



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretary General

**Presentation on the Report by the OSCE Secretary General
on the outcome of the first Annual Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations
held in Madrid on 15-16 January 2008**

Vienna, 10 April 2008

Mr. Chairman, dear colleagues,

My detailed report on the first Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, which was held in Madrid on 15 and 16 January 2008, was distributed on 11 March 2008 (SEC.GAL/50/08/Rev.1). You will recall that the Madrid decision on tolerance and non-discrimination recommended that the Secretary General attend this event and report on its outcome to the participating States.

With the Madrid decision, the participating States further reiterated the interest of the OSCE in the Alliance of Civilizations, and decided to consider an appropriate OSCE contribution to the implementation phase of the High-Level Group's recommendations, taking into account the implementation plan prepared by High Representative Sampaio.

With today's presentation, I would like to stimulate a productive discussion among participating States on the implementation of the Madrid decision, and more specifically on the nature of an appropriate OSCE contribution to the Alliance of Civilizations. To this end, I would like, first, to recall some basic facts related to the OSCE involvement with the Alliance; second, I would share with you some thoughts arising from my participation in the Forum; and finally, I will raise some questions that I would suggest the participating States address in their deliberations.

With regard to the OSCE's involvement in the Alliance so far, following the Ljubljana decision on tolerance, I fulfilled the task received from the participating States by presenting an OSCE contribution to the work of the Alliance's High Level Group. This contribution was prepared in consultation with the OSCE Institutions and participating States, as stated in the Ljubljana decision. In particular, you will recall that the consultations with the participating States were conducted through two meetings of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations conducted in the first half of 2006. The contribution highlighted the conceptual framework of the OSCE's commitments to promote tolerance and non-discrimination, as well as inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, reaching the conclusion that the Organization can be described as an alliance of civilizations in action, which broadly shares the goals of the Initiative (SEC.GAL/93/06r1).

Since then, the Alliance of Civilizations has developed further and consolidated its structure. Following the release of the High Level Group report, in November 2006, and the April 2007

appointment by the UN Secretary-General of Jorge Sampaio as High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, the Initiative defined its role and objectives in a Programme of Action, and officially initiated its implementation phase.

The First Forum of the Initiative, held in Madrid on 15 and 16 January 2008, confirmed a growing participation and political interest in the Alliance, attesting to its increasing visibility as a reference initiative on inter-cultural dialogue. As signalled by the number of practical initiatives launched at the Forum, the Alliance began to work towards the implementation of its objectives, covering the facilitation of dialogue and understanding among groups and cultures also by developing partnerships with a wide range of public and private actors.

In the run-up to the Forum, High Representative Sampaio proposed to the invited organizations the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Alliance, a copy of which, as well as a brief summary of its main provisions, was annexed to my report. So far, five agreements have been signed by Alliance (with UNESCO, the League of Arab States, ISESCO, ALECSO and United Cities and Local Governments -UCLG), while the Council of Europe has signed a letter of intent to conclude such a Memorandum. It is important to note at this stage that I have put on hold a response to HR Sampaio's proposal, formally or informally, until I receive guidance on this issue from the participating States.

Dear colleagues,

Having covered the background of the OSCE involvement with the Alliance, I do not wish to repeat the content of the report, which you have already received and no doubt studied carefully. Nevertheless, I would like to share with you some thoughts and conclusions I was able to draw from my participation in the Madrid Forum.

First of all, the Alliance has chosen to focus its efforts on four areas (youth, media, education, and migration), identified as main fields of action in the Report by the High Level Group and established as priority areas in the Alliance's Implementation Plan. They constitute the initial and non-exclusive focus of the Initiative. The dimensions of human rights, democratisation and the rule of law as well as gender and environmental security are also recognized as relevant to the values and work of the Alliance. In this respect, the OSCE has a wide body of commitments and activities that are pertinent to the programme of the Alliance, but are also broader in scope, as highlighted in the contribution submitted in 2006. The OSCE has a solid experience deriving from its debates, its institutions and its field activities that could usefully be shared.

