



**Alliance of Civilizations' Regional Strategy**  
**on Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation**  
**in South Eastern Europe**

***Presented in Sarajevo, 14 December 2009***

*(revised on 13 December 2009)*

***PREAMBLE***

The Alliance of Civilizations, launched in 2005 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations with the co-sponsorship of Spain and Turkey, is aimed at building bridges between societies, promoting dialogue, understanding and cooperation, and forging the collective political will to address the world's imbalances.

The Alliance of Civilizations, as a political initiative of the Secretary General of the United Nations, is supported by a Group of Friends made up by more than a hundred members, comprising countries and international organizations. Furthermore, the Alliance relies upon a wide network of partners and partnerships with cities, civil society organizations, corporations, foundations, universities, faith-led organizations etc.

The Alliance responds to a broad consensus across nations, cultures, religions and non religious convictions that all societies are bound together in their humanity and interdependent in their quest for stability, prosperity and peaceful coexistence.

The Alliance seeks to address rifts between societies and communities by promoting pluralism and diversity management as essential factors for good governance, based on mutual respect among people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and on helping to mobilize concerted action towards this end. This effort reflects the will of the vast majority of people to reject extremism in any society and support respect for diversity, be it ethnic, religious, cultural or other.

Moreover, by recognizing that pluralism and diversity management are essential for good governance and sustainable human development, the main purpose of the Alliance is to create an environment – at local, national, regional and global levels alike - that stands firm on the common framework of principles and values expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 as well as in the Constitution of UNESCO, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and in other relevant normative and legal instruments, decisions and recommendations.

## ***PART I - SCOPE AND PRINCIPLES OF AOC REGIONAL STRATEGIES***

In order to turn global objectives and aspirations into local deliverables, the Alliance has two major political tools: National Plans and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation.

Both tools should be developed by taking into consideration international law, regional decisions and policies, and national legal frameworks outlining basic human, civil, economic, social and cultural rights upon which intercultural dialogue depends.

Furthermore building upon the achievements of already existing international, regional and local initiatives, Regional Strategies should establish and provide a viable and continuous framework for policy development in the main areas of concern. Regional Strategies aim at raising awareness for the necessity for increased cross-border co-operation and for jointly developed policy instruments that make partners successfully face common challenges.

This shared framework helps to shape an enabling environment for intercultural dialogue 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 exchanges between individuals of different backgrounds - cultural, religious, scientific or artistic - and for people-to-people exchanges to take place. Moreover, it generates sources of good practice projects, inspires new initiatives, develops ambitious benchmarks and opens the way towards effective strategies and good practices for intercultural dialogue.

Regional Strategies are underpinned by a three-fold approach:

- a. **Breaking down walls:** promote democratic citizenship and free circulation of ideas, encourage effective diversity management in legal, political and social terms, foster inter-ethnic and inter-religious respect and tolerance, fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, related intolerance and hate speech, ensure women's rights and gender equality, all of them playing a significant role in building mutual trust among peoples and inclusive democratic societies in the region;
- b. **Building bridges:** intensify people-to-people exchanges, develop intercultural skills through educational, artistic and media programs which can raise the awareness of the complexity of the identity issues and equip individuals with the necessary tools to fully and successfully engage in intercultural dialogue processes;
- c. **Sharing spaces:** create spaces where ideas, experiences and beliefs can be exchanged in an environment of trust and respect, where effective conflict resolution can be experienced, and where interactive communication can freely flow.

Regional Strategies are focused on developing common and/or trans-national activities within a broader comprehensive framework potentially covering the four fields of action of the Alliance – education, youth, media and migration.

They are intended to generate a process of joint ownership and joint participation in the Alliance's projects and to stimulate strengthened cooperation among countries sharing common challenges aimed to create new opportunities to “break down walls”, “build bridges” and create “shared spaces” in a specific region.

Though independent from National Plans, Regional Strategies act as a stimulus for future National Plans and/or as their extension providing new opportunities for interaction, joint initiatives and for delivering results.

Regional Strategies, although driven by governments, rely upon a close cooperation with and between a wide array of stakeholders, namely: relevant international and regional organizations, which have a key role to play by sharing expertise, and make available the necessary resources in terms of knowledge, policy tools and financing; cities and local governments; civil society partners – NGOs, voluntary and civic organizations, foundations, local communities, churches and faith-based organizations - which are crucial in delivering results and catalysing action within countries that mobilize broad-based movements; the private sector which also plays an important role not only because it confronts challenges related to intercultural tensions but mainly because it can serve as a platform for exchanging experiences, disseminating good practices and thus be actively engaged in good governance of pluralism and diversity management.

