inadmissibility of excessive influence, “aggression” of Western culture towards Iranian culture, and emphasized the important role of the Persian language, the need to increase attention to it, especially in light of the influence of Western European languages on it²³. However, despite this position of the spiritual leader, in July 2016 the issue of the need to study foreign languages in schools and higher educational institutions of Iran and the preparation of a comprehensive program for teaching five Western European languages was submitted for discussion and approval of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. It was emphasized that the program would have to fix equal opportunities in the educational process for all the proposed languages without any monopoly of one of them and not to the detriment of the Persian language and national interests of the country²⁴. In the same vein there should be considered the decision of the Iranian authorities in early 2018 to forbid the study of English in public and private schools of the country. According to many analysts, this decision was the result of the protests in late December 2017 - early January 2018, which, as it is believed in certain echelons of the government and circles of Iranian society, were instigated by the West²⁵.

Of interest is also the situation that has developed around Document 2030 on education, developed by UNESCO back in 2015 and proposed for phased implementation in May 2017. It can be considered as the continuation of the above-mentioned discussion and decisions regarding teaching European languages. The document proposed by UNESCO represents educational standards for the world community until 2030, which will be implemented in the context of the increasing globalization processes. Having initially approved this international document, later Iran called it unethical, and on the recommendation of the spiritual leader it refused to accept and sign it as inappropriate to Iran's educational standards adopted by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and, in general, the principles by which the country lives²⁶. At the same time, like in the

23 „Rahbar: Daneshgahha be hich dalil-i julangah-e jarayanha-ye siyasi nashavad“...

24 „Bahs-e showra dar bare-ye gonjandan-e amuzesh-e panj zaban-e khareji dar madares va daneshgahha“ (Discussion at the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution on the admissibility of studying five foreign languages in schools and universities), available at: <http://www.president.ir/fa/94287> (accessed 12.07.2016).

25 „Mamnuiyyat-e tadrise zaban-e englisi dar barkhi madares-e Iran“ (On the prohibition of teaching English in some Iranian schools), available at: <http://norooznews.org/news/2018/01/2/5506> (accessed 05.02.2018).

26 „Iran won't submit to agendas like UNESCO 2030: Ayatollah Khamenei“, available at: <http://www.english.khamenei.ir/news/4796> (accessed 12.06.2017).

discussion on the role of West European languages in the educational system of the IRI, at first there were differences in the approach of Ayatollah Khamenei and Hassan Rouhani and his government to the Document. In this regard, the President stated that Iran would accept it with the proviso, that is, those sections of the Document were accepted that do not contradict the internal laws of the IRI. Along with the suspension of its signing under the pressure of Rahbar and the conservative clergy, the government developed and proposed its own, of a similar type, document entitled "Fundamental Transformations in the Field of Education", for whose implementation the country's budget was even increased²⁷.

As for the sphere of everyday life, on the one hand, despite the opposition of the official authorities, the residents of Iran, primarily young people in large cities, actively accept Western innovations. For instance, they celebrate St. Valentine's Day and European New Year. In society, there is changing the attitude towards the compulsory participation in Shiite mourning events of the month of Muharram (the month of mourning for the Imam Hossein, a martyr, the third imam revered by Shiites). Visiting a theatrical and religious performance dedicated to the martyrdom of Imam Hossein, the Taaziye, is seen as entertainment, rather than a religious obligation²⁸. According to the observation of the article's authors who visited Iran twice in 2019, Western trends are also manifested in the following: the spread of fast-food chains in a Western manner, small European-style cafes, located partially in the open air and working exclusively by registration due to a large influx of visitors; the opening of large shopping centers, such as Palladium in northern Tehran, the establishment of a recreation and entertainment center with a large number of modern restaurants and shops at the foot of the Demavend Mountain, which the Tehran people call Bamland. According to the residents of Tehran, morality police are not to be seen in the city. Outside the official sphere, women have become much freer in clothes and cosmetics. There have appeared bright colors in women's clothing - red, cornflower blue, yellow and others; its style has become much closer to that of European women. Foreign women are often more traditional in dress code than many Tehran women. Girls actively use a bicycle for rest and as a means of transport. Boys and girls more openly show mutual sympathy and friendly feelings. At the same time, Iranians, including young people, are showing more and more interest in the pre-Islamic traditions and religious cults, which, in turn, is associated with the relevant trends in the development of the internal political doctrine of the IRI. Thus, the Zoroastrian festival of lighting a fire is held on a larger scale; on weekends and memorial

27 „Showra-ye enghelab-e farhangi-ye Iran sanad-e 2030 Yunesco ra az dastur-e kar kharej kard“ (Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution: UNESCO Document 2030 removed from the agenda), available at: <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-40267378> (accessed 14.06.2017).

