

“Diego López Garrido considers that the referendum on minarets shows that more work is needed to integrate the immigrants into the European societies”

Sarajevo, 14th December 2009. On the occasion of the international Conference held in Sarajevo in the frame of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) with the aim of adopting a Regional Strategy on intercultural dialogue in South Eastern Europe, the Secretary of State for the European Union, Mr. Diego López Garrido, has been the representative of Spain, in the capacity of co-sponsor of the AoC and incoming presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Secretary of State has underlined the value of this Regional Strategy for South Eastern Europe to strengthen the co-operation and the relations among governments and societies which underwent deep divisions and conflicts. The Secretary of State has drawn the attention to the importance of teaching values, of understanding diversity as a common wealth and not as a threat to the own identity, and of fighting against intolerance through education, as for instance the regional exchange of students as well as other measures to improve mobility and circulation of people.

Referring to the incoming Spanish presidency of the European Union, the Secretary of State has pointed out the promotion and development of human rights as one of the priorities of the Spanish presidency. The Spanish presidency of the European Union will pay particular attention to fostering equality between men and women, and will put on the European agenda the fight against gender violence.

During the dinner hosted by the AoC co-sponsors Spain and Turkey, along with the UN High Representative for the AoC, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, on 13th December, which was also attended by the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Micheline Calmy-Rey, the guests had the opportunity to exchange views on the outcome of the recent referendum held in Switzerland about putting a ban on the construction of minarets. They held a fruitful debate, during which the Secretary of State said that this has been a symptom and therefore more work is needed to integrate immigrants into the European societies.

Furthermore, the Secretary of State emphasized the need of active integration policies leading to comprehension and respect towards other cultural identities, and underlined the value of education and political integration through, for instance, the right of vote in local elections granted to legal foreign residents.