Regional Strategies are built on the pre-existing work carried out by countries, international and regional organizations and by any other relevant players. They aim to give a regional footing to the AoC projects, expanding successful experiences, and providing new opportunities for innovative initiatives, upon a preliminary mapping out of common needs, expectations or requests.

## ***PART II - MAIN GUIDELINES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL STRATEGY ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE***

The AoC Regional Strategy on Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation in South Eastern Europe aims at achieving the goals mentioned in the Preamble and Part I and is intended to foster sustainable peace, development and human rights for all as well as good neighbourly relations in the region.

Further to the general framework of the Alliance, recalled in the Preamble, this Regional Strategy is built on the ideals and principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Cultural Convention as well as any other relevant Declarations, Resolutions or Recommendations of the Council of Europe, namely the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – Living Together as Equals in Dignity” as well as the Helsinki Final Act and the subsequent OSCE relevant documents.

Moreover, this Regional Strategy makes full use of the commitments expressed in various Declarations adopted by the Heads of State of the South Eastern European countries within the framework of the Regional Forums organized by the UNESCO on Dialogue Among Civilizations (Ohrid 2003, Tirana 2004, Varna 2005, Opatija 2006, Bucharest and Sibiu 2007, Athens 2008 and Cetinje 2009) as well as in the Foundation Charter on Cultural Cooperation of the Ministers of Culture of South East Europe, signed in Copenhagen in 2005, and the Annual Ministerial Conferences on Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe on the topic “Cultural Heritage: a bridge towards a shared space”,

This regional strategy builds on the renewed commitment of the CoE and European Commission to pursue the Ljubljana Process through the joint regional programme in the field of cultural and natural heritage in order to promote reconciliation, intercultural dialogue and development processes in SEE.

This Regional Strategy also takes into account any ongoing processes and initiative aimed at enhancing regional cooperation, namely in the framework of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), that contribute to further promoting better understanding and dialogue among different cultures and religions, dignity of peoples and respect for their national linguistic, cultural and religious diversity.

This Regional Strategy builds upon the achievements of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights, economic prosperity and security in the region. Achievements made by the Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact in actively promoting education and youth issues in the region, in particular in the context of policy-dialogue, capacity building and exchange of best practice are of particular importance for this Strategy as well as the efforts that are today continued by the Regional Cooperation Council, as the successor structure of the Stability Pact, in particular in the area of regional cooperation in education by the Regional Cooperation Council Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital and the Novi Sad Initiative.

This Regional Strategy also takes into consideration the Joint Statement of Ministers of Education from South Eastern Europe on “Building Human Capital and Promoting Diversity through Dialogue, Creativity and Innovation” (Oslo 2008) as well as the commitment to regional cooperation in education as agreed in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministers responsible for Education, Science and Research in South Eastern Europe (Istanbul 2007). In this regard, the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) as the Memorandum’s main implementation framework and platform for regional cooperation in the field of education should be further enhanced and developed into a truly regionally owned network.

This Regional Strategy shall also promote, support and ensure follow up of regional activities undertaken under the umbrella of the Alliance of Civilizations or by its partners, within the National Plans of the countries of the region or other relevant initiatives, such as the forthcoming Summit of the Heads of States of the SEE organised by UNESCO to take place in Istanbul in 2010 and the Second World Conference for Dialogue Among Religions and Civilizations to be held in 2010 in Ohrid and the 2009 Tirana Forum on Interreligious Dialogue.

This Regional Strategy will also put into practice the priorities of the Implementation Plans of the Alliance, the commitments made within the Alliance's Forums, namely in Madrid (January 2008) and in Istanbul (April 2009), as well as the recommendations adopted at the Youth Event organized as part of the AoC Istanbul Forum.

This Regional Strategy intends to utilize all of these tools in order to promote a gradual process of strengthened cooperation between countries, peoples and communities aimed at contributing to build pluralistic societies characterised by socio-cultural and religious diversity which are based on shared values, better understanding, mutual trust and respect.

This Regional Strategy reaffirms that successful regional co-operation, promoting dialogue and successful diversity management will positively contribute to the concerned countries of the region meeting the conditions and requirements set forth in the Copenhagen criteria and in the Stabilisation and Association process, thus bringing the whole region closer to the European Union.

