

# THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INITIATIVE IN GLOBALIZATION ERA: CONCEPT, PROSPECTS AND PROPOSALS

**Dr. Firat BAYAR<sup>1</sup>**

## **Summary**

*Apart from multiple benefits, the dynamics of the contemporary globalization process brings forth various challenges to the entire world which are unprecedented and fairly complex. What these challenges display in common is that they can only be addressed through global effort and partnership. In other words, no single individual state can effectively cope with these challenges per se which are truly transboundary in nature. In that respect, what we urgently need is an “alliance of civilizations” logic and mentality. A high level of multilateralism and interdependency will never come into existence unless a platform of progressive dialogue between different cultures is established. Effective global partnerships can only come into existence through evading inherent prejudice towards alternative cultures. On that basis, this paper aims to demonstrate that the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, launched by Spain and Turkey under the auspices of the United Nations is one of the concrete and effective approaches to turn the latter philosophy into practice.*

## **Keywords**

Globalization, global governance, overlapping communities of fate, multilateralism, Alliance of Civilizations Initiative, cartoon crisis

## **Introduction**

Apart from multiple benefits, the dynamics of contemporary globalization process brings forth various challenges to the entire world. This process is characterized by radical change affecting all spheres of

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<sup>1</sup> Third Secretary, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed in this paper belong to the author and do not necessarily correspond to those of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

human activity through rapid aggregation and disaggregation. These challenges are being directed through various and contradictory tendencies; they are unprecedented and fairly complex. Global terrorism and insecurity, hunger and poverty, and environmental degradation are only some among many of these challenges that are currently encountered.

What these challenges display in common is that they can only be addressed through global partnerships. In other words, no single individual state can effectively cope with these challenges *per se* which are truly transboundary in nature. Therefore we are living in unique junctures that the world demands more and more multilateralism to survive. Unless global partnership mechanisms are founded through global collective wisdom, it will not be possible to cope with these challenges.

In that respect, the “clash of civilizations” thesis leads us just to the other end of the spectrum. What is urgently needed is rather an “alliance of civilizations” conception. A high level of multilateralism and interdependency will never appear unless a platform of progressive dialogue between different cultures is established. Effective global partnerships can only come into existence through evading inherent prejudice towards alternative cultures.

On that basis, this paper aims to demonstrate that the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) Initiative, launched by Spain and Turkey under the auspices of the United Nations is one of the concrete and effective approaches to turn the latter philosophy into practice. In that respect, the paper is consisted of two major sections. In the first section, contemporary globalization process is examined with reference to the phenomena of globalization, global governance, “overlapping communities of fate” and the need for multilateralism. In the light of these topics, the second section deals with the AOC Initiative in detail. This part consists of sub-sections such as the Initiative itself, the recent cartoon crisis and indispensability of the AOC Initiative, and proposals for further action. Finally, there are brief concluding remarks, with several points on the special role of Turkey concerning the Initiative.

## **1. Contemporary Globalization Process**

### **1.1. Globalization**

The globalization process is the most influential dynamic in shaping our world in the contemporary era. Nonetheless, globalization still constitutes a subject which is fairly controversial and contested all around the world. This is the case with respect to its definition, history and impact. For instance, globalization is perceived as the process of internationalization, liberalization, universalization, modernization, de-territorialization, etc. Moreover it is classified in terms of a variety of dimensions, economic, political, social and cultural. A similar attitude is set forth with respect to its scale, chronology, impact, etc., as well.

In that sense, the concept of globalization is in the midst of a danger of becoming a cliché, which is being used to encompass everything; yet which delivers little insight into the human condition in the contemporary era.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, a study on the topic of globalization needs to get started by being precise on its definition. This is particularly important for such an analysis on the alliance of civilizations, the main subject in this article.

On that basis, this study employs the following definition of globalization:

“Globalization means the process of increasing interconnectedness between societies such that events in one part of the world more and more have effects on peoples and societies far away”.<sup>3</sup>

Based on that definition, we could argue that globalization is simply the “expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction”. In that sense it symbolizes a major transformation in the social organization of humanity which links distant communities with

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<sup>2</sup> Held D., McGrew A., Goldblatt D. and Perraton J., “Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Baylis J. and Smith S., “Introduction”, in ed. by Baylis J. and Smith S., “The Globalization of World Politics”, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.8

each other.<sup>4</sup> On that basis, this multi-faceted interconnectedness triggers a major shift in not only the political and economic relations; but also the social and cultural interactions between different parts of the world.

