Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

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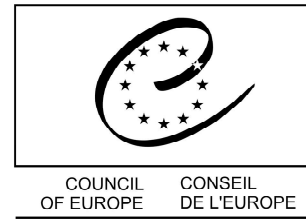OF EUROPE

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A new notion of media?
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Turkey

Spotlights on media literacy and users' empowerment

> **"Coming together is a beginning,**
> **Keeping together is progress,**
> **Working together is success."[1]**
> **Henry FORD (1863-1947)**
> **Founder of Ford Motor Company**

I. PREFACE

Vertiginous developments in the media and new communication services urge to transform both the content and technology used for media. For instance it is transforming broadcaster to service provider, content by producer to user-generated content and viewer to user and/or consumer. The "one to many" broadcasting is also transforming to the "one to one" plus the "one to many" and the "many to many" communication. The new aspects and the new terms occur such as electronic media, interactive media, non-linear media and etc.

While the content, technology and structure of the media is transforming as mentioned above, the relationship between human rights and media is needed to be examined. The freedom of expression, privacy, personal data, right of reply, copyright and neighbouring rights issues are prior among these.

Media, as an indispensible element of democratic and social life, will increasingly progress to be essential for individuals in their daily lives in the future. They will participate in the democratic and social life more and more and they will communicate with other people in cross-border and cross-cultural manner. Besides, "new virtual communities" will be established online and they will cluster around the subject-based or appreciation-based environments. These communities will also eliminate the social restrictions. This might cause more mutual understanding among communities.

The Alliance of Civilisations (AoC) project which is carried out by Turkey and Spain is aiming to construct such kind of communication links among the individuals from different cultures and religions. In order to understand the leading role and the future projects of the AoC concerning the media and new communication services here is some general information about the AoC.

II. ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS AT A GLANCE / IN BRIEF[2]

What is Alliance of Civilizations?

Alliance of Civilization is an initiative which was launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey.

What is the mission of AoC?

With more than 85 member countries the Alliance functions, both globally and within the UN system, in the following capacities:

- A **bridge builder and convener**, connecting people and organizations devoted to promoting trust and understanding between diverse communities, particularly – but not exclusively – between Muslim and Western societies;
- A **catalyst and facilitator** helping to give impetus to innovative projects aimed at reducing polarization between nations and cultures through joint pursuits and mutually beneficial partnerships;
- An **advocate** for building respect and understanding among cultures and amplifying voices of moderation and reconciliation which help calm cultural and religious tensions between nations and peoples;
- A **platform** to **increase visibility**, enhance the work and highlight the profile of initiatives devoted to building bridges between cultures; and
- A **resource** providing access to information and materials drawn from successful cooperative initiatives which could, in turn, be used by member states, institutions, organizations, or individuals seeking to initiate similar processes or projects.

What are the objectives of AoC?

Based on the recommendations made in the AoC High-level Group Report, the work of the Alliance of Civilizations is structured around the following three objectives:
- Develop a **network of partnerships** with States, international organizations, civil society groups, and private sector entities that share the goals of the Alliance of Civilizations, to reinforce their interaction and coordination with the UN system;
- Develop, support, and highlight **projects** that promote understanding and reconciliation among cultures globally and, in particular, between Muslim and Western societies;
- **Establish relations and facilitate dialogue** among groups that can act as a force of moderation and understanding during times of heightened cross-cultural tensions.

What are the main fields of action of AoC?

As stipulated in the AoC High-level Group Report, there are four main fields of action:
- Education (including media education and media literacy);
- Youth;
- Migration;
- Media (including new media and communication services).

What are the related activities in the field of education under AoC?[3]

Global and cross-*cultural* education: Nations with increasingly multi-religious and multi-ethnic populations must recognize the need for more inclusive education about the world and its peoples. In the past few decades, many prominent universities and research centers around the world have been advancing efforts to

develop "world history" or "history of humanity" programs with multi-polar approaches. Growing efforts to teach interdisciplinary world history in colleges and schools contribute to developing knowledge and appreciation of the diversity and interdependence of global cultures, and to building a sense of shared human experience.

Media literacy education: The constant exposure of populations to media presents an educational challenge, which has increased in the electronic and digital age. Evaluating information sources requires skills and critical thinking and is an educational responsibility the importance of which is often underestimated. Separating fact from opinion, evaluating text and image for bias, and constructing and deconstructing a text based on principles of logic are teachable skills. Media literacy instruction is not widely recognized for its importance as an aspect of civic and peace education and therefore few instructional programs have been developed as part of basic modern education.