Second, the Alliance has a global scope, aiming at the promotion of understanding and reconciliation among cultures. In this context, the OSCE's special relations with its Mediterranean and Asian partners significantly match the main concerns of the Alliance. Additionally, the most committed supporters of the Alliance are also active OSCE participating States. This further enhances the potential for common interests between the two processes.

Indeed, this leads me to my third point: both the OSCE and the Alliance are more processes than institutions. Both of them are built on commitments and values that are non-legally binding in nature. Furthermore, they both depend on the engagement and political support of key countries, lack legal personality and have small secretariats. They interact extensively

with NGOs and with the broad range civil society actors. They seek to operate as part of networks and to interact with national and international actors. The Alliance works under the UN umbrella and relies on the Voluntary Trust established within the UN framework. Significant resources have been already pledged to two Funds, the Youth Solidarity Fund and the Media Fund, launched and supported by the Alliance. While the first projects presented by youth organizations are now being examined by the Alliance in the framework of the Youth Fund, the modalities for designing, selecting and running the projects in the media field are still to be clarified.

Fourth, the Alliance has already generated considerable interest and momentum, as the success of the Madrid meeting indicates. It has acquired a broad membership, an initial common conceptual framework and significant financial pledges, including from the private sector. These dynamics make it an interesting partner that has the potential to pull together diverse forces. The OSCE could probably benefit from this vitality in its interaction with the Alliance. In this context, let me note that in Madrid the OSCE was invited, along with other international organisations, but was rarely mentioned by the speakers, and was not given any specific prominence. The OSCE's highly developed *acquis* in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination, through among others the so-called tolerance cycle of conferences, is of great value, and could be highlighted and shared with other Alliance participants.

In this context, I would like to emphasize that the ambitions of the Alliance are particularly relevant for the OSCE institutions and for the CiO personal representatives on tolerance and non-discrimination. The ODIHR, the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the HCNM are indeed the main natural interlocutors of the Alliance in its core areas of interest. The Secretariat role in this respect is more as an institutional interface reporting to the CiO than as an actor of substance. Ultimately, it would be the institutions who would co-operate with the Alliance. On this matter, the debate we are opening today is of particular importance.

Dear colleagues,

Allow me to conclude by raising a few of the questions that the appearance of the Alliance seems to pose for the OSCE and its participating States.

Firstly, what kind of input do the OSCE participating States want to provide to the collective debate that is taking place within the Alliance of Civilizations, on the basis of their experience within the OSCE? The participating States could consider, for example, proactively promoting the OSCE's comprehensive, cross-dimensional approach to security in the Alliance's concept and activities. It is up to the participating States to determine their position and to ensure coherence with the positions they adopt in different international fora. Today's debate provides a first opportunity to reflect on the goals and practical ambitions of the Alliance from an OSCE perspective.

Secondly, do the OSCE participating States want the OSCE as such, in the diversity of its institutions, to be directly involved in the deliberations and the work of the Alliance? This is indeed the question posed by the draft Memorandum of Understanding proposed by the Alliance and circulated as it was received. Let me recall that those organisations that have already accepted the offer by signing or entering into negotiations on the text, appear to have done so in a selective way, choosing among President Sampaio's proposals those they deem

most relevant to their activities. A clear signal from the participating States is required before the OSCE can enter into a similar process, the outcome of which they would ultimately have to approve. A procedure would have to be established for participating States to provide guidance and support to the Secretariat and the institutions in choosing the best form of interaction and future co-operation.

A third key question will be the issue of specific projects of common interest. Are the OSCE participating States interested in establishing a practical working relationship with the Alliance of Civilizations? If so, this could materialize in different ways. The OSCE could explicitly orient some of its activities and projects to be supportive of the Alliance in the fields of tolerance and non-discrimination, media and youth. Such an approach could be present in the work of the institutions or of the field offices. Common meetings could also be organized on given topics of joint interest. Conversely, the Alliance could call upon the OSCE to implement projects on its behalf. There is also ample scope for cooperative endeavours involving the OSCE Partners for Co-operation. Their views are of great importance on all these issues.

In brief, the time has come for the OSCE to decide how it wants to position itself regarding this new and significant initiative of global scope. Because the Alliance is an unusual construction established in response to very complex challenges, the answer is bound to be innovative. We look forward to your comments on this issue.

Thank you.