The globalization process in the contemporary era is thus related to the radical transformation in the “problematic of time-space distancing”, ordering of social life across time and space. Today, the degree of time-space distancing is significantly higher than before, and the relations between “local involvements” and “interactions across distance” are continuously getting “stretched”.<sup>5</sup>

Globalization basically refers to that stretching process, the latter meaning that in the current world of affairs, events, decisions and activities taking place in one corner of the world have significant effects and outcomes in distant regions. In the contemporary era, there are numerous global, regional, trans-national institutions and networks of rule-making and surveillance. Hundreds of multilateral organizations and thousands of NGOs monitor and regulate many sectors of the global activity. Thus, states and governments account for only individual units in this overall structure.<sup>6</sup>

This process refers to nothing but the emergence of the notion of “global politics”, simply referring to the worldwide ramifications of decisions or actions taken in one part of the world. Therefore, globalization refers to the change in these spatio-temporal processes, underpinning the transformation in the organization of human affairs through expanding human activity all over the globe.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Held D. and McGrew A., “The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction”, in ed. by Held D. and McGrew A., “The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> Giddens A., “The Globalizing of Modernity”, in ed. by Held D. and McGrew A., “The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.60.

<sup>6</sup> McGrew A., “Globalization and Global Politics”, in ed. by Baylis J. and Smith S., “The Globalization of World Politics”, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 22-24.

<sup>7</sup> Held D. and McGrew A., “The End of the Old Order? Globalization and the Prospects for World Order”, in ed. by Dunne T., Cox M. and Booth K., “The Eighty Years’ Crisis”, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 232; Held D. and McGrew A., “Introduction”, in ed. by Held D. and McGrew A., “Governing Globalization: Power, Authority and Global Governance”, Polity Press, Oxford, 2002 (b), p.5; Held D., McGrew A., Goldblatt D. and Perraton J., “Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p.67; Held D., “Democratic Accountability and Political Effectiveness from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, Government and Opposition, Special Issue on Global Governance and Public Accountability, Vol 39, Number 2, Spring 2004, p. 382-386; Held D., “From Executive to Cosmopolitan Multilateralism”, in ed. by Held D. and Koenig-Archibugi M., “Taming Globalization: Frontiers of Governance”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 173-183.

This phenomenon of “global politics” is invalidating the traditional distinction between the “domestic” and the “foreign”. Modern political thought as well as institution-building which have been based on this distinction are being questioned in today’s world. In the contemporary world, in simplest terms, politics “everywhere” is related to politics “everywhere else”. Therefore the traditional orthodox approaches to international relations theory based on the domestic/foreign duality provide limited insight in the functioning of current global affairs. In the contemporary state of world affairs, global activities have local repercussions, and the other way around. Therefore, today, the world is moving on the way towards becoming a shared social space. This process could be called “intermestic” [inter(national)(do)mestic].<sup>8</sup>

This framework of “global politics” has important repercussions on the social and cultural domains. In the sphere of “global politics”, nations, peoples and social movements are interlinked with each other by various forms of communication. Obviously, the current revolution in information and communication technologies facilitate these networks in significant ways. These channels of communication facilitate free movement of concepts, symbols and images in a rapid fashion all around the world. Developments taking place at local levels do have repercussions at the global level and it is getting increasingly difficult for people to live around the world in an isolated fashion. The link between “physical setting”, “social situation” and politics is getting blurred. New communication systems, new forms of political reference and new modes of understanding create new ways of living.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2. Global Governance

On that basis, the aforementioned contemporary globalization process and the emergence of “global politics” bring forth a new system of global rule and order. Globalization is re-engineering the power, authority and functions of national governments in substantial ways. Although the state still remains as the ultimate unit in world politics

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<sup>8</sup> McGrew A., “Globalization and Global Politics”, in ed. by Baylis J. and Smith S., “The Globalization of World Politics”, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 20-23

<sup>9</sup> Held D., “Democratic Accountability and Political Effectiveness from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, Government and Opposition, Special Issue on Global Governance and Public Accountability, Vol 39, Number 2, Spring 2004, p. 364-368.

today, it cannot retain the sole command of what transpires within its territorial boundaries as before. The main reason for that is the fact that global politics is currently being designed and conducted through complex networks, composed of both states and non-state actors.