New technologies and access to the Internet: Poor penetration of computers and lack of access to the Internet in developing countries – known as the digital divide – reinforce inequities and hinder cross-cultural learning. Without widespread Internet access, particularly in school systems, populations in these regions will be unable to participate fully in what is becoming the primary means for accessing information and for cross-cultural interaction in the world. Expanding Internet access in developing countries is necessary if youth from these regions are to gain access to a wider array of information and the means for communicating with people of other national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. These efforts need to be combined with support for – or creation of – tools and e-spaces which foster inter-cultural dialogue and understanding.

What are the related activities in the field of media under AoC?

How the media shape our views: The media in all its forms holds the potential to serve as a bridge between cultures and societies. The frequently stated goal of the media is to inform and educate viewers and readers. Yet, some of the strongest pressures in today's world – political control and market forces – hamper the production of both quality news and entertainment programming that present a well-balanced portrayal of foreign cultures. Increased access of Muslim populations to news produced by Muslim sources has raised popular awareness of events in Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan. News that highlights the victimization of fellow Muslims fosters public sympathy and solidarity. In the West, an appreciably more nationalistic and at times anti-Muslim tone has become evident in news and commentary, especially since the events of 11 September 2001.

Press freedom and responsibility: Journalism in many countries is subject to a lack of press freedom; where such freedom exists, market forces and nationalistic sentiments often result in the irresponsible practice of these freedoms. Objective reporting and the presentation of a diversity of perspectives are needed to prevent stereotypes and misrepresentations from blocking the flow of reliable information.

The impact of entertainment media: Entertainment media also fuels hostile perceptions. There is an urgent need for balanced images of ordinary Muslims in Western mass media. There are however emerging positive signs that since 11 September 2001, Muslims living in the West are becoming more involved in Hollywood and film productions in Europe in order to generate more accurate depictions of themselves and their faith.

The Internet and the digital revolution: Accompanying these trends in both the West and in the Muslim world is the advent of "new media". The Internet and the development of digital media production and distribution have opened new avenues for media consumers to become media producers and disseminators and have provided means for vastly increased people-to-people communication. While the Internet can be used for destructive purposes, it also has a wide range of positive applications: its openness makes it an ideal network for social interaction, and a unique forum for exchanging ideas and information. In that regard, the Internet offers an effective mechanism to bridge cultural and religious divides, linking activists capable of promoting dialogue and understanding.

What are the other initiatives in this field taken by the other actors?[4]

- Council of Europe – *Intercultural Dialogue*;
- European Union;
- Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE);
- Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALESCO);
- Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures;
- Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO);
- Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA).

"Peace at home, peace in the world." Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK (1881-1938) Founder and the First President of Republic of Turkey

III. REPUBLIC OF TURKEY ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS NATIONAL STRATEGY[5]

A. INTRODUCTION

Turkey, being conscious of its cultural heritage of peaceful coexistence and being an insider to the cultures, traditions and institutions of the West for nearly two centuries, is in a unique position to understand the significance of dialogue among civilizations and to apprehend the dire consequences that may result from the absence of tolerance and understanding among cultures. This is why the Alliance of Civilizations, initiated by the Turkish Prime Minister, Mr. Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN and Spanish Prime Minister Mr. José Luis Rodríguez ZAPATERO, and launched by the UN Secretary-General Mr. Kofi ANNAN as a UN project in 2005, has been adopted wholeheartedly in Turkey.

The High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, co-chaired by Minister of State Prof. Dr. Mehmet AYDIN, and by the former General Director of UNESCO Mr. Federico MAYOR, fulfilled the mandate given to them and issued a Report in Istanbul in November 2006. The Report, with its keen analyses, rich content and concrete recommendations is considered a landmark document, particularly with respect to its emphasis on an action-driven approach to prevent conflicts, reduce tension, and increase dialogue and cooperation among civilizations. The Alliance is rightfully regarded as the peace project of the 21st century.

The UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban KI-MOON's commitment to the project, his appointment of the former President of Portugal Mr. Jorge SAMPAIO as the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, and last but not least the increasing support of the Group of Friends, make us highly optimistic about the current success and future potential of our initiative.

