

**From the Dialogue to the Alliance of Civilizations**  
**A COLLECTIVE INITIATIVE**  
**FOR UNIVERSAL PEACE**

**Bekir Berat Özipek – Kudret Bülbül**

**SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research**

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## Preface

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative is one of the major attempts of our day to bring different cultures and civilizations together. Like all great ideas, it has arisen out of a need to address a problem: the problem of recognizing cultural differences without denying their existence on the one hand, and without turning them into causes of conflict and war, on the other. In a world in which all of us passionately seek a moral and political center, the need for uniting rather than dividing is obvious. Reaching that goal, however, remains a daunting task.

In no period of recorded history have human beings known about different cultures as much as we do today. Thanks to the pervasive nature of globalization, what happens in Washington, London or France has an immediate impact on what positions are taken in Istanbul,

Cairo or Kuala Lumpur and *vice versa*. Our global public space is so powerful yet also so elusive that it leads many to believe that more information brings more understanding. Getting to know each other from close up, however, is not always a smooth and easy experience. It may result in some pleasant surprises and enriching experiences. Yet it may also result in disappointment, frustration and mistrust. Given the current state of relations between different cultures and especially Muslim and Western societies, we are doomed when we refuse to recognize each other. Yet, we also run up against tremendous difficulties when we show the courage and honesty of knowing each other closely for there is too long a history of doubt, mistrust and refusal.

Today, living together is no longer confined to living in the same city or country. Geographical and political boundaries turn into trivial details when it comes to the shared space of thought, imagination and feeling. Living together becomes a burden and threat when this space, so dear to the heart and mind of every human being, is ridiculed, underestimated, attacked or destroyed. It is at such moments of

violence that we loose our resolve to defend the middle path and begin to see extremism of various kinds, i.e., economic, military, political, religious, cultural, as a refuge and basis for our oppositional identities. This is where Muslim sentiments collide with those of the West, ordinary people with sound minds become suspects or enemies, what is called 'East' becomes a powerful category only to the exclusion of the 'West'. Our so-called information age gives us not understanding but misinformed intellects and hardened souls.

As we experience it today, the form and scale of living together is a new phenomenon in the history of humanity. In no other period in history have human beings been so open and vulnerable to what others think and do. Blessed ignorance or calculated indifference is only a luxury which comes at a high cost. Neither a New Yorker can ignore the Middle East peace process nor can an Egyptian turn a blind eye to the uninspiring and tasteless work of few Danish cartoonists. Whether we see it as a challenge or threat, we live together and try to make sense of our lives through the lenses of such a real and demanding experience.

The dazzlingly fast and diverse confluence of different cultural, ethnic and religious communities is a unique fact which all of us across the globe are trying to accommodate. The mass migration and relocation of communities in large numbers over relatively short periods of time changes the social fabric of host countries with far-reaching consequences for their societal compositions, economic adjustments and political systems. Not only the migration of individuals and communities as real beings and actors bring about change in the socio-cultural and religious landscape of Eastern and Western countries. Of equal importance is the fast movement of ideas, commodities, images, artifacts, trends, fashions, intellectual and political currents from one corner of the world to the other. This is such a centripetal process that despite the disturbing remnants of Euro-centrism and the increasing prevalence of American popular culture, no one can control its scope, content or direction.

While we have conveniently given to this process the name of globalization, what is involved here is more than simply the creation of a global market economy for Chinese or American products. Globalization has the effect of de-cen-

tering what was once the only center of the world. We can no longer claim with any degree of confidence and certainty that the world is comprised of neatly defined zones of politics, economy or culture. There is just too much 'impurity' and hybridity that defies wholesome and untainted categories of cultural uniqueness or communal identity. We are constantly challenged to revise our standing in the world vis-à-vis the traditions to which we belong and the contemporary challenges which we face. Whether we are a professor at a prestigious university, a local politician or a farmer in a distant corner of the world, we cannot remain indifferent to the changes around us. Yet a world in which we cannot claim to be active agents because there is too much to control beyond you and me does not give us a sense of belonging. We desperately seek for an Archimedean point in our lives to make sense of what is happening around us. Our shrinking world juxtaposes many things but does not necessarily bring us together.

Living together is thus one thing; being aware of it something quite different. And it has taken different forms throughout history. At the risk of being simplistic, we can divide our ex-

perience of sharing the world into three periods. The first is what the pre-modern cultures and societies have experienced. The traditional societies were able to exist as more or less independent and integral units. Internal coherence both in the metaphysical and social senses of the term had given them the ability to grow organically without much need for interaction with the outside world. Different cultures and traditions have taken generations if not centuries to settle in alien lands but they have done so without damaging the integrity of other cultural traditions. There have been interactions with others, of course. But this was not a condition for the long and healthy existence of a civilization. A Chinese painter could have easily produced some of the most beautiful works of art without knowing anything about Islamic miniatures or Christian icons. Today, no matter how close one tries to remain to his or her tradition, it is no longer possible to remain oneself without recognizing the reality of others, both close and distant.

Curiously enough, in the middle ages there were two major civilizations that were the exceptions to this rule. In fact, there are no two world civilizations whose histories have been so

intimately intertwined with one another as the Western and Islamic civilizations. We cannot understand, for instance, the development of Islamic science, philosophy and arts without recognizing the significance of what Muslim scholars did with the Greek and Byzantine lore that was available to them. Nor can we talk about medieval Europe without acknowledging the heavy influence of Islam on everything from the scholastic tradition and rise of colleges to Beati miniatures and even Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It is because of this long history, rather than its absence, that the two have always seen each other as its worthy rival.

In spite of this deep sense of competition, the Western and Islamic civilizations have managed to learn from each other without destroying what was essential and enduring in either one of them. Furthermore, neither the Roman nor the Ottoman Empire created a world system that tied everything to a single center which, in turn, gave to its subjects not only wealth or protection but also legitimacy, cultural identity, or social status. This was not the world order of the pre-modern societies. Even at the zenith of the Ottoman military power, there were other eco-

conomic, political and cultural centers or locales that defied all imperial(istic) attempts to control. The multi-polar world system gave enough space to the creative energies of different cultures and societies to be realized at different paces and in different manners.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries put an end to this and led to the emergence of a new model of cultural development. The rise of the West as the dominant force of the modern world created a Euro-centric world whereby the *idea* of Europe became a *reality* for the rest of the world. Needless to say, Euro-centrism has never been simply a matter of economic and military might. It has manifested itself in such diverse areas as culture, arts, historical consciousness, philosophy, urban design, architecture, humanities, science, imperialism, novels, taste and social stratification. Its hallmark has been the pushing of others to the margins of human history. Whether these others are Muslims, Russians, Chinese, African-Americans or Native Americans, it has made very little difference.

The Euro-centric world system crumbled dramatically when it produced the most dreadful and bloody wars of human history in a span

of thirty years. The human tragedy witnessed during the two World Wars has no equivalent in human memory. Yet what was lost was also the promise of the modern world to create, in Weber's words, free individuals and a rational society. As the German philosopher Martin Heidegger noted in his profound critique of modern humanism, neither freedom nor rationality was delivered, and a culture of homelessness and despair began to permeate everything modern from politics and art to education and literature. The closing of the European mind further alienated Westerners from the non-Western world. The promise of a global village turned out to be an apartment building with tenants having no idea about each other.