This complex multilayered system, emerging as a result of the dynamics of globalization is defined as global governance. The notion of global governance is important from the view point of our main subject, the concept of the alliance of civilizations. Therefore, it would be beneficial to briefly dwell on that in this part of the paper.

In simplest terms, governance refers to the collectivity of ways individuals and institutions, both public and private, manage their common affairs. Thereby, it reflects a continuing process in which diverse interests are accommodated to generate cooperative actions. Within that framework, governance encompasses both formal and informal institutions and arrangements to sustain that goal.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it symbolizes a new paradigm of power which is characterized less by a static and fixed hierarchy and more of flexible and changeable networks instead.<sup>11</sup>

When we extend this conception of governance to the global realm, the issue gets more complicated as global governance refers to a much broader domain than what we know as the international system composed of territorial states. First of all, unlike the case in nation-states, there is no higher political authority in the global sphere. Secondly, in the current globalization era, we observe a considerable process of disaggregation in the authority of states, the primary units of the system. Therefore, global governance addresses a much broader domain than the formal institutions and organizations in the management of international affairs. It includes systems of rule at all levels of human activity in which the pursuit of goals have transnational repercussions. For instance, the domain of global governance embraces private agencies that seek to realize and resolve global problems. For Rosenau, the reason for that broad comprehension is very simple: “in an ever more interdependent

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<sup>10</sup> The Commission on Global Governance, “Our Global Neighbourhood”, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.2.

<sup>11</sup> Lamy P. and Laidi Z., “A European Approach to Global Governance”, [www.progressive-governance.net](http://www.progressive-governance.net), 2003, p.2.

world where what happens in one corner or at one level may have consequences for what occurs at every other corner and level.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, global governance should not be conceptualized as a phenomenon equivalent to world/global government. It does not refer to a coercive global authority dictating order on the global level. On the contrary, interactions among constituent parts of global governance are not arranged and designed in formal hierarchies. Collectivity of adequate mechanisms in the system is much more inclusive, participatory and democratic. Diverse sources of rule making, political authority and power take part in it. The governance arrangements taking place within this complex framework are public, private as well as hybrid. Therefore, the basic principle of global governance is “conflictual cooperation”.<sup>13</sup>

By the latter term, it is essentially meant that even though there might arise disagreement and clash of approaches among the constitutive elements in the overall governance structure at the initial phases of the negotiations, a degree of eventual accord and partnership is attained in the final stage. This end-result is in no way a product of a dictate or order coming directly from a single authority or power. On the contrary, it reflects the outcome of a comprehensive negotiations process, from which all parties could gain in certain aspects.

As there is no supreme authority in this governance mechanism, the system reflects a polyarchic and pluralist framework depending upon the convening and assembling of multiple agents to perform global policies and regulations. The infrastructure of global governance system is composed of the supra-state, national, transnational and sub-state layers. Therefore, global governance does not refer to a hierarchical, monolithic or unitary activity as there is mutual cooperation and coordination among various actors functioning in the process.

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<sup>12</sup> Rosenau J.N., “Governance in the Twenty-First Century”, in ed. Higgott R. and Payne A., “The New Political Economy of Globalisation”, Volume 2, Cheltenham, UK, 2000, p.39.

<sup>13</sup> Koenig-Archibugi M., “Mapping Global Governance”, in ed. by Held D. and McGrew A., “Governing Globalization: Power, Authority and Global Governance”, Polity Press, Oxford, 2002, p.62; Keohane R.O., “Global Governance and Democratic Accountability”, in ed. by Held D. and Koenig-Archibugi M., “Taming Globalization: Frontiers of Governance”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 132.

### **1.3. “Overlapping Communities of Fate” and the Need for Multilateralism**

The driving force and fundamental principle of this global governance system discussed above is the concept of “overlapping communities of fate”. This refers to the “state of affairs in which the fortunes and prospects of individual political communities are increasingly bound together”.<sup>14</sup> This means that in contemporary world affairs, there are many issues, challenges and problems that stretch beyond the boundaries of individual states and these issues could only be addressed at the global domain in an interdependent manner. Therefore, the “fates” of communities are bound together, which means that no single community or state is competent and potent to handle and cope with these aforementioned challenges in contemporary globalization era.

