

**The International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA)
33rd annual conference**

**Interdependence of National Assessment Systems and Education
Standards**

16- 21 September 2007 at the Park Inn, Baku

**Speech of Ambassador Hafiz Pashayev
Chancellor of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy
Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs**

**"Assessment in MFA Career and Education Path:
New steps, big plans."**

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to speak today at this important event and to share with you my thoughts and opinion regarding the assessment in the education field. Let me first of all congratulate the organizers of the event with the wonderful job that they have done in hosting this international event and welcome all the guests of my country in our beautiful city of Baku. I hope all of you will greatly enjoy this city and will have fond memories from this conference.

The topic of this conference is both very important for the field of education and civil service and timely. The education process can not develop and improve without clear guidelines of assessment of the results and quality of the both educators and students. And without the much-needed advances in the field of education, the country's economy can not progress much either.

As Azerbaijan slowly but steadily emerges from its Soviet past, the issue of globalization, integration into the world economy and remaining competitive at the international markets becomes vital for the country's existence.

One of the proper ways to strengthen our global and regional economic competitiveness and foster the development of the society and country is to strengthen the human capacity. Without proper human resources, without qualified pool of cadre, Azerbaijan will come across enormous challenges in overcoming its current political, economic and societal problems and in building the healthy society.

By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, the education system was in stagnant conditions, the evaluation system lost its credibility in the eyes of the public and the

admission process into the higher education and civil service was simple closed for many layers of the society.

For the independent Azerbaijan and its government, the key challenge was to change the shift both in the process and in the mentality of the people. In order to raise qualified cadre, much needed for the strengthening of the economy and political power of the country abroad and at home, the government initiated the test-based system of entrance exams into the higher education system. This was a revolutionary at that time act, one of the first of its kind in the post-Soviet space, which provided equal opportunities to all students and eliminated the issue of subjectivity during the interviews and personal evaluations by professors which existed before.

The testing system later reformed and updated and existing up to date, significantly improved the evaluation of the knowledge of the high school graduates and provided fair opportunities for their admission into the universities and institutes. But more importantly, it restored the confidence and trust of the public into the process of admissions. As a result, the quality of students entered into universities has been significantly improved. In the future, we should not stop on the current achievements, and try to improve the testing system even further, using technology, modern inventions and discoveries in the field of education and make sure that the tests do not only evaluate the knowledge, but also judge the leadership, creativity skills and is closely related to the curriculum of the academic programs.

Seeing the positive results of the testing process, many state ministries and agencies have started using a similar system for recruiting new cadre. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is one of them. In 2005, the first tests into the diplomatic service took place. Only seven out of 700 applicants passed the test, which showed to us that they were not perfect and needed some improvements. But they also showed that these tests not only provide fair, just and proper opportunities for the recruitment of the civil servants into the Foreign Ministry but also increase the trust of the public into the civil service system. At the same time, these tests are able to provide much needed personnel to the expanding foreign service representations abroad. Only in the past three years, the number of Azerbaijani diplomatic missions abroad has doubled from 24 to 52.

In the following years, the test system was upgraded and improved. This year, we had 350 applicants and 24 of them have passed. The results are fascinating: a very diverse group of young men and women, coming from all over the country are admitted into the diplomatic service and are given a chance to serve the nation abroad and at home doing important tasks. This system of internal entrance exams for the recruitment of the cadre for the foreign service has also significantly improved the image of the ministry.

To speak more specifically about these recruitment tests, the advertisement goes out in early May of each year both in print and broadcast media with the goal to attract as many applicants as possible and to publicize the recruitment as widely as possible. The independent commission within the ministry is established to receive the applications and to review the documents.

Then, the standardized tests, locally developed, are held for all applicants in several areas, such as foreign languages, history, international relations, economics and law. The applicants are given a chance to choose one field of expertise, such as law or economics. Questions from this field are rated higher than the rest of questions. Minimum passing threshold is established for the admission of the new recruits.