Despite its tragic failures, Euro-centrism continues to be a global problem that hurts not only non-Western societies but also Westerners themselves for a uni-polar world only leads to the marginalization of the vast majority of world populations. This marginalization can be economic, political, intellectual or artistic. No matter how it happens, it strips people of a sense of meaning and purpose. Much of the current sentiment of dispossession and frustration we see in

the non-Western world today is a result of this. Can we talk about a common world culture or a genuine dialogue of civilizations when history books from London to Beijing, from Istanbul to Berlin present a history that begins suddenly with the so-called Greek miracle and ends with modern Europe and the United States?

These two models of cultural and civilizational order can no longer provide a sense of security and participation for all citizens of the world. A multi-polar and multi-centered world has to arise to undo the misdeeds of both Eurocentrism and cultural isolationism. A world which is no more than an excuse for 'White Man's Burden' cannot foster a culture of peace and civilized diversity. The future of the relationship between Islamic, Western and other societies will largely depend on the extent to which a truly multi-polar world system is carefully crafted and all the citizens of the world are invited to be equal members of a shared vision for humanity. This means redefining the current definitions of culture, art, politics, society, nation-state, migration and a host of other concepts that shape our perception of the world. This is an invitation for hard and patient work.

A multi-polar and pluralist world, however, is not a world without any standards or values. It is a world in which all cultures and societies are seen as equals but urged to vie for the common good of humanity. This is not a wishy-washy multiculturalism which runs the risk of eroding any common grounds between cultures and creating parallel communities. Rather, it is an act of enriching oneself by recognizing others. A shared framework of ideas and values can emerge within the context of what Hans-George Gadamer has called the 'fusion of horizons'. This is not an act of self-denial where one is expected to negate oneself to recognize the reality of others. Nor is it a sentimental or imaginary position without any moral standards. Rather, it is enriching oneself by recovering the middle path of preserving one's identity while recognizing others. It is through such acts that we can foster an ethics and culture of coexistence which will not tolerate racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims as well as the demonization of Jews, Christians and others.

In a world driven by identity politics, part of the problem lies in creating a conflict between an absolute self and an absolute other. Much of

the language of clash today is based on such an opposition where Islam is set against such values as justice, equality, human rights and human dignity. Many non-Westerners and Muslims among them make the same mistake in reverse in the name of indigenous oppositions, belated nationalisms or communal solidarity. Speaking of the self and the other in terms of a binary opposition, however, does not necessarily lead to an essential conflict. The distance between the self and the other could be construed as a healthy tension in expanding one's self-understanding and reaching out to the world around us.

Needless to say, there is a further danger in trying to dissolve all boundaries between the self and the other for it creates a sense of insecurity and homelessness. This is a disturbingly common feeling which we see everywhere today from the streets of Cairo to Spain. In numerous ways, globalization has further deepened this sense of insecurity. This is felt deeply especially in Muslim countries where the eroding impact of modernization has created a profound sense of mistrust and resentment towards the modern world in general and the West in

particular. If the world is to become an abode of peace and a habitat for all, we have to address the problem of alienation.

This we cannot do only through political niceties. Even the strongest political platforms and mechanism are not sufficient to inculcate a share sense of responsibility because every responsibility must come with clearly defined rights and a certain degree of autonomy. Political and economic measures are necessary to contain the problem of disenfranchisement and disempowerment. The current political injustices and economic inequalities in the world are a major source of instability and disharmony. The continuing war in Iraq, ethnic and sectarian tensions in the Middle East, the Palestinian problem, the chaos in Lebanon, poverty, famine and epidemic diseases in Asia and Africa, human trafficking, drugs, weapon smuggling, child soldiers, mines, domestic and international terrorism and a host of other excruciating problems continue to cause deep divisions beyond national and regional borders. Such international organizations as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Conference have a mandate to address these issues in a global context.

Each nation-state has a responsibility to do its share to change the course of events in our increasingly divided world.

None of these problems, however, can be solved only through political settlements and economic programs. What we need is an ethics of co-existence that will guide all such noble efforts with a sense of human dignity and respect for others. A world in which only my problems are real is not a world I share with others. A world in which only my concerns are worthy of attention is not a world that can thrive on peace and stability. A narcissist view of the world, whether held by Westerners, Christians, Indians, Chinese or Muslims, can only exacerbate the problem and lead us to further friction and disunity.

Can we develop an ethics of co-existence that will go beyond sentimentality, avoid condescending attitudes, and bring us closer to one another as equal human beings? The present study by Bekir Berat Özipek and Kudret Bülbül seeks to answer this basic question. Providing a brief overview of the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, the authors look critically at the conceptual framework of the Initiative and present a number of arguments for the use and limits of

such key concepts as culture, civilization, identity, and nation-state. They also provide a balanced criticism of the concepts of “Islam” and “West”. As these terms are used to make huge and often dysfunctional generalizations, the authors make an important point about the relevance of nuances and details in such a big narrative as the dialogue and alliance of civilizations.

The most important contribution of the present essay, however, is its attempt to develop an ethical framework for a genuine and sustainable culture of co-existence. Adopting the Kantian dictum “treat others as you would like to be treated”, the essay draws from both Christian and Islamic teachings to recognize and embrace the reality of others without giving up one’s self-identity. Logically, one must be a self to recognize others, and this means accepting the world as it is, viz., as a shared space of distinct identities and common values. The classical Islamic civilization has created a remarkable social and cultural world where the ‘self’ necessarily implied the existence of the ‘non-self’. As articulated by numerous Muslim philosophers and sages, the non-self, i.e., that which lies outside the individual self, may include other human

beings, nature, or distant cultures and societies. None of these border lines, however, is a reason for the self to see the other as a rival or even enemy. The unity of the self is not negated by the plurality of the world. Nor is the multiplicity of the world a cause for the insecurity of the self. This has formed the basis of the Islamic concept of cultural and religious pluralism and allowed numerous religious, ethnic and cultural traditions and communities to live together and create what the medieval Spanish/Andalusian scholars called *convivencia*, i.e., the experience of living together. In fact, this is what the great Muslim saint and metaphysician Ibn al-'Arabi has formulated as "unity-in-plurality" (*wahdah fi'l-kathrah*) and "plurality-in-unity" (*kathrah fi'l-wahdah*).

Our shrinking world needs this spirit more than ever.

**Ibrahim Kalin**

*A story of four people who call grape with  
four different names*

*A man gave some money to four people and said: Go ahead and buy whatever you need! One of them said "lets spend this money on 'engür'." "Don't be silly" said another one who was an Arab. And he added: I don't want 'engür,' but I want 'ineb'". The third one was a Turk and said: I want 'üzüm' not 'ineb.' The last one, who was a Greek, told them to stop talking nonsense; "let's buy 'is-tafil.'" Afterwards, they started debating loudly and then fighting among themselves. They did so because they did not know the meanings of the words they used. If there had been a man there who could understand their languages, he could have reconciled them. He would have told them: "I could buy for all of you whatever you want with that money. Your words can divide and lead you to a war, while mine reconcile and unite." Unfortunately that problem couldn't be solved. Unless a Solomon who knows the eternal languages, dilemmas can not be solved.*

**Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, 13th Century Sufi  
Poet\***

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\* *Mesnevi*, Volume II. Ötüken Publisher, İstanbul, 1997, shortened from p. 531.