One of the best examples to cite for this “overlapping communities of fate” phenomenon is related to contemporary global environmental degradation. This problem is currently posing a great variety of risks to the entire planet which are truly unprecedented. Previously, environmental matters used to be confined to local or regional areas. Therefore societies had the opportunity to escape its consequences easily by moving on to unspoiled places and as a result of that, environmental outcomes were not much felt in neighboring areas. However, this situation has entirely changed in the contemporary era. Today, environmental risks being faced by humanity are global in essence and affect the daily lives of people all over the world which might have irreversible outcomes in the future.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the fates of different communities in the world are significantly “overlapping”.

Global environmental degradation is only one of the major issues of the current era that could be given as an exemplification for the “overlapping communities of fate” phenomenon. Today, the solution to a great variety of challenges, in the spheres of politics, economics, culture, health, etc., could only be viable through partnership and collaboration of multiple nation-states. In other words, a high level of multilateralism is

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<sup>14</sup> Held D., “Democratic Accountability and Political Effectiveness from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, *Government and Opposition*, Special Issue on Global Governance and Public Accountability, Vol 39, Number 2, Spring 2004, p. 382-386.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobs M., “The Environment, Modernity and the Third Way”, in ed. by Giddens A., “The Global Third Way Debate”, Polity Press, UK, 2001, p.325-326; Greene O., “Environmental Issues”, in ed. by Baylis J. and Smith S., “The Globalization of World Politics”, Oxford University Press, 2004, p.452.

vital to cope with the major problems of current era, in which the overriding principle is the “overlapping communities of fate”.

Obviously, such kind of a multilateralism cannot be constructed and carried out with a philosophy of a “clash of civilizations”. On the contrary, the ongoing course of life in the context of emerging global governance system is directing humanity to the contrary, towards an “alliance of civilizations”. Multilateralism can never be obtained in the absence of progressive dialogue between different cultures. Effective global partnerships could only be ensured through overcoming various sorts of biases towards others. Materializing and effectuating the latter will considerably facilitate to resolve the challenges of contemporary globalization based on the notion of “overlapping communities of fate”.

Therefore, the domain of the alliance of civilizations is nothing but the moral realm of humanity. In other words, the role of individual human beings reveals as the key notion, the latter based on the core principles of egalitarian individualism, reciprocal recognition and impartial treatment.<sup>16</sup> This approach naturally overthrows the traditional distinction between domestic/international, territorial/non-territorial, insider/outsider, etc. As in the discourse theory of morality, elaborated in the literature of critical theory, all practices of exclusion are negated and a mutual dialogue among different cultures and civilizations is set up, in which each party is included in the process.<sup>17</sup> This is the core of the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) Initiative, that we turn now.

## **2. The Alliance of Civilizations Initiative: Proposals for Further Action**

### **2.1. The Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) Initiative**

The “clash of civilizations” thesis was suggested by Samuel P. Huntington, originally formulated in the *Foreign Affairs Journal* in 1993. This term had first been coined by renowned historian Bernard Lewis in his “The Roots of Muslim Rage” in the 1990 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*; yet since the publication of Huntington’s book, “The Clash of

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<sup>16</sup> Held D., “Regulating Globalization? The Reinvention of Politics”, in ed. by Giddens A., “The Global Third Way Debate”, Polity Press, UK, 2001, p.400.

<sup>17</sup> Linklater A., “The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era”, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.121-122.

Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order” in 1996, the issue has gained widespread popularity all around the world. The major argument in Huntington’s thesis was that the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War era would be based on civilizational/cultural/religious identity.

Since then, in contradiction with the rationale of the above-mentioned “overlapping communities of fate” phenomenon and the significance of multilateralism which form the *sine qua non* elements of a functioning global governance system in the contemporary era, there emerged unfortunately a tendency congruent with the logic of the clash of civilizations thesis throughout the world. Especially since early 1990s, conflict and tensions based on ethnic and religious grounds have become more frequent. Certain segments of societies have begun to define themselves on the basis of a confrontation between “us” and “others”.

In several circles of the Western world, an adverse stance towards Islam has become relatively more visible, particularly in the aftermath of September 11 events. This attitude of certain Westerners towards Muslims could bluntly be perceived in an ascending proportion. On the other hand, the degree of hatred and temper of the Islamic world in general towards the West have mounted up notably with the occupation in Iraq. On top of that, the chronic problems with the Middle East peace process have further nurtured these pessimistic feelings. This unfavorable confrontation between certain segments of these two parties today influence the course of inter-civilizational dialogue in a considerably adverse manner and that drifts people from both sides to come closer to believe in the postulates of the clash of civilizations discourse.