Applicants also have a right for the review of their test results and even appealing them in front of the senior ministry leadership.

Despite the fact that this test system is producing very positive results, we at the Foreign Ministry decided to go one more step further. Instead of using the principle TEST-HIRE-TEACH, we decided to implement the system TEACH-TEST-HIRE.

For that purpose, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA) of the Foreign Ministry was set up in 2006 by the decree of the President Ilham Aliyev. At ADA we envision to create a modern, state of the art, 21st century educational environment- a place where high standards of admissions, academics and career development intersect with each other and develop top quality diplomats and other civil servants for both Azerbaijani government as well as private sector, NGOs, international organizations and foreign nations.

The educational process at ADA will function in three key areas: short-term trainings and capacity building for the staff of the MFA and other civil servants (Executive Education); 2-year long master degree in international affairs and the research center. The graduate school is expected to focus around the concentrations of International Security, Energy and Environment, International Trade and Finance, Governance and Administration.

We are at the moment of setting up and building our new, modern campus, which will host nearly 200 students both from Azerbaijan and near abroad, such as Caucasus, Central Asia, Middle East and Europe.

The vision of the leadership of the Foreign Ministry and of Azerbaijani Republic is to make ADA meet the needs of the current globalized world and be able to equip Azerbaijani diplomats and other civil servants with the skills and knowledge which will enable them to excel in the international arena.

In fact, setting up the ADA can be considered as part of the broader trend in Azerbaijan to invest in education. Hundreds of new high schools, hospital, roads and plants have been opened in the last few years. President Ilham Aliyev has made his top priority to provide modern educational opportunities for the Azerbaijani youth and for that purpose, several months ago he has established a Scholarship Fund for studying abroad, an opportunity which will be benefited by thousands of young Azerbaijanis. This is a temporary solution to the problem of the shortage of qualified human cadre. Once ADA is fully set up, we hope to provide venue for training similar caliber cadre at home as abroad and investing these Scholarship Funds into our domestic programs.

Eventually, the Diplomatic Academy will function as a full-fledged School of International Studies, with a modern physical and up-to-date e-libraries, student center, publishing house and career development center. We hope not only to be able to produce valuable cadre for the foreign policy but also advocate and influence the development of the foreign policy in the region.

In order for ADA to achieve its goals and really turn into a center of educational excellence, the quality control, assessment of the teachers and the whole educational process, student feedback, training evaluations will be very much needed and are in fact put on the top of the Academy's leadership's agenda. We believe these are priority issues for us in terms of improving our academic programs and performance and

constantly try to seek anonymous feedback both from the recipients, deliverers and administrators of our academic programs.

A special attention will be paid to the issue of admission of the students, rigorous testing and application process and making sure that the international students from multi-cultural environment feel equal and respected to their peers from Azerbaijan.

We plan to use both standardized tests, which many universities and institutes use around the world, but also use our locally produced tests and application procedures to select the students for ADA. Face-to-face interview and writing samples will also be utilized to take a deeper look into the leadership potential of each student and to be able to select the best of the best.

The ultimate goal is to make the educational products meet the needs of their recipients and for the public to trust our government and academic institutions. If this trust is restored, the flow of good, competent cadre into the public institutions will once again resume, which will ensure the proper performance of the government as a whole.

As for the ADA, assessment of the educational process will allow us to be constantly on the vanguard of the education reforms in the country as a true role model and to shape the reform agenda of other universities as well. It will also allow us to educate mature, forward thinking and open minded diplomats for the whole region. We need diplomats that are proactive rather than reactive. We need them to be able to strategize and think ahead. So, we are determined to teach the future generation of Azerbaijan diplomats how to be better equipped for the region's and world's changing challenges.

From this perspective once again I would like to reiterate that the information and ideas exchanged at this international conference are very useful for us and I congratulate you all with the organization and participation in this wonderful event. We are open to and welcome any ideas for cooperation with our colleagues from other countries.

