

23 September 2008

Dear High Representative,

The diversity of civilisations is a basic feature of human society and a driving force for human progress. However, in the last few years, differences in culture and religion have been exploited by radical groups fuelling mutual suspicion, fear, confrontation and violence. This often builds on long-standing inequalities and perceived injustices. This had an impact on international relations contributing to polarisation in world fora, on inter-regional and bilateral relations, and also within societies.

These developments are of deep concern to the EU. We agree there is the need to intensify measures to counter misunderstandings and stereotypes, build up more trust within societies and strengthen bridges between people, communities and nations. At global, regional and national level, action is being taken to protect and manage cultural diversity, based on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

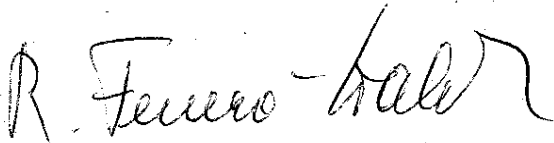
The Alliance of Civilisations was established precisely with the aim of improving understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation, extremism and radicalisation into violence. All the Member States of the European Union as well as the European Commission support the Alliance and are Members of the Group of Friends. We strongly agree with the results-oriented approach adopted by the Alliance under your leadership and welcome, in this respect, the launching of several concrete initiatives at the Madrid Forum last January.

The European Union, for its part, has a long-standing record of promoting intercultural understanding. Respect for cultural diversity lies at the heart of the European project and is central to many internal policies. This year, the European Union has marked the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In its external relations, while supporting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the European Union has built cooperation and partnership with third countries on the basis of mutual respect and dialogue, promoting understanding and cross-fertilisation of ideas.

H.E. Mr. Jorge Sampaio  
UN High Representative  
for the Alliance of Civilisations

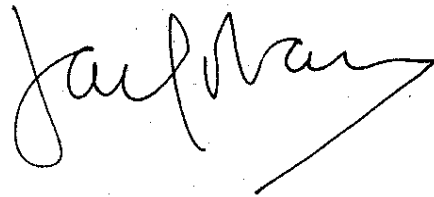
On the basis of our common commitment to the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, cooperation between the European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations would serve our shared goal of promoting dialogue between cultures and civilisations. The attached Action Plan sets out areas where cooperation between the European Union and the Alliance can be usefully explored. It also envisages the holding of annual meetings and the appointment of focal points on both sides. In this connection, we are pleased to inform you that the designated contact person will be, for the European Commission, Ms. Karen Fogg, Head of Unit, United Nations and Treaties Office, External Relations Directorate-General, and for the General Secretariat of the Council, Ms. Helga Schmid, Director of the Policy Unit.

We would be grateful if you could confirm your agreement that that the contents of this letter and the Annexed Action Plan provide a sound basis for cooperation between the European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations.



For the Commission

Benita Ferrero-Waldner  
Commissioner for External Relations



For the Council

Javier Solana  
High Representative/Secretary General

H.E. Mr. Jorge Sampaio  
UN High Representative  
for the Alliance of Civilisations

**ACTION PLAN 2008-2010****COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION  
AND THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS**

The European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations are committed to the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. They recognise that the diversity of civilisations and cultures is a basic feature of human society and a driving force of human progress. They underline that education, youth, migration, cultural cooperation and media are areas where action is critical in helping to reduce cross-cultural tensions and to build bridges between and among communities.

The European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations express their will to work together towards the shared goal of promoting dialogue between and among cultures and civilisations and of countering the forces that lead to polarisation, extremism and radicalisation.

Such cooperation will be based on the respect and mutual understanding of the respective strengths, organisational structures, mandates and institutional capacities, as well as the policies and commitments of both parties. Attention will be given in this context to the participation of non-state actors including representatives of civil society.

**AREAS OF COMMON FOCUS AND COOPERATION**

Over the next two year, the European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations will seek to develop cooperation in particular in the following areas:

**a) Promotion of human rights and political reform**

- Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms is a key area for cooperation, in particular with regard to freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, promotion of gender equality, and the fight against any form of discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Other areas include democratisation, political reform and governance of diversity.
- Cooperation should be explored through identifying and sharing good practices (including in the light of existing political dialogue, bilaterally and in multilateral settings) as well as through promotion of human rights education, including teaching of tolerance and development of intercultural competences.

**b) Media and access to information**

- Cooperation should be explored between the Alliance of Civilisations and the EuroMed and Media programme, in particular on rapid-response media-based mechanisms, initiatives around media literacy, data collection and other related issues.
- Regular exchange of information and experiences about other projects and initiatives in these areas should be encouraged.

**c) Intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity, including exchanges and promotion of people-to-people contacts**

- Cooperation could be developed in the context of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue and follow-up action as well as within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Year for Intercultural Dialogue.
- Cooperation should be explored between the European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations in the context of Euro-Med, notably on the potential use of the Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Cultures as well as its Networks-of-Networks.
- Cooperation could be based on exchanges of experience and developing the intercultural dimension of the European Union exchange programmes in the fields of education, science, and research. In particular, the Alliance of Civilisations could be associated with the promotion of European student and academic exchange programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus Mundus External Co-operation Window) and the international training and mobility actions of the Framework Programme for Research and Development (specific programme PEOPLE) as well as with alumni association networks, which can act as catalysts for enhanced intercultural dialogue between the European Union and its external partners.
- The role of youth, in particular participation by young people and youth workers in mobility projects, could be an important focus, with a view to developing new learning opportunities, mutual understanding and intercultural competences.
- Cooperation should be explored regarding promotion of intercultural dialogue, including among communities and religious or other leaders, and with the participation of women and youth.
- Regular exchange of information and good practices about other projects and initiatives in these areas should be encouraged.

**d) Immigration and integration**

- Possible exchange of experience in integration policies for example best practices, as identified in the EU 'Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners', could be explored.

**e) Role of civil society in the prevention of polarisation and radicalisation**

- The European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations could exchange views on the role of civil society organisations in the prevention of polarisation and radicalisation, and exchange information about projects and other initiatives aimed at a better understanding of the factors that are conducive towards polarisation within society. In this area, the EU should be guided by the framework of the implementation of the UN global strategy against terrorism as well as the EU Strategy for Combating Terrorism.

**DIALOGUE/EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION**

The European Union (through the Commission and the General Secretariat of the Council) and the Alliance of Civilisations Secretariat will hold annual meetings to review the state of play in areas of mutual concern, to strengthen cooperation and to plan, monitor and evaluate the implementation of common activities and exchanges. A review of the present Action Plan should be carried out in 2010.

The European Union and the Alliance of Civilisations will exchange information on a regular basis about projects and initiatives of common interest. Such exchange of information would be aimed at identifying joint work platforms and areas of potential collaboration between the two sides.

Each side will designate a focal point who would be responsible for internal coordination and for generally facilitating the process of cooperation.

Enhanced visibility of this cooperation and relevant activities of both sides should be considered a priority. To that end, discussions on a communication strategy should be envisaged.