However, as mentioned above, this process is entirely irrational and in full contradiction with the dynamics of contemporary globalization. The globalization process and the emerging system of global governance is channeling and pushing the world in the opposite direction, namely towards more multilateralism. In other words, in a world in which the overriding principle is the “overlapping communities of fate” phenomenon, the well-being of one depends more and more on the other.

The AOC Initiative is a direct response to this call. The Initiative was initially proposed by Spain in 2004 and soon after, the Spanish officials invited Turkey to sponsor the Initiative. Upon Turkey’s

affirmative reply, the Initiative was officially launched by the UN Secretary General in July 2005. Spain and Turkey assumed the co-sponsorships of the Initiative.

Following the launch of the Initiative, a High Level Group was established which was authorized to produce a program of action. This Group was set up from eminent personalities representing different cultures and religions, co-chaired by Federico Mayor of Spain, President of the Culture of Peace Foundation and former Director General of UNESCO, and Mehmet Aydin of Turkey, Minister of State and Professor of Theology.

This High Level Group was entitled to:

1. provide an assessment of new and emerging threats to international peace and security, in particular the political, social and religious forces that foment extremism;
2. Identify collective actions, at both the institutional and civil society levels, to address these trends;
3. Recommend a practicable program of action for States, international organizations and civil society aimed at promoting harmony among societies.<sup>18</sup>

Toward this end, the High Level Group tried to:

1. Strengthen mutual understanding, respect and shared values among different peoples, cultures and civilizations;
2. Counter the influence of groups fomenting extremism and the exclusion of others who do not share their worldviews;
3. Counter the threat to world peace and stability posed by extremism;
4. Foster awareness in all societies that security is indivisible and is a vital need for all, and that global cooperation is an indispensable prerequisite for security, stability and development.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations, "An Alliance of Civilizations: Terms of Reference for the High Level Group", 25 August, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, "An Alliance of Civilizations: Terms of Reference for the High Level Group", 25 August, 2005, p. 1-2.

Since its establishment, the High Level Group has met on a periodical basis in different parts of the world such as Palma de Mallorca (Spain), Doha (Qatar) and Dakar (Senegal). Eventually, on 13 November 2006 in Istanbul (Turkey), the Group presented its final report to the Secretary General of the United Nations. It is certain that the work of this High Level Group provided a significant value added to the ongoing efforts for the promotion of cooperation among different cultures.

Last of all, to support the work of the High Level Group, a Secretariat was established at UN Headquarters in New York which is engaged in analysis, research and putting forward action-oriented proposals in the areas identified by the Group. In addition to the Secretariat, there is the Group of Friends, consisting of governments and multilateral organizations that support the efforts of the Initiative to counter the rise of polarization and extremism. The Secretariat provided regular briefings to the members of this Group.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.2. The Recent Cartoon Crisis: Indispensability of the AOC Initiative**

As mentioned above, the dynamics of contemporary globalization, the system of global governance, the phenomena of “global politics”, “overlapping communities of fate” and “conflictual cooperation” require individuals, communities and states to cooperate, collaborate and partner with each other in a progressive and ascending fashion. That could only be materialized by augmenting and securing multi-faceted dialogue among these different parties. In other words, an alliance between the latter is by all means an absolute criteria to accommodate and cope with the features and challenges of the current globalization era.

However, the recent printing of ill-assorted cartoons of Prophet Mohammed in various European magazines and the large-scale demonstrations of the Muslim world in reply to these incidents clearly demonstrate that the problem is still really acute. Nonetheless, it is indeed fortunate that the Council of Europe stated in its Conclusion dated 27 February 2006:

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<sup>20</sup> [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org)

“Freedom of expression is a fundamental right and an essential element of a democratic discourse, with an independent judiciary as a safeguard mechanism. Free media are indispensable to a free and open society and to accountable systems of government. Freedoms, however, come with responsibilities. Freedom of expression should be exercised in a spirit of respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions. Mutual tolerance and respect are universal values we should all uphold”.<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, printing of these cartoons by some European magazines was inappropriate. However, it should also be recognized that this crisis is an end-product of the reciprocal distrust between the Western and Muslim worlds. In other words, while searching for the root causes and end-results of this issue, it would be a fallacy to solely allege the European side.