The problems that challenge us today are of a complex nature; hence the strategies that we develop must match their complexity. Like in many other situations, the best way to achieve alliance among cultures is through multiple strategies: initiating immediate cooperation when possible, appealing to the strength of arguments when needed, and providing various incentives to make cooperation preferable when appropriate. Complex and multifaceted though it is, our strategy is a strategy of action, not of mere thought or talks. We consider inertia or indifference towards problems that are undermining peaceful relations among nations as the worst possible approach. Thus the initial engagement with these problems begins with a proper cognitive and emotive reaction. However, the current situation of the world requires from us to do more and to join our efforts in unison for the common good as it was indicated frequently and amply in the HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations. An example of good practice at the international level was provided in 2006 in a joint effort by the Turkish and Spanish Prime Ministers, who published the article "A Call for Respect and Calm" in handling the cartoon crisis. To increase the number of these kinds of cooperative efforts is one of the main objectives of Turkey's National Strategy.

The successful completion of Turkey's full accession into the European Union, which has been underway since 1963, will be a good example of the Alliance of Civilizations and of the coexistence of communities and individuals from different religions and cultures in a milieu of peace and tolerance.

In order to realize the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations, peace and cooperation among individuals and nations should first be seen as a public good for the benefit of all. Wars and conflicts are not, and should not, be seen as necessary steps of human progress; their decline in number, scope and effect will only give way to our hopes for a

peaceful future for humanity. Peace and cooperation must be perceived as the normative ground upon which human relations develop and human potential flourishes. This change of perception requires a major restructuring of our thoughts and beliefs towards relations among individuals, societies, institutions, nations and cultures. In sum, what is needed is a passionate heart, a firm resolution, a new mindset. To provide for all three together in a coherent way, our national strategy aims to realize projects and activities toward the values and goals of the Alliance of Civilizations. The key concepts that guide our strategy and motivate our actions are pluralism and diversity, friendship and cooperation, dialogue and understanding, and respect for human dignity and gender equality.

Pluralism and Diversity: Although diversity can create difficulties, it can also be a rich resource for solutions to the problems that we are facing today. Many consider diversity to be the real engine behind social progress. A lack of diversity can even be seen as the cause of stagnation that affects many societies. Diversity and pluralism require cognitive skills that promote different ways of perceiving and interpreting problems and generating a wide range of solutions for them. Diverse groups and societies outperform homogeneous ones. People with different cultural backgrounds are more likely to see the world differently and to have fresh perspectives on important matters in life. Human progress depends as much on our ability to turn our differences into advantages as it does on our readiness to deal with new problems. A diverse society is also more likely to have talented individuals who lead their communities to safe shores in troubled times. Diversity is beneficent when there is a coherent structure upon which diverse opinions, interests and acts can converge. When individuals are constantly competing against each other, and perpetually trying to undo what others achieve, diversity has little to offer.

Friendship and Cooperation: Cooperation and friendship among cultures proceeds in different dimensions. In some cases, a valid norm is sufficient for cooperation and in others, face-saving concerns might be a strong incentive for individuals or groups to work together. At times, concerns about being left out or being isolated may also motivate cooperation. However, unlike cooperation between two individuals through reciprocal relations, alliance among cultures can require carefully formed incentives and commonly shared values. Cooperation itself does not necessarily carry an objective value, since two individuals or groups may cooperate to the detriment of a third one. The perspective of this potential third party has to be built into the general structure of our strategies. In our strategy, participation for the common good is the rule.

Dialogue and Understanding: There are various well known methods to be applied for problems that arise in the area of intercultural-relations, and these methods include negotiation, conflict resolution and mediation. Dialogue is an approach which is related to these methods, but less clearly defined. This can be taken as an advantage since dialogue, being more flexible, can be easily adapted to each specific situation. Furthermore, dialogue requires cooperation at the minimum level without which the participants could not even carry out their interaction. Dialogue and the processes that are conducive to it are therefore the main tools with which we may begin to work on issues that emerge out of our differences in values, beliefs and acts.

There are several criteria that test genuine inter-cultural communication. Deepening one's knowledge about one's own culture and cultivating an appreciation for other cultures come first. Moreover, without the critical skills necessary for evaluating constantly changing information, dialogue is unlikely to progress very far. Finally, dialogue entails an ethical stance through which our interactions cast off their habitual routine and transform into a significant relation. These criteria do not only make dialogue possible but also constitute the basics without which no long term relation can last.

Respect for Human Dignity and Gender Equality: During various stages of policy making, planning, evaluation and implementation, respect for human dignity and gender equality will form the focal point that defines our activities. Disagreements are the brute facts of life. We often disagree not only in our tastes but even in our perceptions of facts, and, more importantly, in our choices of ethical norms. Some norms, however, are too valuable to be a subject for negotiation. Our strategy is based on respect for human dignity, gender equality, freedom, tolerance, and the democratic governance that lets these values function fully in a pluralistic society.