## **Introduction**

The twentieth century has witnessed the rise human rights, democracy and freedom as common ideals of humanity on the one hand, and serious violations of these values by two great wars on the other. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as a document which reflects an aspiration of founding the world on common values and grounds symbolized the hope that an international environment could be created befitting human dignity in the aftermath of the second world war. However, this period witnessed new conflicts and controversies marked by ideological polarization of the Cold War which shelved the aspirations for building a world order where peace and compromise prevail. The twentieth century came to a close with tragic events marked by ethnic cleansings and genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda.

Humanity entered the new millennium in a climate of new conflicts characterized by terror and wars rather than values such as freedom, justice and peace. In the past, the world was divided into rival political camps drawing upon ideological differences. In this new environment, however, a new axis of conflict seems to have emerged based on the concept of "civilization", a concept defined largely by religion and culture. Changing perception of threat in the United States of America, reactions to wars on Muslim lands that it pursues along the lines of foreign policy concept informed by such a threat perception, growing manifestation of Islamophobia in the US and Europe following the terror acts on September 11 indicate that we are entering a disturbing historical process for today and for the future of humanity. Moreover, there is an emerging ideological trend aiming at explaining such conflicts, terror and wars on the grounds of an axis of conflict drawing on Islamic and Western civilizational division. Moreover, an intellectual and political discourse to justify the conflict is in the making.

The current situation in our new century indicates that we are not anywhere close to a hu-

mane condition or climate where hopes for the spread of democracy, global acceptance of human rights, improvement of intercultural relations might be realized. We are at the brink of a world where such concepts as “fundamentalism”, “terror”, “axis of evil”, “preemptive strike”, “weapons of mass destruction” have become part of our daily lives. Democratic guarantees in Western democracies for immigrants, refugees and other disadvantaged groups, made possible by human rights advocates, began to erode rapidly and the state gaining more power at the expense of individual rights. Unfortunately, with additional social and cultural problems, terror and Islamophobia instigated by some states and groups tend to spread in Western and Eastern societies. It is observed that in many Western countries with a strong democratic tradition, such a trend is growing; prejudice and fear are becoming widely shared in society. In this context, the Danish cartoon crisis can be interpreted as a sad example of the fragility of peace and the weakening of communication and mutual understanding in today’s world.

It is self evident that initiatives for protecting peace on a universal level, resolving ten-

sions, building effective lines of communication and eradicating the root causes of violence have vital significance for the future of mankind. What is promising is the existence of individuals, civil society organizations and intergovernmental institutions as actors which take it upon themselves as a moral responsibility to prevent conflicts and work for a world based on the principles of peace and justice. These actors show that they are well aware of the threat and have already taken initiatives for long-term and sustainable solutions. In this context, various initiatives on individual, institutional and international levels were launched which requires universal cooperation, solidarity and effort. As a new axis of conflict is being promulgated through the idea of "civilization(s)", initiatives to prevent a clash of civilizations usually begin with the same concepts and theoretical constructs such as "Dialogue among Civilizations" or "Alliance of Civilizations". In a similar vein, since religion is one of the most important components of the concept of civilization today as it was in the past, a number of initiatives for peace are formulated and led by inter-religious dialogue groups or multi-religious humanitarian aid organizations. On the other

hand, the initiatives to advocate human rights are also spreading in our rapidly shrinking world and civil society organizations are becoming increasingly aware of one another and establishing solidarity among them. All of these point to the existence of a universal movement of human rights and human values. In short, a promising movement of hope is on the rise in the midst of our divided world.

While avoiding conflicts is possible, good will and hard work alone are not sufficient. Achieving success in this field largely depends on the quality and impact of individual and collective initiatives, and what principles these initiatives are based on. It is therefore important to clarify what moral grounds such initiatives should be based on, which common values they should uphold, and what their short and long term objectives should be.

The present study seeks to discuss and crystallize the moral grounds on which the ongoing initiatives to prevent conflicts should be based, the qualities that they should possess, and the short and long term objectives they should target. These premises are of crucial importance for the future of all peace and dialogue initiatives. It

goes without saying that the Alliance of Civilizations project should philosophically and intellectually be based on firm grounds, its objectives and strategies clearly defined, and its existence go beyond meetings and statements.

## A. PATH TO THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

“... we join forces against the only real enemy we have in front of us for the 21st century. That enemy is not a state. It is not a religion. It is not a culture. But it is, indeed, intolerance. History does not kill. Religions do not destroy buildings and institutions do not rape. Only individuals do those things. As we speak, there are those who still claim that the origin of their hatred is in history or religion or civilization or culture. Unfortunately, it is not so. Only individuals can hate and only individuals can dialogue. Diversity is not a threat. It is only the beginning of life”

**(Giandomenico Picco,** Personal Representative to the Secretary-General for the United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mehdi Danesh-Yazdi, *Dialogue Among Civilizations (Letter dated 17 August 1999 from Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General)*, United Nations, General Assembly, A/54/263, <http://www.un.org/documents/a54-263.pdf>

The Alliance of Civilizations project, co-chaired by the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero and the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan, is part of a series of initiatives for the establishment of peace and constructive dialogue a global scale. The project represents an important step in avoiding the mistakes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and bringing different cultures and societies closer to one another in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

When the Eastern block collapsed in 1989, the expectation was that the ideals of human rights and democratic values would prevail and the ideological polarization of the cold war period would come to an end. However, this did not happen. When new tensions and conflicts arose on the basis of such concepts as ethnicity, religion and civilization, it was clear that the “the end of history” had not come. There were new theories to “explain” new types of disputes, conflicts and events. In the international media, the academia and think-tanks, a large body of literature begun to emerge to explain or justify such conflicts on grounds of religion and/or civilization. The most popular among these was Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis which argued that conflicts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be

based on religious and civilizational identities rather than simply national or regional disputes. Studies presenting the conflicts in the Balkans and the Northern Caucasia in the 1990s as conflicts between Islamic and Western civilizations were intentionally or unintentionally paving the way for a new global polarization<sup>2</sup>.

## **1. Historical and Intellectual Background of the Initiative**

Since its establishment following the Second World War, the United Nations (UN) has led numerous initiatives to prevent conflicts and promote peace in the international scene. While the Secretary Generals of the UN led various initiatives, intergovernmental initiatives on both regional and global levels had only limited success. Throughout its history, the UN has faced

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<sup>2</sup> Huntington was not the only one who provided theoretical ground to this new environment of conflict; in fact it was Bernard Lewis who first used the concept of “clash of civilizations” in an article published in 1990. See Lewis, Bernard, “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, Volume 266, No. 3, pp. 47 – 60. For a critique of Lewis and Huntington, see Ibrahim Kalin, “Roots of Misconception: Euro-American Perceptions of Islam Before and After September 11<sup>th</sup>” in *Islam, Fundamentalism, and the Betrayal of Tradition*, ed. by Joseph Lumbard (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2004), pp. 143-187.

the vexed problem of mistrust and mostly lacked influence. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew to an end, concrete civil and specific initiatives were needed to overcome such limitations.