It is readily recognized that some segments within both parties are fairly biased towards each other. Particularly in the post-September 11 era, a notable size of the Western public, intentionally or unintentionally, express their contention that the Muslims are predisposed to terrorism by the nature of their religion. These people argue that, this situation is somehow unconditional and thereby cannot be remedied.

On the other hand, a specific portion of the Muslim world generalizes Western states as the agents of pure imperialism, which are deliberately exploiting cultural and religious differences for their own purposes. At the end, one way or another, there appears a conviction of lack of confidence and discredit between the two parties.

The recent cartoon crisis is one of the rationales among many, substantiating the indispensability of the AOC Initiative. The Initiative could function as an effective barrier deterring such prospective incidents as the cartoon crisis. This aspect is evident in the jointly-written article of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, published at the International Herald Tribune following the cartoon crisis, as well. In this article, they stated that such experiences only aggravate the relations between the two

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<sup>21</sup> Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on Reactions in the Muslim World to Publications in European Media”, 2712nd External Relations Council Meeting, Brussels, 27 February, 2006, p. 1.

sides. What needs to be done in the contrary is that efforts need to gain speed in sustaining tolerance, respect and understanding between the Western and Muslim worlds.<sup>22</sup> This is nothing but the spirit of the AOC Initiative in essence.

### **2.3. Proposals for Further Action**

Further action is urgently needed to advance and carry the Initiative forward. Just to cite a simple example among many concerning the “urgency” of the situation, the Muslim population in Europe is expected to double by 2015 whereas non-Muslim population is projected to fall by at least 3.5 percent by that date. Looking further ahead, compared to today’s 5 percent, according to some projections Muslims will comprise at least 20 percent of Europe’s population by 2050.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned above, this is only one reason that alternative communities ought to learn to co-exist with each other.

On that basis what could be alternative proposals for further action to promote the spirit of the Initiative? It is of utmost severity that concrete steps and precautionary measures need to be taken to strengthen this exercise. We could enumerate both theoretical and practical proposals in this respect.

First of all, both of the parties ought to refrain from voicing expressions portraying terrorism with any kind of religion. This is particularly valid for the Western world. Terrorism cannot be supported by any kind of religious belief for the simple reason that this is totally against their spirit and core principles. This is valid for Islam as well as other religions. By the same token, it is improper to assess the issue in a comparative manner among different religious affiliations. This fact is even acknowledged by Huntington who states in an interview just after the September 11 attacks that: “I don’t think Islam is any more violent than any other religions, and I suspect if you added it all up, more people have been slaughtered by Christians over the centuries than by

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<sup>22</sup> Erdogan R.T. and Zapatero J.L.R., “A Call for Respect and Calm”, International Herald Tribune, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Savage T.M., “Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing”, The Washington Quarterly, 27: 3, Summer 2004, pp. 28.

Muslims”.<sup>24</sup> To sum up, the term “Islamic terrorism”, used by certain segments of the Western world should be avoided. The acts of IRA have never been called as “Catholic terrorism”.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, it should initially be realized that the three monotheistic faiths share much in common than dissimilarity. While there are several differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in some aspects, similarities are much more dominant. They all are monotheistic, believe in prophethood and divine revelation, and have a concept of moral accountability, sanctity of life, value of family, desire for prosperity, social justice, peace and security and responsibility, etc.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the real problem between the two parties does not stem from religious differences in essence. Unfortunately, religious issues are being exploited to cover various kinds of other intentions. The fundamental driving force behind the degeneration of attitudes between the two parties is the great imbalance between political, economic, social conditions they are faced with. Therefore, in lieu of explaining various problems based on religious suppositions, the articulation of religion needs to be explored.<sup>27</sup>

Thirdly, a dual error conducted by both the Western and Islamic worlds is appraising the other as a monolithic structure. That needs to be dispelled. A fraction of Westerners deny the entire Islamic world the contemporary values of peace, rationalism, democracy, etc.<sup>28</sup> A similar erroneous attitude of some Muslim people towards the Western community is the belief that the latter perfectly constitutes an integral bloc with a uniform vision. On that basis, in the eyes of these people, the entire Western world is equated solely with the motives of imperialism, colonialism, expediency in terms of their treatment of the other. Obviously, both arguments are far from satisfactory. Islamic history as well as current political, economic and social dynamics in the West clearly demonstrate invalidity of these assertions.