B. STRUCTURE

1. AoC National Coordination Committee

In order to realize the National Strategy of the Alliance of Civilizations in its entirety and to secure coordination among the relevant Ministries, institutions and non-governmental organizations, an AoC National Coordination Committee will be established and its director and members will be appointed by the Prime Minister. The National Coordination Committee, which will operate under the guidance of Minister of State, Prof. Dr. Mehmet AYDIN, will organize regular meetings during 2008 – 2009 and prepare an annual report to be presented to the Prime Ministry regarding the developments in the area of Alliance of Civilizations. The projects included in the National Strategy will be implemented by the relevant Ministries.

The National Coordination Committee will consist of the representatives from the following Ministries.

Ministry of State (Prof. Dr. Mehmet AYDIN)

Ministry of State (Mr. Faruk CELIK)
Ministry of State (Mrs. Selma Aliye KAVAF)
Ministry of State (Prof. Dr. Omer DINCER)
Ministry of Interior Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of National Education
Ministry of Labor and Social Security
Ministry of Culture and Tourism
Ministry of Environment and Forestry

2. Grand National Assembly

Since a significant number of the Members of the Grand National Assembly are already involved with various activities and projects that come under the umbrella of intercultural dialogue, the National Coordination Committee will work closely with them to coordinate various efforts and maximize their outcome.

3. Municipalities And Local Authorities

The National Coordination Committee will cooperate with the municipalities and local authorities so that the main objectives of the Alliance are reflected in their social policies, and secure the involvement of individuals and groups at the community level.

4. Civil Society and Business Organizations

As recommended in the High Level Group Report, the National Coordination Committee will aim to secure the involvement of national and international organizations and civil society groups in the projects and activities of the Alliance of Civilizations. Among these organizations are UNESCO, UNDP, OSCE, OIC, IRCICA, Anna Lind Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, TİKA, TESEV, SETA, TOBB, TUSİAD, and MUSİAD. In implementing the AoC projects concerning the youth, the National Coordination Committee will seek the cooperation of national and international youth organizations such as the Youth for the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative.

5. Processes

The Projects included in the National Strategy will implemented at three levels: (a) new projects will be initiated, such as organizing meetings, publishing articles and books, and establishing centres for cultural dialogue at the universities; (b) support will be provided for the ongoing projects that are active toward the objectives of the AoC, such as the projects that are listed below and are currently implemented by the Ministries and NGOs; and finally (c) a dialogue perspective will be injected into the existing projects that are likely to adapt some of their aims and content to the general aims of the Alliance. (To prevent repetition, the projects under the responsibility of more than one Ministry are mentioned only once.)

> **"Come, come again, whoever you are, come!**
> **Heathen, fire worshipper or idolatrous, come!**
> **Come even if you broke your penitence a**
> **hundred times, Ours is the portal of hope,**
> **come as you are."**
> **MEVLANA (1207-1273)**
> **Poetry and Philosopher**

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMANDATIONS

In the forthcoming decade we will intensively discuss the role of media and new communication services in the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Alliance of Civilisations is one of the greatest and large-scale projects in the field of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. AoC is also a peace construction project like others stated earlier. AoC is aiming to make use of media and new communication services during all of the phases of the project.

In the light of above mentioned context we as Turkey, one of the founding member states of the Council of Europe and one of the initiator Parties of AoC recommend that;

Council of Europe Member States should co-operate among themselves and with other international organisations and relevant public and private actors for cross cultural and human rights education;

Council of Europe Member States should also co-operate for media literacy education by taking into consideration the new media and communication services;

Council of Europe Member States should collaborate for Internet access for all by taking into consideration the disabled people such as handicapped people, the elderly and technology-illiterate people.

Council of Europe Member States should encourage youth leaders and civil society activists to develop intercultural dialogue and to conduct common organisations and projects in order to understand each other better.

Council of Europe Member States should collaborate to create mechanisms for immigrant populations by communicating with immigrant community leaders and or their associations for their integration to the society where they live.

Council of Europe Member States should encourage the media organisations and media professionals to cooperate to establish sustainable dialogue to respect values mutually between different cultures and religious.

V. REFERENCES

[1] http://thinkexist.com/quotes/henry_ford/

[2] www.unaoc.org

[3] UN Alliance of Civilizations Report of the High-Level Group, 13 November 2006.

[4] White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together as Equals in Dignity", Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 7 May 2008.

[5] http://www.medeniyetlerittifaki.org.tr/