This Regional Strategy aims to contribute to overcoming divisions and conflicts in the region through a common and coherent approach of regional cooperation. To achieve these goals, this strategy relies upon a wide range of stakeholders such as international and regional organizations, national and local governments, cities, civil society organizations, foundations, universities and schools, companies, faith-based organizations and individuals.

Intercultural dialogue is a key tool in addressing some of the most important challenge Europe and the region of South Eastern Europe is facing at present and it constitutes one of the three strategic objectives of the European Agenda for Culture.

This Regional Strategy will primarily focus on youth and education, without neglecting media, and bearing in mind that the Alliance also addresses the challenges posed by migration from the integration perspective and that in the long run this topic should be considered in order to enhance the impact of this Strategy.

Therefore, this Regional Strategy will focus on young people up to the age of 30 who as a crucial pool of talent, ideas and energy, represent an essential asset to surmounting the challenges of building inclusive and participative societies based on a new paradigm of good governance, pluralism and diversity management.

It will also focus on education because it is a critical area to increase youth capacity building, knowledge and skills in order to integrate young men and women into society and economy and empower them to shape the future.

This Regional Strategy will strengthen the role of women in youth initiatives, education, media and intercultural dialogue and promote gender issues and equal rights between men and women in these fields.

In order to foster open and inclusive societies and to promote active citizenship, citizens need to be equipped with intercultural competences, which constitute a key factor for strengthening intercultural dialogue. The knowledge, skills and attitudes of particular relevance to intercultural competences are those relating to communication in foreign languages, social and civic competences, and cultural awareness and expression.

The importance of including media issues is well known because of the impact of media in shaping collective views and attitudes, and its potential to serve as a bridge between cultures and societies. In this regard, this strategy will aim at contributing to ensure press freedom and responsible, objective and fair reporting and presentation of a diversity of perspectives.

Moreover, this Strategy will also focus on the use of “new media”, the internet and the development of digital media production and distribution as a powerful means to increase people-to-people communication and to bridge cultural and religious divides.

Increasing cultural diversity is an essential characteristic of modern society mainly due to migration and mobility of populations. International migration is one of the areas for concerted action to reduce cross-cultural tensions and enhance regional stability. Integration of migrants is paramount to furthering social cohesion and averting marginalization of vulnerable groups, such as migrant youth and migrant women. Therefore, this Strategy will aim to promote intercultural understanding and dialogue and integration issues among relevant target groups, through, *inter alia*, information campaigns, multi-stakeholder workshops, media events and other public outreach measures, as well as training campaigns.

This Regional Strategy stresses that further development of cooperation in all these fields will contribute to strengthening human rights for all; ensuring women’s rights and gender equality; promoting inter-ethnic, inter-cultural and inter-religious respect and tolerance; encouraging free circulation of ideas; developing youth education focused on intercultural skills and competences; fostering intercultural dialogue; promoting integration of migrants; and combating hate crimes, all of which play a significant role in building mutual trust among peoples and cohesive democratic civil societies in the region.

Turning the South-Eastern Europe into a region where peoples are engaged together in finding shared solutions for the common challenges they are facing is the common goal to be met by this Regional Strategy.

### ***PART III - MECHANISMS OF COOPERATION AND FOLLOW-UP***

An Action Plan with activities, open to the participation of all countries of the region and to be carried out over a period of two years (2010-2012) will be discussed at the Sarajevo Conference on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2009. After being finalized and agreed upon experts and representatives of civil society under the guidance of the National Focal Points, the Action Plan will then be presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual AoC Forum in Rio in May 2010

In addition to the Ministerial meeting, the Sarajevo Conference will provide a platform for engaging civil society, corporate sector, foundations, etc. in concrete commitments to participate and support financially the various actions identified in the Action Plan.

The community of Focal Points of the South Eastern European region will ensure the follow up of the implementation of the actions identified in the Action Plan with the assistance of the Alliance of Civilizations' secretariat and the support of any other partners.

This community will meet whenever necessary and at least twice a year.

A sub-section of the AoC website will be created to share information on this Regional Strategy and on the implementation of its Action Plan and networking will be fully used.

The annual Forums of the Alliance (namely Qatar in 2011 and Vienna in 2012) will be used in the future to share with other partners success stories, lessons learned and to report on progress made in the implementation of this Regional Strategy. A marketplace of commitments to this Regional Strategy should take place annually at the occasion of the AoC Forums.

In 2012 a new Conference should be organized on a rotating basis to take stock of the outcomes of this 1<sup>st</sup> Action Plan and to adopt a Second Action Plan (2013-2015).