It was in this context that initiatives to prevent a new wave of polarization on the basis of the concept of civilization had emerged. However, the efforts for “inter-religious dialogue” to facilitate such initiatives go back to an earlier period<sup>3</sup>. In 1964, the Pope Paul IV established a department to promote inter-religious relations with non-Catholics. The department was established in the light of the Second Vatican Council and Declaration of “*Nostra Aetate*”. It was named “The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue” in 1988. Its aims were identified as to improve mutual understanding, respect and co-operation between Catholics and followers of

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<sup>3</sup> Vartan Gregorian argues that the *Nostra Aetate* announced in the Second Vatican Council in 1965 is a turning point for the development of dialogue between Islam and Christianity. See United Nations, General Assembly A/54/263, Fifty-fourth Session, *Dialogue Among Civilizations* (Letter dated 17 August 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, Annex, Disr. 20 August 1999).

other religious traditions and to promote religious activities and dialogue<sup>4</sup>.

In around the same time, a number of initiatives in various cultural and civilizational zones were introduced to promote peace and cooperation<sup>5</sup>. The most important initiative before the “Alliance of Civilizations” project, which bases itself on the concept of civilization, is the one led by the then Iranian President Muhammad Khatami<sup>6</sup>. Khatami proposed the United Nations

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<sup>4</sup>[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_pro\\_20051996\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_pro_20051996_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) can be mentioned among such initiatives. It was established in 1996 with 35 member states, 25 EU member states and 10 Mediterranean countries. Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) has also twenty-four observer institutes and two international associate members. EuroMeSCo “seeks to construct relationships between Europe, the Maghreb and the Mashriq on a North-South and South-South basis which otherwise might not exist in order to widen the forum for debate on matters of mutual concern”. See. <http://www.uromesco.net>

<sup>6</sup> Muhammed Khatami’s work in this context should also be mentioned. He served as the President of Iran between 1997 and 2005 and earned a reputation for his projects on democracy, peace, human rights and improving the status of women in his country, in the region and on a global scale. He established the International Institute of Interreligious and Civilizational Dialogue in 2006. The same year, Khatami visited the U.S. to promote his ideas on the improvement of in-

on 21 September 1988 to announce 2001 as “The Year of Dialogue among Civilizations”.

The UN General Assembly unanimously accepted this proposal in November 16, 2006. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a High Level Group. One of the most significant works of the High Level Group under the co-ordination of Giandomenico Picco in the framework of the “year of dialogue” was the publication of *Crossing the Divide*. This study emphasized the importance of recognition, dialogue and mutual understanding to improve peace and toleration on a global scale. It also outlined the fundamental principles and objectives of such projects dialogue and understanding. In this sense, the “Dialogue among Civilizations” initiative provided a theoretical framework and practical guideline for the “Alliance of Civilizations” Project.

Events following the *Year for Dialogue among Civilizations*, however, called for more concerted

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terreligious and civilizational dialogue. In his address in a mosque in Chicago, Khatami made a call to work together to form a dialogue even between the secular and religious views([http://ews.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060903/1\\_mideast\\_afp/usiranpoliticskhatami\\_060903154616](http://ews.yahoo.com/s/afp/20060903/1_mideast_afp/usiranpoliticskhatami_060903154616)). As a member of the High Level Group, Khatami is also involved in the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative led by Zapatero and Erdoğan.

efforts. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led to the rise of Islamophobia in the West, anger against USA and its allies especially after the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Subsequent events were signs of a dangerous polarization and global violence with a potential of pulling the world into new conflicts. Reversing this process also required efforts and endeavors on an international scale. It was in this environment that the joint initiative by the Spanish Prime Minister Zapetero and the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan was launched.

## **2. Significance of Spanish and Turkish Leadership**

The fact that the Alliance of Civilizations initiative was co-chaired by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey has a special significance. Spain was home to what the medieval Spanish scholars called “convivencia”, the multicultural and multi-religious co-existence of Muslims, Christians and Jews in Andalusia. Spain also witnessed the tragic end of this remarkable experience. With the end of *convivencia* and Muslim presence in southern Europe, a historic opportunity was lost.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spain went through a violent civil war and a period of dictatorship. After a long struggle to overcome the seemingly irreconcilable ethnic, religious and political divisions in the Spanish society, it has succeeded to establish social consensus and a lasting democracy. When the Spanish people were preparing their new Constitution in 1978, they had overcome much deeper social polarization than that of a division between Muslims and Christians. Despite the sad memory of the *reconquista* and the end of *convivencia*, Spain was able to foster a new culture of reconciliation and negotiation in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Spanish culture of compromise and reconciliation became so strong that the 2004 Madrid train bombings did not damage its resolve.

Turkey, on the other hand, has inherited an imperial legacy which facilitated the peaceful coexistence of different religions, ethnic groups and cultures for over a thousand year. It has developed a culture of coexistence, embraced diversity, and led the Muslim world with an attitude of tolerance. Although it has become a battle ground for tragic and religious conflicts under the influence of nationalist movements in the beginning of

twentieth century, Turkey has been able to preserve its legacy of living together.

After the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, tensions between religious and secularist groups and ethnic problems left their imprint on the country. While Turkey continues to struggle with this problem, it has also started to experience a process of democratization with the influence of the European Union membership policies since 2000. In recent years, a number of legal and political reforms have been implemented to improve the standards of democratic institutions and processes in Turkey. Keeping these points in mind, both Spain and Turkey have backgrounds suitable for taking leadership in this initiative. It should also be noted that, thanks to its historical legacy, Turkey can not remain indifferent to developments in the Muslim world and the Balkans. A proactive and multidimensional foreign policy requires the coordination of cultural and political factors on both regional and international levels. Finally, such a project by two countries on the eastern and western edges of Europe carries a symbolic significance.

### 3. The “Alliance of Civilizations” Initiative

The “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative was proposed by the Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero at the UN General Assembly meeting in September 21, 2004. Following the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan’s decision to co-chair the project, it became a major platform associated with the name of the two countries. After consulting the two leaders, the UN Secretary General appointed a High Level Group composed of distinguished personalities to guide the initiative. The High Level Group was given a mandate with a UN document dated August 25, 2005 to discuss and coordinate the project at the institutional and civil society levels<sup>7</sup>. Professor Federico Mayor from Spain and Professor Mehmet Aydın from Turkey were appointed as co-chairs of the High Level Group.