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<sup>24</sup> Huntington Samuel, “So, are Civilisations at War?”, *The Observer*, October 21, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Armstrong Karen, “The Role of Religion in Today’s Conflict”, [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org), June 7, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Esposito L. J., “Islam and the West After September 11: Civilizational Dialogue or Conflict?”, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, November 2002, pp. 12, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Alliance of Civilizations Working Paper for the High Level Group, Palma de Mallorca, November 27-29 2005, p.4, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Kausch Kristina and Barrenada Isaias, “Alliance of Civilizations: International Security and Cosmopolitan Democracy Seminar Conclusions, FRIDE Working Paper No 13, October 2005, p. 7-8.

Fourthly, an important practical proposal is concerned with the sphere of education. An adequately designed educational curriculum could function as a fruitful tool to subvert bias and prejudices as well as distrust, racism and intolerance among different cultures. It is an important vehicle to replace “ignorance of the other with knowledge of the other” through promoting tolerance and understanding.<sup>29</sup> To this end, organizing academic exchanges between the Western and Muslim school and universities, developing particular education and training programs on alliance of and harmony between different culture and civilizations, publishing special books, magazines or leaflets, or benefiting from information technologies, especially Internet in this direction are among the initial steps to be considered.

The fifth proposal is concerned with the media. In contemporary globalization era, the access of media is unprecedented. Media has overwhelming efficacy in a great many of ways. The large impact of the above-mentioned cartoon crisis all around the world is a direct consequence of that feature. Therefore, comprehensive projects need to be developed to benefit from the power of media towards fulfilling the promises of the AOC Initiative.

Last of all, it would be an additional contribution for the AOC Initiative to utilize from the accumulation of parallel efforts such as the Barcelona Process and Euro-Mediterranean partnership, “Dialogue Among Civilizations”, “World Faiths Development Dialogue” as well as the contributions of international organizations to the subject such as OIC, OSCE, World Economic Forum, etc. That assistance and sharing process will certainly affect the course of the Initiative in a constructive manner. In that respect, the most recent “Ernst Reuter Initiative for Intercultural Dialogue and Understanding”, launched by Germany and Turkey in September 2006, is worth mentioning.<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The primary theme of this paper is that the logic of a clash of civilizations thesis is totally unnatural and irrational in the era of contemporary globalization and governance. Current global dynamics, on

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<sup>29</sup> Alliance of Civilizations, “Report on Education”, Second High Level Group Meeting, Doha, Qatar, 26-28 February, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> “The Ernst Reuter Initiative for Intercultural Dialogue and Understanding”, [www.mfa.gov.tr](http://www.mfa.gov.tr)

the contrary, is run by the principle of “overlapping communities of fate”, which requires more and more multilateralism. Unless a considerable level of multilateralism is sustained at the global level, it will be impossible to cope with the ongoing global challenges that the entire world is currently faced with.

On that basis, what the world desperately needs is an “alliance” rather than a “clash” of civilizations motive. As Serageldin argues: “We should move from confrontation to dialogue, and from dialogue to understanding, and from understanding to a working alliance for the common good of all humanity”.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, the AOC Initiative launched by Spain and Turkey under the auspices of UN is a noteworthy project in terms of transforming the latter motive to practice. Beyond doubt, there is a long journey before the international community to eventually be capable of the declared objectives of this ambitious project.

In this context, it should finally be stated that one of the leading countries that could substantially contribute to this Initiative is Turkey. The elementary reason for this unique role of Turkey in this direction stems from the multi-cultural fabric of the country. By courtesy of her geographical position and historical profundity, Turkey has become the homeland of a mosaic of different cultures, religions and societies. Throughout history, these societies have by and large been able to cohabit with each other on these territories, which yields today a very important asset for those who argue in favor of the AOC Initiative.

Moreover, Turkey is today a country which belongs both to the Western and Islamic worlds, evidenced by her presence in various organizations consisted of members from both platforms. Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Council of Europe and is in the midst of negotiations for acceding to the European Union (EU). This status is concurrent with her membership to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which is an intergovernmental

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<sup>31</sup> Serageldin Ismail, “Accumulated Fuel and Dangerous Sparks: Reflections on the Cartoon Controversy”, [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org), p.5.

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organization comprised of fifty-seven states from Muslim countries. This feature *per se* displays an important added value from Turkey to the spirit of the Initiative.