

MALLORCA OPENING STATEMENT BY H.E.

Prof. Dr. Mehmet AYDIN
The Co-chair of the Alliance of Civilization
Minister of State
Turkish Republic

“The Alliance of Civilization” initiative, launched by the Turkish and Spanish Prime Ministers and fully supported by the Secretary General of the UN, is a timely project from many points of view. The vision and the mission of the Initiative is very clear: “To address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that ferment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal the wounds opened by misunderstandings, misrepresentations, misrepresentations, unfounded prejudices, irrational reactions, extremism of all sorts and the unrestrained use of power which has not only physically destroying consequences but culturally confusing, humiliating and alienating effects at a very large scale.”

The Initiative aims to create an enabling atmosphere to contribute to the joint efforts which want to pass from a climate of “clash” through which we are going now, to a climate of “alliance” which is indispensable if we are in search of a peaceful co-existence. We all know that many people, many competent analysts, many world leaders and administrations rejected the idea of a “clash of civilizations.” But this did not prevent some of them from introducing different versions of the “clash argument” into their discourse. Many powerful world leaders did not hesitate, for instance, to explain certain tragic events in terms of civilization-related arguments that run more or less like this: “They are against our values, democracy and human rights regime.” Some well-known scholars were more than ready and happy to give this discourse an academic gloss. Let us remember once more what a Western author stated more than a decade ago: They are against “our secular vision, our Judeo-Christian heritage” and worldwide expansion of both. This is not less than a clash of civilization.¹

¹ See Bernard Lewis “The Roots of Muslim Rage”, *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990.

This argument and its more detailed versions put forward by other authors did not fail to create or strengthen its counter-part: “They are against our religion, our cultural values. They want to destroy us so as to make it easier for them to have a free hand on our natural and human resources by dominating us militarily, materially and even, culturally.” It seems to me fairly clear that to a certain extent, the clash discourse translates the political into the language of civilization, and its counter-part translates the political into the language of religion; thus, both feeding each other.

As the initiators of the Alliance Project state, this new approach is going to be open, comprehensive, dialogical and action-oriented. It is not in search of a scapegoat to lay the blame on. There are extremism, integrism, moral decadence, political opportunism, ruthless and politically corrupt leaders in all cultures and civilizations. They have created a pessimistic environment practically everywhere. That is the reason why most of us began to worry, to be concerned about the future of reasonable pluralism, the politics of multiculturalism, democratic governance, the world security and peace without which we cannot even imagine a human and humane form of co-existence.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative, like all the previous initiatives launched by the UN such as the Promotion of Culture and Peace, and Dialogue Among Civilizations, is of the opinion that a civilizational understanding is not only a possibility but a necessity.

The Alliance of Civilizations initiative has to spare some time and energy in order to produce and gather more reliable knowledge on civilizational commonality and diversity, and a framework that would create a reasonable environment for their management. Here we need more international discussions and debates on this historically, culturally and politically sensitive issue.

However something more than the exchange of knowledge, intellectual, moral and material achievements has to be done in order to translate ideas, knowledge and resolutions into practice. “The Alliance Project” must be, as I have just said, an action-oriented project at all levels, from education to politics.

We are very glad to see that the Alliance of Civilizations initiative received full support from many countries, civil organizations and individual thinkers, politicians and so on. They want to contribute to this endeavor and desire to see that this Initiative become a new and a more reality-congruent way for understanding and explaining quite a number of international affairs.

Why did the two important Mediterranean countries, i.e., Spain and Turkey launch this important initiative? One can think of many reasons: Both countries are situated at the crossroads of historical civilizations. Both have centuries-old experience of statehood and social co-existence. Both are Mediterranean countries, and the Mediterranean Sea lies at the center of civilizations partly created by the Abrahamic monotheistic faiths. Both countries have recently suffered at the hands of terrorist attacks. Both countries believe that the world peace and security are possible only through peaceful ways and means, i.e., dialogue, persuasion, mutual understanding and respect.

I would like to end by thanking for the wonderful hospitality we received from our Spanish Hosts in this lovely Mediterranean island and wish you all a successful meeting.