The High Level Group held its first meeting in Palma de Mallorca, Spain on 26-29 November 2005. At the Dacca meeting May 28, 2006, the High Level Group decided to focus on activities in four main areas: education, the media, youth and inte-

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<sup>7</sup> See. United Nations, *An Alliance of Civilizations Terms of Reference for the High-Level Group*, 25 August 2005.

gration.<sup>8</sup> The third meeting in Geneva on June 17, 2006 provided more concrete action plans. In this meeting, Federico Mayor argued that the emphasis should be placed on building peace rather than peacekeeping, and proposed that synchronized activities should be carried out ranging from the education of migrants to their integration. Other participants contributed to the crystallization of the steps to be taken within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations project.<sup>9</sup> Decisions on further actions and more specific activities were taken at the Istanbul meeting in November 2006 in Turkey. The Report of the High Level Group was made public at the Istanbul meeting where the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Conference Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, and the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey were present.

#### **4. Other Initiatives Contributing to the Peace**

Following the launch of the Alliance of Civilizations project, a number of other initiatives

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=18677&Cr=alliance&Cr1=civilization>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

were introduced to facilitate closer cooperation between countries, cultures and religions.

One of such initiatives is “The Mediterranean, Europe, Islam: Actors in Dialogue” (MEIAD) which started in 2005. MEIAD is a Research Program attached to the Fondazione Mediterraneo and currently based in Naples at the University of Naples “L’Orientale”. Its website describes its mission as to strengthen mutual understanding and cooperation between 1) countries of the Southern and Northern shores of the Mediterranean, and 2) Europe and the Muslim communities within and outside Europe”. John L. Esposito leads the Executive Scientific Committee composed of 14 members.<sup>10</sup>

A similar initiative was introduced by France and Egypt. In April 2006, the former French President Jacques Chirac gave a talk at the French University in Egypt. His statements very closely resonate with the issues and questions addressed by the Alliance of Civilizations initiative.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.meiad.org>

<sup>11</sup> Chirac had the following to say: “*Faced with the risk of uniformity, cultural diversity must not foment division among people but on the contrary bear proud witness to human ingenuity. At a time when the destinies of peoples are increasingly intertwined, what has been termed the clash of civilizations –which is*

Another initiative of a similar nature is the “Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group”. Since its launching in 2006, the Strategic Vision Group held three meetings in Moscow<sup>12</sup>, Kazan, Tataristan, and Istanbul. The group continues its work as an important initiative led by Russia<sup>13</sup>. The following statement by Veniamin Popov,

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*rather, as I said in Riyadh, a clash of ignorance– is not a foregone conclusion” and called upon his counterpart as follows: “A shared Euro-Mediterranean ambition brings us together, with a special focus on education. A project for an Alliance of Civilizations was discussed at the Barcelona Summit. I call on this new university to assert itself as the emblematic institution supporting such an alliance”.* See [http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/anglais/speeches\\_and\\_documents/2006/egypt/official\\_visit\\_to\\_egypt-address\\_by\\_the\\_president\\_of\\_the\\_republic\\_at\\_the\\_french\\_university\\_in\\_egypt.47214.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/anglais/speeches_and_documents/2006/egypt/official_visit_to_egypt-address_by_the_president_of_the_republic_at_the_french_university_in_egypt.47214.html)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.infoguerre.com/article.php?op=Print&sid=989>

<sup>13</sup> M K Bhadrakumar argues that the Russian leadership in this initiative represents a clear position against the wrongful policies of USA and great Britain in the Muslim World: “Russian policy in the Middle East is a kind of mirror image in reverse of the string of mistakes that Washington has committed in the region. Prominent among such mistakes is the tragic error on the part of President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair to give an inter-civilizational character to the ‘war on terror’. Moscow realizes that the consequent sense of hurt and alienation in the Islamic world is profound.”

[http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/IB17Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/IB17Ag01.html)

the Russian President's special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference:<sup>14</sup>

"I mean that, first, everybody is critical about Samuel Huntington's theory of the collision of civilizations without offering any solutions. Secondly, the West has been actually trying to impose its values on Muslims. I would like therefore to suggest agreeing on new principles of a truly equal dialogue between different cultures, a dialogue that would be based on mutual respect. After all, it is safe to claim that civilizations do not fall into superior and inferior ones; they are all equal and have made their historic contribution to the treasure trove of global culture. Besides, the war in Lebanon and the occupation of Iraq prove that it is impossible to settle political problems through the use of force. The situation calls for a fresh compromise approach. Finally, we should certainly revive a principle of international life, namely to give up war as a means to settle international disputes".

Some of the initiatives outlined so far have discursive and objective commonalities with the Alliance of Civilizations project. It is important to note that the number of actors with which the current initiative can cooperate has increased compared to the past. The initiative is likely to draw more partners and interested parties for various activities.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ruvr.ru/main.php?lng=eng&q=7126&cid=56&p=03.02.2007>

## **B. "ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS" WITH ITS POTENTIALS AND LIMITS**

As an initiative for peace, the importance of the Alliance of Civilizations is obvious. The future success of the initiative largely depends on two conditions: a solid intellectual foundation and a strong political will. It is therefore important to clarify the philosophical and intellectual foundations of such an initiative, and discuss its short and long terms objectives. In a similar vein, concrete steps to be taken should be identified because establishing a balance between discourse and practice would encourage other attempts for peace to come forward.

## 1. Question of Terminology and Discourse

*“There is word that stops the war,  
There is word that leads one to death,  
And there is word  
That converts poison into honey and butter.”*

**(Yunus Emre, 13th Century Turkish Sufi Poet)**

The success of an initiative depends upon its coherent moral and philosophical foundations as well as the way in which it is presented with a proper language and terminology. This involves a closer examination of the Alliance of Civilizations project and its nomenclature.

First of all, the name of the project should be reconsidered because the concept of “alliance” is borrowed from the war literature and usually associated with conflicts and temporary truce. In addition to this criticism, it may also be argued that the concept still remains within the limits of a discourse based on the clash of civilizations thesis. Such criticisms were voiced openly during the Madrid meeting in the framework of Al-

liance of Civilizations on 6-7 June 2005. Participants at the meeting argued that Huntington's thesis had a corroding impact on public discourse and poisoned the public debate about the subject. It was also pointed out that the theory has drawn a large attention and left a hostile imprint in the Muslim and Western worlds. Participants asserted that the Alliance of Civilizations represents not only a reactionary frame but also a pro-active initiative<sup>15</sup>.

The second problem of terminology is related to the concepts of "civilization" and "civilizations". As the title of the initiative suggests, the existence of a historically constructed Islamic civilization and a "Western / Roman Christian Civilization" is accepted. However, this major assumption leads to a number of questions. First, it assumes that there is indeed only one civilization and the essential contradiction is not between Islamic, Western or Indian civilizations but between a mode of thinking, world view and life style which can be described as "civi-

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<sup>15</sup> Kausch, Kristina and Barreñada, Isaías, *Alliance of Civilizations International Security and Cosmopolitan Democracy*, Seminar Conclusions, Working Paper, October 2005, pp. 2-3.

lized” and others that can be labeled as “uncivilized”. Megalommatis who criticizes the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations argues that since there is no “clash” of civilizations historically, no coherent argument can be made for their “alliance”. In world history, no conflicts from the Persian-Greek wars to the Crusades and the Abbasid-Eastern Roman battles were interpreted as a clash of civilizations by the actors involved. Similarly, the imperial seats of Baghdad and Constantinople did not think that there were significant cultural and other kinds of differences between them except religion, and therefore they did not have the perception of having different civilizations. However, beginning with the developments in the sixteenth century and especially in the last two hundred years, the European and American educational systems divided the world in to two as the “West” and the “East”<sup>16</sup>.