28 Елена Дунаева, "Новые политические и социокультурные реалии современного Ирана, Вызовы и перспективы", в: *Иран во втором десятилетии XXI века: вызовы и перспективы*, ИВ РАН, Москва, 2016, pp. 84-85. (Elena Dunaeva, "IRI's New Political and Sociocultural Realities: Challenges or Prospects?", in: *Iran in the Second Decade of the XXI Century: Challenges and Prospects*, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Moscow, 2016).

days there are massive visits to memorable places of the pre-Islamic civilization in the country.²⁹

On the other hand, there are attempts made by the authorities, including resort to violent methods, to prevent the population from contacts with the West and Western culture. A vivid example of this is the mass destruction of satellite dishes in July 2016 under the pretext of preserving public morality, Islamic values and Iranian culture, as Iranian conservative forces regularly accuse satellite television of their distortion and corruption of society. And this is happening against the background of President H. Rouhani's repeated statements about the inefficiency and counter productiveness of the ban on its use³⁰. The fight against international social networks and messengers as well as proposals to strengthen control over the media is another area of anti-Western policy. Very interesting and demonstrative in this vein is the situation that has developed around *Telegram*, which, according to the Iranian authorities, plays a destructive role and against which there are introduced various technical restrictions, and attempts are made to replace it with a domestic counterpart. And this happens against the background of its extraordinary popularity in the country, especially among young people³¹. The Iranian Internet itself is under constant attack. For instance, during the so-called gasoline unrest in November 2019, the Internet in Iran was turned off for several days, and it started working only after the protests weakening.

Formed in the first decade after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and further developed in the following decades, the international aspect of cultural policy of the IRI is becoming an increasingly important and effective factor in the country's political doctrine and its foreign policy activities. In the opinion of M. Sanai, already quoted above, "the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the transformation of the principles of international relations, the globalization of culture and the emergence of the concept of world culture became the three main factors in changing the previous positions and strengthening the role of culture in the sphere of international relations." Further he notes that "the culture which, according to ethnographers, determines the spirit, aspirations and behavior of various peoples, is directly related to the foreign policy of the state"³².

It is possible that in the difficult situation in which Iran has found itself nowadays both in the world arena (at first lengthy international sanctions, then gradual lifting of sanctions as a result of the 2015 Vienna Agreements, the US withdrawing from the International Agreement on Iran in 2019), and along the perimeter of its borders, and namely, the aggravation of Sunni-Shiite contradic-

29 Ibidem.

30 *The Express Tribune*, July 25, 2016, available at: <http://tribune.com/pk/story/1148299> (accessed 28.07.2016).

31 Владимир Месамед, *Иран: власти против Telegram* (Vladimir Mesamed, Iran Authorities opposed to Telegram), available at: <http://www.iimes.ru/?p=43977> (accessed 02.05.2018).

32 М. Санаи, *Мусульманской право и политика. История и современность*, Садра, Москва, 2016, pp. 158-159. (Mehdi Sanai, *Muslim Law and Politics. History and Modernity*, Sadra, Moscow, 2016)

tions, the deterioration of relations with a number of neighboring states in the context of the country's participation in the Yemeni and then Syrian conflicts, as well as the existing bilateral interstate disagreements, it is the cultural factor which can come to the fore and play a positive role. It should be noted that back in 2005, in the program document "Twenty Years' Perspective", the leadership of the IRI issued an ambitious statement that "in 20 years, Iran should become a developed country and take the first place in the region ... It will become an inspirer and civilization-forming state with the revolutionary Iranian identity"³³. Thus, the idea of expanding Iranian culture was included in the agenda at the state level. And for the implementation of this task in Iran, there are a number of objective prerequisites. First of all, they include the fact that Iranian civilization and Iranian culture are among the oldest in the world. In addition, Islam, one of the leading and most developed religions in the world, is the state religion of the country. Finally, in many countries of the world there is a considerable Iranian diaspora which provides fertile ground for accepting Iranian culture there.

Iranian leadership's concern over the creation of a unified cultural space for both residents and ethnic Iranians living abroad is evidenced by the fact that at the end of 2007 at the state level there was adopted a special program to educate the young generation of Iranians living in different countries of the world, with the aim of "preserving the inseparability of their ties with the culture of their native land", and the implementation of this project was taken under the control of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of the IRI³⁴.

