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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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3rd Focal Points meeting
Remarks on AoC Regional Strategies

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Dear Focal Points

- Good afternoon to you all

- The aim of this working session is twofold: on the one hand, I want to give you detailed information on the Regional Strategies because I really think that there is an information gap to be filled in; on the other hand, I want to consult with you on a number of opening points regarding regional strategies and so I would like to have a frank and open exchange of views with you.

- So let's divide our allocated time – one hour – into three parts: I will take the floor over the first 15 minutes; 30 minutes for you to share your thoughts, and let's keep the last 10 minutes to wrap up and draw conclusions.

- As I recalled this morning, three AoC Regional Strategies were announced in Istanbul: the Regional Strategy for South East Europe; the Euro Mediterranean Regional Strategy; and the Latino-America AoC Regional Strategy.

- Since Istanbul, we have been moving forward on these three fronts, although at different paces and with different timelines.

- So let me go through each one.

South East Europe AoC Regional Strategy

- Until now we held two preparatory meetings in Bosnia involving the active participation of delegations of thirteen AoC countries - Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia as well as Spain and Turkey as co-sponsors of the Alliance of Civilizations.
- International and regional organizations, such as UNESCO, IOM (International Organization for Migration), OSCE, the Council of Europe, its North-South Centre, and the Regional Cooperation Council were also invited to attend the second preparatory meeting.
- These meetings focused on the preparation of three documents - a draft political Declaration on the Regional Strategy, a draft Regional Strategy and a draft Action Plan implementing the strategy in 2010-2012 to be issued at the Sarajevo Conference, to be held on 14th December with the participation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the participating countries. Indeed the preparation of this Conference has also been part of the agenda of the meetings.

- Tomorrow we will have an additional working session on the South East Europe Regional Strategy, hopefully, to finalize the documents.
- As you all know, for the Alliance this is a pilot exercise that I highly value. Not only because it will be the first political commitment by a group of AoC members to achieve common action but also because it concerns a region where this common effort should be placed as a contribution – even modest - to a process of reconciliation.
- This means that what is at stake here is the ability of the Alliance to generate a process contributing to peace-consolidation by addressing the let's say “identity dimensions” of political conflicts.
- Now what are the lessons learned so far from this pilot exercise?
- To start, I would like to underscore four main points:
- Firstly, the AoC is a new process but it has the capacity to bring together different partners and to promote common action. The fact that it is a political initiative under United Nations auspices gives it credibility to act as an honest broker and enables it to bring together and commit a wide array of key players involved in promoting intercultural dialogue.

- Secondly, AoC Regional Strategies are intended to trigger a process of reinforced intercultural dialogue and cooperation among groups of countries. It builds on the existing “acquis” and aims at going further. So only a strong ownership of the process from its inception by participating countries can guarantee that redundancies are avoided and that future action focus on the real needs and meets expectations.
- Thirdly, the role of regional and international organizations is key not only because of their expertise and specific knowledge of the ground, which are crucial to identify and design new common actions, but also because normally they are well-equipped in terms of resources to act as leading forces for the implementation of the agreed new actions.
- Fourthly, because of its limited resources and lack of technical expertise, the role of the Alliance is not intended at all to run the process. To be honest with you, I see the Alliance helping in three main ways: it can act as a political convener of the process; it can assist the Focal Points in the follow up of the regional strategies; it can contribute with its projects to feed the action plans. But, I don't think that we can go further...

- I want to share with you some other thoughts but before that I want to go through the Euro-Mediterranean and the Latin American AoC Regional Strategies.

Euro-Mediterranean AoC Regional Strategy

- This will be our next big challenge.
- As you may remember in Istanbul we presented a common initiative with Anna Lindh Foundation named “Restore Trust and Rebuild Bridges”.
- “Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges” is a cluster of projects presented by various partners – countries members of the Group of Friends, international and regional organizations (such as UNESCO, OIC, the Council of Europe and the European Commission) but also by civil society organizations and indeed by the Anna Lindh Foundation.
- On the top of the initiative there is the proposal put forward by Egypt to host a Conference in Alexandria in spring 2010 to adopt an AoC Regional Strategy to the Euro-Mediterranean area.
- So whereas some of the projects are already being implemented, others were put on hold to be included in a future regional Strategy or are being used to prepare specific components of the Strategy.