Secondly, launching an initiative over such a general concept as “civilization(s)” is mistaken not only because it separates civilizations from

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<sup>16</sup> Megalommatis, Muhammad Shamsaddin, “The Clash and the Alliance of Civilizations: too much ado for nothing!”.

one another but also because it arbitrarily homogenizes heterogeneous formations within each civilizations.<sup>17</sup> Both in the Islamic and Western worlds, it is possible to see contradictory approaches and practices which can either facilitate or hinder such initiatives. As far as the Alliance of Civilizations is concerned, one can find elements in “civilizations” that are attributed to Islamic and Western regions either facilitating or complicating the desired reconciliation. Moreover, the existence of individuals and groups who live in these regions but do not associate themselves with the dominant formations should not be neglected. For example, when we talk about the “Western civilization”, we should keep in mind that in addition to the liberal tradition, we are talking about such things as the fascist and communist traditions. As Amartya Sen pointed out, there is a negative trend that leads to “perceiving the world as a federation of religions or civilizations” and disregarding all other ways of self-perception and

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<sup>17</sup> D’Orville, Hans, “Dialogue among Civilizations: The Role of International Organizations, Western Policies and the Islamic World”, *UNESCO Wilton Park Conference*, 13 February 2002, p. 4).

associations<sup>18</sup>. In such an environment, concepts of essential differences across cultural and religious landscapes can only strengthen divisions.

Practices and approaches deemed “civilized” have had similar characteristics throughout human history. Values such as respect for human beings, justice, tolerance, rule of law and freedom have been respected as fundamental values in the East as well as in the West. Such institutions and values as free market, human rights and democracy, on the other hand, have emerged in the West and should be viewed within this framework.

The Bosphorous Declaration of the Parliamentary Union of Organization of Islamic Countries entitled “Call for an Intercivilizational Dialogue” in 2006 supports this thesis<sup>19</sup>:

“Basic values of Islamic culture and civilization are also universal values. Justice, peace, equality, respect for others, rule of law, accountability, moral and family values are common

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<sup>18</sup> Sen, Amartya, “Freedom and Reason Offer the Solution to Cultural Confusion”, *Financial Times*, 28 November 2005.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.akabe.com/haber\\_detay.php?haber\\_d=1217](http://www.akabe.com/haber_detay.php?haber_d=1217)

[http://www.akabe.com/haber\\_detay.php?haber\\_d=1217](http://www.akabe.com/haber_detay.php?haber_d=1217)

values shared by humanity. The future of mankind will rise on foundations of these common values. The world which is indifferent to human values can not represent progress and civility. The world whose direction is not determined by such values would become a world plagued by chaos, terror, hopelessness and injustices. All societies in the world should cooperate with each other to establish a world informed by universal human values. Religious, historical and political differences between diverse cultures and civilizations should not be sources of conflict.”

The values presumed to be “Western” are constructed and shaped by the common contribution of mankind and therefore they cannot be associated with a particular culture in an exclusive manner. Talking about a civilization marked by these values requires us to draw our arguments from the shared legacy of different cultures and nations.

As a matter of fact, this approach has its roots in the Muslim world. The 14<sup>th</sup> century Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldun, who is considered by many to be founder of the modern science of sociology, distinguished between “bedouin-urban” structures and did not argue that such formations would lead to a significant difference

stemming from their religious and cultural distinctiveness. This view of culture helps construct a comprehensive formulation not only because it takes Islamic and Western civilizations into account but also pays attention to the rest of the world.

At the Madrid Conference, it was underlined that the concept of civilizations was used as opposed to “barbarism” until the 18th century. Today, however, it has acquired new meaning referring to culture and society.

There is yet another approach to the concept of civilization which accepts the existence of more than one civilization and allows the use of the concept of “civilization” in the plural. According to this view, a single etiquette of “civilization”, which is usually associated with the West, is far from representing the characteristics of different cultures, perceptions and practices within it. Although many Western values, whether the rest of the humanity has contributed to them or not, are worthy of respect and can be taken to be universal, and not all western values have these qualities. Therefore, there should not be persistence on the existence of a “single civilization” when qualities of respect

and universalibility can be generalized for all Western values. Working with a single concept of civilization would only provide ideological justification for various interventions in the name of Western values such as democracy or women rights. For instance, the reasons given for the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan such as “bringing democracy”, “liberation” and “protection of women’s rights” can be viewed in this framework. With these concerns in mind, drawing upon a single concept of civilization is not preferable for it runs the risk of subduing the Muslim world to the values of a dominant civilization, thus evoking a hierarchy. What is required concerning the Alliance of Civilizations is to draw up a road map derived from the idea of the existence, legitimacy and peaceful co-existence of multiple civilizations.

This point of view argues that starting from the *de facto* variety and plurality of civilizations is more realistic because there are millions of people who place themselves in different civilizational formations and attribute distinct religious, cultural and historical meaning and content to them.

Although the debates and discussions about the existence of a single civilization or multiple civilizations are important, we do not have to see them as absolute alternatives to one another. No matter which approach is taken, a collective initiative is possible with a final goal of global peace.

One way of resolving the problem of terminology is to replace the concepts of “alliance” with more positively sounding concepts such as “meeting” or “sharing”. Also the initiative can be renamed because of the problematic meaning of the concept of “civilization” as discussed earlier. It may be thought that choosing a concept which could express the current initiative and its moral objective more clearly could enhance the support on a global scale given the criticism that the concept of “civilization” is ambiguous and open to speculation, therefore it fails to attract a wider participation. This way, it can answer the criticism that the current conceptualization does not include Chinese and African civilizations and does not provide a framework wide enough to include those individuals who define themselves with these identities.

Although due attention should be paid to the issues mentioned above, the question of

terminology is not an essential problem, therefore one should avoid getting lost in terminological debates. Concepts may be expected to become crystallized and a distinct terminology may emerge in the process of the practical applications of the project.

Another way of resolving the problem is to preserve the current title of the project so as to avoid the risk of ambiguity that the modification of a declared name might cause. A less speculative and more comprehensive title may be given to the future activities within the scope of the project.

In publicizing the activities of the project, it is important to avoid the impression that the project relates to a particular region, culture and civilization(s) due to its name and the leaders who initiated it. It should be emphasized that this project is open to contributions of all people who support values such as justice and peace from around the world. In this context, a special attention should be given to employ an all inclusive language.

## 2. The Moral Foundation of the Alliance of Civilizations

*“The Saints have many paths*

*And we said yes to all of them”*

**(Muhyi, 17th Century Anatolian Sufi Poet)**

*“Do not think you are going among infidels. Muslims attain to Salvation. The ways of Providence are infinite”*

**(Papa Pius XI, XX. Century, to the Apostolic Delegation to Libya)\***

The most important aspect of the Alliance of Civilizations project is the consensus of people with different religious, cultural and political identities, and their willingness to demonstrate that it is possible to work together to reach a common objective while maintaining differences. This consensus expresses a need for an explicitly or implicitly recognized common moral ground. From this point of view “Alliance

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\* Swee-Chun, Joseph Ng, *Christianity and Islam: Beyond History to the Will of the One and Only God*, East Asian Pastoral Institute,  
<http://eapi.admu.edu.ph/eapr003/ng.htm>

of Civilizations” is essentially a moral initiative and therefore it is this aspect that needs closer attention.