Iran's cultural ties with many countries of the world, primarily its neighbors in the region and the Eurasian space, have a long tradition. Iranian culture in general and the Persian language, as an important component of the international aspect of cultural policy, are a subject of attention in such Arab countries as Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, with some adjustments to the current situation, Syria and some others. Recently, there has intensified the bilateral cultural cooperation with Algeria and Iraq. Moreover, the level of relations between Iran and the countries of the Arab East in the field of culture does not always correspond to the level of diplomatic relations, often surpassing them in intensity, such as with Egypt and Morocco.

Iran has well-established cultural contacts with a number of non-Arabic-speaking Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh, Malaysia and others. As for Afghanistan, the difficult domestic political situation in the country contributes neither to the advancement of Iranian culture in the country, nor to the development of its own Afghan culture. However, the Iranian side is taking certain positive steps to establish cultural ties between the two countries.

Among the Central Asian states, of particular interest is the history of the development of relations between Iran and Tajikistan, which have always been

³³ Iran.ru, available at: <http://www.iran.ru.13.12.2005> (accessed 10.01.2006)

³⁴ *Ettelaat*, September 9, 2007, p. 4.

quite close. Tajikistan was the first country in this region where Iran opened an embassy in 1992. Iran also did a great job to resolve the intra-Tajik conflict, and together with Russia made significant efforts to prevent the Taliban from interfering in the country's internal affairs. Despite the implementation of a number of successful cultural projects, at the same time, nowadays against the background of a general deterioration in relations between Tajikistan and Iran, the degree of their cultural interaction is being reduced, which, according to analysts, is largely due to the desire of the IRI, using the historical, ethnic and language identity, to conduct Shiitization of the population of the republic, especially of young people³⁵.

A special place is occupied by India, which is associated with Iran due to the strong cultural and historical traditions, which continue to develop actively today. There are well-established cultural relations between the IRI and many European countries (Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Romania, Ukraine, Finland, etc.); a cultural dialogue is being developed with many Asian non-Muslim countries, such as Japan and China. It is Russia which should be pointed out in particular, where Iranian studies as a science emerged at the beginning of the XIX century, and the first Persian translators appeared under Peter I in the first half of the XVIII century.

At the same time, the cultural factor does not always play a constructive and consolidating role. It can cause misunderstanding and conflict situations between Iran and individual countries. For instance, the film "Mohammad. The Way of the Almighty God" (the first part of a trilogy), presented by the famous Iranian director Majid Majidi, was not accepted in a number of Muslim Sunni countries, for example, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and some others.

Thus, the analysis of the development of Iranian culture and cultural policy which has been pursued in the country for over 40 years of its existence under the Islamic regime allows us to conclude that the culture factor plays a significant role both in the domestic policy and the foreign political doctrine of Iran. Iranian culture is gradually turning into an important component of the "soft power" policy, which is actively supported by the leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran and finds a positive response in Iranian society. There should be emphasized the special place of the language factor, that is, the role of Persian, Arabic and English in this process.

35 Марина Каменева, "Взаимоотношения Ирана с сопредельными странами: культурный аспект", в: *Мусульманский мир на исторических рубежах России*, Труды Института востоковедения РАН, Выпуск 5, ИВ РАН, Москва, 2017, pp. 247-248. (Marina Kameneva, "Relations between Iran and Neighboring Countries: Cultural Aspect", in: *Muslim World on the Historical Frontiers of Russia*, Proceedings of the Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Issue 5, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Moscow, 2017),

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КУЛТУРНИ ФАКТОР У ПОЛИТИЦИ ИСЛАМСКЕ РЕПУБЛИКЕ ИРАН

Сажетак

Овај чланак полази од претпоставке да тема културе и културне политике није маргинално питање у Ирану. Руководство ове земље види културу као важну компоненту своје политичке и идеолошке доктрине. У овом раду анализирамо улогу ислама и културног наслеђа у културној политици Ирана у последње четири декаде. Стога, веома је важно обратити пажњу на улогу теорије дијалога цивилизација коју је предложио Хатами, и како се мења јавно мњење Ирана у складу са политички догађајима унутар и изван ове земље. Напомиње се да однос „Иран и Запад“, који има дугу традицију у јавном дикурсу, постаје нарочито акутан и политизован у савременом добу. Поред тога, рад указује на чињеницу да култура постаје важан фактор спољне политике Ирана и користи се како би се учврстила позиција ове земље у светској арени и у региону, али и шириле идеје исламске револуције.

Кључне речи: Иран, ислам, култура, политика, национална традиција, вестернизација, међународни аспект

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