- To give you one example: the Italian government has supported a meeting with coastal cities of the Mediterranean which took place in Reggio Calabria on 19 and 20 October.
- In that meeting the Alliance asked mayors to come up with projects of city diplomacy related to intercultural dialogue to be included in the future Regional Strategy. Now there will be a follow up meeting in Lisbon on 18 and 19 January 2010 to agree on the component of city diplomacy of the future Regional Strategy.
- Regarding this Strategy, due to its high sensitiveness, my plans are to start in the near future a first round of bilateral consultations with the potentially involved countries as well as with main relevant international and regional organizations.
- I have already consulted with the Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs during a visit I paid to Cairo two weeks ago as well as with Professor Serageldin, AoC Ambassador of the Alliance, who will be, let's say, our Focal Point for the Alexandria meeting. Indeed in Cairo I also consulted with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Mr. Moussa, who assured me of his support.

- After all the consultations are finished, I will convene a meeting with Focal Points which will take place in January and my plans are to follow a similar path to the South East Europe Regional Strategy.

Latin American AoC Regional Strategy

- There are not that many things to say in this regard because I have just had some pre-consultations with Mr. Enrique Iglesias on this issue.
- Because of time constraints it is not likely that this Regional Strategy will materialize before the Rio Forum.
- For the time being we are trying to enlarge membership of the Alliance to a few more countries in the region and we are reflecting on the building blocks that may be part of this regional strategy which has to deal with specific cultural diversity common challenges to countries in the region .
- So to be honest with you, we are not that advanced and it is not realistic to think that we can make real progress until mid 2010.

Dear Friends

- This is for the informative part of our working session.

- Now, I would like to go a little further and share with you three main wider concerns regarding the Regional Strategies and the National Plans:
- Firstly: on the link between human rights and national plans and regional strategies for intercultural dialogue.
- This is a key point because intercultural dialogue can only take place in an environment where a person is guaranteed safety and dignity, equal opportunities and participation, where different views can be voiced openly without fear, where there are shared spaces for exchanges between cultures to take place.
- So we need to recognize that intercultural dialogue depends upon the full implementation of human, civic, economic, social and cultural rights, as outlined in international legal instruments such as the common framework of principles and values expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in other documents on cultural and religious rights.
- Now my question is: how can we best move ahead on both fronts? How can we best try to combine both perspectives?
- I sincerely would like to hear your opinions on this question.

- Now my second point is the following: as experts point out “intercultural dialogue is a transversal issue which is part of a complex system of governance based on diversity, equality and participation”.
- So to develop strategies of intercultural dialogue as a process of interactive communication within and between cultures we need to raise awareness among policy and decision makers about the need to invest in public policies as they relate to cultural diversity and to intercultural dialogue.
- At the heart of these policies we should place intercultural competencies and skills and integrate their development as part of an overall political vision or national strategy on life-long learning how to live together.
- This means making a big effort at educational level and creating opportunities for cultural-specific learning in each educational system. But this also implies, for instance, implementing and harmonising evaluation methods for intercultural dialogue programmes and activities and improving research methodologies for intercultural comparisons.
- Are we ready to face the challenge seriously? Are we ready to do it all together as a common effort?

- Do you expect the Alliance to promote this kind of approach as a way to contribute in the long run to National Plans?
- I would like to hear you on this point too.
- My third concern is the following: the Alliance needs to further expand its cooperation with international and regional organizations in order to strengthen intercultural dialogue in external and international policies.
- I see in the Regional Strategies a unique opportunity to do it. But I am indeed open to other suggestions you may have.
- Regional Strategies enable us to tackle common problems and implement common solutions. They build on the existing work and represent a platform for collective action.
- This is why I think that we need in the future to invest in regional strategies as much as possible. But again I would like to hear you on this issue because, to be honest with you, sometimes I sense a certain hesitation on your side regarding these initiatives....
- Thanks. The floor is open.