A common moral foundation is the essential condition for coming and resolving the current problems in a dialogical framework. The question concerning the origin of moral values is not of essential importance at least as far as the requirements of such an initiative are concerned.

There are certainly different views about the source of morality. Some argue that moral values come from a Divine source while others may think that it is a value embedded in the creation of man. It may be also thought that moral values are discovered through rational thinking because everyone has them by birth. It is possible to subscribe to a common moral code whether morality is taken to be grounded on religious or secular foundations. This ethical code which might be derived from a great variety of sources is clearly formulated as a “Golden Rule” by the authors of *Crossing the Divide* as follows: “Treat others as you would like to be treated”.<sup>20</sup> Hüseyin Hatemi, a Turkish Muslim thinker ar-

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<sup>20</sup> Picco, Giandomenico, (Eds.), *Crossing The Divide – Dialogue among Civilizations*, UN, 2001.

gues that the Qur'an refers to the moral attitude befitting the "Golden Rule" as 'isar'<sup>21</sup>. This rule can be derived from various sources ranging from Islam and Christianity to Kantian ethics. Islam, for example, commands its followers to be witnesses of truth even if such testimony is against their own interests<sup>22</sup>. Islam also forbids Muslims placing heavy burdens on others. Christianity encourages its followers to see their own faults first<sup>23</sup> and preaches that the first stone should be thrown by the one without sins<sup>24</sup>. Kant, on the other hand, argues that morality can be grounded without establishing a necessary relation with religion by postulating

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<sup>21</sup> Hatemi, Hüseyin, "İslamda İnsan Hakkı ve Adalet Kavramı", [http://www.tekamul.net/islam/Islamda\\_Insan\\_Hakki.html](http://www.tekamul.net/islam/Islamda_Insan_Hakki.html).

<sup>22</sup> "O ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for God can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily God is well-acquainted with all that ye do." Qur'an, al-Nisa, 4/135.

<sup>23</sup> "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" Matthew, 7/3. See also, Matthew, 7/5, Luke, 6/41,42.

<sup>24</sup> "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her", John, 8/7.

the principle of “act in such a way that it constitutes a moral code” as a categorical imperative. Considering the fact that for many religious Jews, Christians and Muslims, secular moral theories also originate from religion, there is no necessary conflict between the two moral systems. The difference lies not in the essence of moral values but in the way in which they are legitimized.

Alliance of Civilizations should take this moral principle as its core to achieve its objective before focusing on civilization and culture<sup>25</sup> because this foundation points to a shared quality that every human being has or can acquire independent of cultural and geographic differences. In this sense, the final objective of the project should be the dissemination of morality as the necessary condition to ensure peace among different people and make it prevalent across the world so as to establish a global moral framework. Indeed, this objective is emphasized in *Crossing the Divide* which is collectively written to provide a theoretical framework for the *Dia-*

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<sup>25</sup> See Tsutsumibayashi, Ken, “Fusion of Horizons or Confusion of Horizons? Intercultural Dialogue and Its Risks”, *Global Governance* 11 (2005), pp. 109-110). .

*logue of Civilizations* project. This document presupposes the existence of common and universal values, which is summed up in the following conclusion:

“We recognize the existence of a “global common denominator,” which some may call a “global civilization,” meaning to us common ethical standards and values, the foundation for a global ethic”<sup>26</sup>.

“A global ethic for institutions and civil society, for leaders and for followers, requires a longing and striving for peace, longing and striving for justice, longing and striving for partnerships, longing and striving for truth. These might be the four pillars of a systems of a global ethic that reconciliation, as the new answer to the vicious circle of endless hatred, is going to provide us”<sup>27</sup>.

Statements aiming at developing a global morality can be interpreted as having a long term objective or a strongly asserted objective. There is no need to develop such a morality starting from zero because this kind of ethical code implicitly or explicitly exists in all societies.

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<sup>26</sup> Picco, *ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Picco, *ibid*, p. 212.

Some societies may have strong codes while others may have weak and less influential ones.

A moral code implicitly exists because no matter how we identify its source and how we name it, there are individuals, groups and thoughts in all cultures and religions that support higher human values such as justice and peace. There are people who try to solve a social or political problem through compromise, mutual understanding and negotiation as there are those who turn a blind eye to such processes and tend to engage in conflict and violence when a similar problem is encountered. In light of these thoughts, it may be argued that all human beings potentially have a sense of justice and conscience which constitute the foundations of such a morality. Although they may not necessarily reflect these potentials on their attitudes and behaviors, one can identify the fact that they are crystallized in attitudes and behaviors of some people in all cultures and regions in every corner of the world. Sacred texts as well modern political theories have two kinds of readings, one leads to compromise and peace, the other prevents such an approach.

It may be argued that such a morality is embodied in the numerous national and international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Covenant on Children's Rights and this testifies to the existence of a global ethics. Therefore, the priority should be given to the dissemination of this global ethics and the transfer of its intellectual and institutional outcomes to make a deeper impact on the course of world events.

Talking about such a moral framework also means talking about material relations and rules for the distribution of economic assets among people. It might be misleading to consider the Alliance of Civilizations or variously named similar projects as a magic wand that would eliminate the wealth gap between the North and the South and divert sources allocated for the armament and "luxury consumption" to combat hunger and infant deaths. However, it should be emphasized that if these objectives were to be achievable at some stage, this would be possible through both large scale and micro projects.

If such a moral ground is taken to be the starting point of a concrete action plan with

short and mid-term outcomes, it would be possible to find voluntary partners and contributors from all political sides in the Eastern and Western worlds. Values such as justice, peace, human rights, respect for others, and uncompromising attitude against discrimination can constitute a common language among people with different geographical and religious backgrounds.



## **C. REVIEW OF THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. The High Level Group Report as a Road Map**

On November 13, 2006, the Alliance of Civilization High Level Group met in Istanbul and released the High Level Group Report, an important step in the direction of realizing the aims of the initiative. It is important to review the report since it is the most recent documents setting a road map.

In its first chapter, the report underlines the fact that conflicts in the world do not stem from religious and civilizational differences. It indicates that the current problems in the world are the result of “real or perceived injustices”. The report emphasizes that politics not religion is the source of conflicts. The wrongful policies of Western countries toward the Muslim world,

reactions to such policies among Muslims, and the shortcomings of the Muslim world in several areas including the status of women are also pointed out by the report. As part of general policy recommendations, the report emphasizes the crucial importance of the solution of the Palestinian problem and asserts that the narratives of Palestinians and Israelis who seem unlikely to reach a compromise to achieve a solution can not be ignored.

The Second Chapter discusses the steps to be taken in the areas of the media, education, research, scholarships and textbooks. It recommends the expansion of the Erasmus Program to include Muslim countries and the participation of all Middle Eastern countries in the "Euro-Med Youth Program". Compared with the previous theoretical debates and other steps taken, these innovative and concrete recommendations make the report more applicable beyond mere wishes to establish global peace. When these projects are implemented, they are likely to lead to other concrete steps.

The Report proposes the appointment of a High Representative of Alliance of Civilizations whose duties should include assisting the UN Sec-

retary General in times of crisis. The Report also recommends the establishment of Alliance of Civilizations Forum under the auspices of the UN.

The High Level Group Report is an important document and written with considerable care and attention. Yet there are some points that need to be clarified. First of all, the Report incorporates the basic perspective of previous works such as *Crossing the Divide* in a less sophisticated style. Despite this fact, its political analysis and recommendations seem to be resolute and plausible. The Report asserts that the Alliance of Civilizations would have difficulty to achieve its objectives if it remains limited with inter-governmental and international organizations. Therefore it is recommended that international public opinion should be mobilized in this context. Yet, the Report itself makes state-centered recommendations. Instead of giving weight to civil society, it commissions the realization of proposed activities to states, local authorities and international organizations. This position runs a serious risk of surpassing official and diplomatic boundaries of proposed actions and insufficient involvement of civil societal and individual initiatives in the process. However, such shortcomings

can be overcome because the Report doesn't prevent the engagement of civil society actors in the implementation of smaller projects.

## **2. What To Do and How To Do It?**

Drawing upon the moral foundations explained earlier and the methods that should be followed, we can discuss what kind of an action plan should be adopted within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations. The first step is the declaration of clear and intelligible initiative based on moral/ethical principles which has already been accomplished by Zapatero and Erdoğan. In order to achieve the objective of the initiative, a UN document dated August 25, 2005 has drawn a general framework for the activities to be carried out. Moreover, a High Level Group was given a mandate to set up an action program for states, international organizations and civil society, and asked to submit this plan in the second half of 2006. The following recommendations can be made to contribute to the efforts of the High Level Group and planned activities: (1) Identification of theoretical and practical steps to be taken to contribute to peace (2) Identification of potentials and likely obstacles before such an

initiative in Muslim and Western countries, and (3) ensuring the sustainability of the project independent from the future of current political leaders and to facilitate the continuation on all levels.

The types of activities that will contribute to the overall objectives of the project can be grouped under three major areas: (1) "Peace Initiative Platform" that would be essentially political (2) "Cultural and Intellectual Activities" which would aim at eliminating sources of social, legal and religious conflicts and (3) "Leader Level Activities" which would encourage and support solving problems through the leadership of major political figures and states people.

**Peace Initiative Platform:** A "Peace Initiative Platform" should be established composed of experts, scholars, NGOs and other related actors. The main function of this platform is to rethink the areas of conflicts such as wars, political violence, terror and discrimination that mark the current world and to develop recommendations for the solution of disputes.

"Peace Platform Initiative" should be composed of individuals with different religious and national backgrounds with no official appoint-

ments and should meet on a regular basis. It is expected that a platform comprising such individuals is expected to work together and air views not in line with the interests of their countries but according to the dictates of their conscience. If such a platform works effectively, an irreplaceable body that can help ending international crises may emerge to which the UN and other inter-governmental organizations as well as states can apply for views.

This platform should be considerably different from the previous projects. Former initiatives aiming essentially at promoting dialogue have contributed to the common objective of peace and they still function as such. However, these initiatives mostly adopted using an extremely careful language to avoid exerting unintended impact as far as common objectives are concerned. Moreover, they were forced to confine their field of activity and discourse on the basis of a framework drawn by the states they represented. The difference of the current initiative lies in the fact that those involved in it are authorized to develop a discourse and an action plan relatively detached from the framework drawn by political leadership which assembled

the group. Moreover, they are qualified to be witness of the truth in the face of constantly changing ethnic, religious and other kinds of international problems by openly declaring right and wrong without feeling to oblige to be politically correct while also taking the risk of attracting reactions of various groups.

**Cultural and Intellectual Activities:** Innovative studies should be launched and supported that would challenge deeply rooted judgments about the Eastern/Islamic and Western civilizations, and emphasize the philosophical and cultural roots shared by Muslim and Western societies. There are a number of activities to recommend in this category. For example, books and documentaries may be prepared to underline that history of Islam and Christianity doesn't merely consist of conflicts but also has peaceful relations in places such Andalusia, Jerusalem and Istanbul where peaceful co-existence lasted for centuries. Moreover, preparation of reports and books may be commissioned to correct misunderstandings, stereotypes and prejudices by studying how the Muslim World and the West perceive one another. Additionally, research concerning legal and social problems which Muslims in Europe

and Christians in the Middle East face may be supported.

**Activities on Leaders Level:** The success of this initiative led by Spain and Turkey will be facilitated by the conciliatory engagement and intervention of leaders of these countries in global political problems to find solutions. On the other hand, such an initiative will set an example and inspire other countries and leaders to take similar steps.<sup>28</sup> In this context, publicizing the accomplishments of the leaders of both countries with reference to their successful interventions and mediations in crisis may also strengthen the project and promote its ideals. Another step that should be taken by leaders concerns the establishment of necessary instruments to ensure the continuation of political support when they leave office. The project should be carried on both political and civil society levels<sup>29</sup>. In this context, Tsutsumibayashi's observation concerning the dialogue of civilizations is also valid for the Alliance of Civilizations. Individuals and civil society organizations

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<sup>28</sup> It is reported that France and Egypt have currently embarked upon a similar project

<sup>29</sup> Tsutsumibayashi, *ibid*, p. 112.

from the East and the West with a sympathetic commitment to ideals of such a project and moral values based on the sense of “justice” should be brought together to carry out various civil society activities while receiving political support only when needed.



## Conclusion

Walter Benjamin speaks about a history of barbarism inherent in the history of civilization. As a matter of fact, when we look back from the 21st century, what we see is not at all comforting for mankind. If the current human condition is considered as the dominant situation, one can find no positive sign indicating that history would flow in a better direction.

However, the past could have been different than what it had been and so could be future. Sometimes it is possible to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable parties, or at least to mitigate hostilities, thus every step to this end is a meaningful one. Sometimes problems remain irresolvable simply because of lack of communication, yet being like Solomon who understands various languages would mean establishing peace despite all differences.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative points to the existence of a substantial potential to achieve aforementioned objectives although it has some limitations as indicated above. The initiative might be a significant step with its potential bringing us closer to the ideal of global peace because the initiative has already begun to make a considerable impact. This initiative has also encouraged other countries to introduce similar projects among them. However, the success of this and other similar initiatives depends on their sustainability and continuity independent of the political climate in Spain and Turkey. Any possible doubts concerning this aspect of the project should be dispelled. The main method of dispelling such doubts and ensuring the continuity of "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative beyond political conjuncture is the formation of civil institutions.

The foundation to be laid together for the Alliance of Civilization may perhaps make a "butterfly impact" in search for a better world far beyond the imagination of its initiators and supporters. In this sense, preserving this voice is an essentially a moral responsibility for those who value justice and peace.