



Turkey's Role in the Alliance of Civilizations: A New Perspective in Turkish Foreign Policy?

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ABSTRACT *Since its foundation, Turkey's foreign policymakers have declined to undertake any pioneering roles in global initiatives, such as assuming the position of the spokesperson of the Islamic world, on international platforms. Given this, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative presents not only a challenge to the traditional parameters of Turkish foreign policy but also a new perspective for Turkish foreign policy. This essay examines the roots of this change, the rise of the notion of the Alliance of Civilizations, and Turkey's role in this initiative. It also analyzes the impact of Turkey's role in the initiative on other foreign-policy issues, such as European Union membership.*

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Introduction: Sources of the Justice and Development Party's Interest in the Alliance of Civilizations

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The victory of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP) in the November 3, 2002 general elections was a major turning point not only in Turkey's domestic politics but also in its foreign policymaking. While some asserted that the landslide victory of the AKP was "the greatest challenge to the traditional concept of Turkish secularism" because of the party's Islamic roots,¹ others presented this victory as "a success of Kemalism" on the grounds that the new strength of Islam in Turkey was a result of Kemalist reforms aiming to control Islam.² Although the comments about the AKP's effects on Turkish domestic structure differ, nearly all commentators agree that the survival of the party depends in large part on its ability to be attuned to the Kemalist regime. This "necessity" in turn forces the AKP to practice a "non-confrontational and consensus-seeking" policy³ in the domestic arena. This approach has its equivalent in foreign policy too, which makes feasible such practices as the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC).

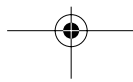
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This “necessity” has also forced the AKP to change its predecessors’ Islamic perceptions. The Islamism of the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi), led by Necmettin Erbakan, embraced an anti-Western/European stance and championed an orthodox conception of Islam from the 1970s to the 1990s. Although the prominent founders of the AKP emerged from this pro-Islamic movement, they learned the “limitation of Islamic politics” from the military’s intervention during the February 28 process, also known as a postmodern coup. Subsequently, they departed from the National Outlook Movement by referring to themselves as the “innovators” and by embracing a liberal conception of Islam instead. Furthermore, this transformation brought about some significant changes in the Islamic conceptualizations of Europe and the West.⁴ Changes in the perception of the West also made possible the alliance with Western civilization.

In addition to these two factors, the AKP’s foreign policy for the Alliance of Civilizations has been substantially shaped by two academics, namely Ahmet Davutoğlu, the party’s chief foreign policy advisor; and Mehmet Aydın, minister of state and a professor of philosophy. The “non-confrontational and consensus-seeking” politics inside and outside and the effect of Davutoğlu on foreign policymaking can be seen in wide practices ranging from Turkey’s relations with its neighbors to the struggle to solve perennial problems between the Muslim world and the West. This “non-confrontational” approach and Davutoğlu’s “zero problem with neighbors” principle⁵ have given rise to the rapprochement in Turkish–Syrian relations, as reflected by Bashar Asad’s January 8, 2004 trip to Turkey, the first-ever by a Syrian president. The “consensus-seeking” approach and Davutoğlu’s “taking initiative in contributing to the regional and global peace” principle⁶ also drove Turkey to explore ways of preventing the war in Iraq in 2003 by organizing a meeting with the countries bordering Iraq.⁷

The AKP administration’s mission to solve the existing problems between the Muslim world and the West amounts to a civilizational attitude or dimension in foreign policy, which has derived both from the views of the party’s prominent leaders and Davutoğlu’s thoughts. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party’s other prominent leaders have all advocated a perspective of both forming good relations with Muslim countries and promoting accession to the European Union (EU). The direct result of this outlook is that membership to the EU is perceived as “the harmony of a Muslim society with predominantly Christian societies”⁸ and that the alliance of civilizations is possible. According to President Abdullah Gül, one of the founders of the AKP, civilizations have changed in order to gain a great deal from interacting with one another.⁹ In short, the ruling party members and foreign policymakers chose to focus on their civilizations’ inclusive rather than exclusive dimensions.

Davutoğlu’s views about civilizations have been illustrated in his extensive works on Turkish foreign policy¹⁰ and the “clash of civilizations” theory.¹¹ In his view, civilizations are not destined to clash; on the contrary, they can collaborate on the process of globalization, which leads to a more pluralistic interaction of different cultures and civilizations. In particular, Turkey has significant potential to undertake this mission

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because of its strategic, cultural, and geographical location at the crossroads of civilizations. Prime Minister Erdoğan, in his speech at the American Enterprise Institute on January 29, 2004, emotionally stated that “we need to create a world where there is the meeting and harmony of civilizations ... we need to get together in various meetings, conferences ... so that it will be peace that will win This is what we believe in.” President Gül also wrote that “Turkey’s unique historical, political, and social experience bestow upon it both a role and a responsibility to promote peace, security.”¹² As a result, Turkey’s policymakers, influenced by Davutoğlu’s views about civilizations, have been ready to participate in any initiative aiming towards the alliance of civilizations.

Significantly, the process of accession to the EU, the most important target of Turkish foreign policy, indirectly affected the AKP’s ardor to join in such initiatives. The party leaders see these civilizational initiatives as a factor that could facilitate Turkey’s membership to the EU. The core claim of the party and Erdoğan in relation to the process of EU membership is that the only way the EU can show that it is not a “Christian club” is to grant membership to Muslim Turkey, creating a bridge between Eastern and Western civilizations. Erdoğan underlined this point by stating that “if the EU is not a Christian club, this has to be proven. Saying that European Union is not a Christian club does not mean that EU is not a Christian club.”¹³ Indeed, there has been a great deal of effort in using the “bridge metaphor” to portray Turkey’s entry to the EU as a way of bridging the gap between Islam and the West in order to ease existing tensions, especially after the agreement to start the long-awaited accession negotiations for EU membership on October 3, 2005. Erdoğan went on to further suggest that “those in the EU who cannot digest Turkey being in the EU are against the Alliance of Civilizations.”¹⁴ Erdoğan also directed a hypothetical question to European circles: “What do you gain by adding 99% Muslim Turkey to the EU?” and replied: “You [Europeans] gain a bridge between the EU and the Islamic world, 1.5 billion population and this will start the Alliance of Civilizations.”¹⁵ Given the fact that this discourse might be an effective way to convince some circles in the EU, undertaking such a role in the AoC initiative is expected to strengthen Turkey’s image and thus even facilitate its membership.

The Road to the Alliance of Civilizations

The notion of the Alliance of Civilizations cannot be solely seen as a result of the AKP’s accession to power. Rather, it is a result of global developments and conjunctures. The argument itself began with the publication of Samuel P. Huntington’s article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993 entitled “The Clash of Civilizations?” which claimed that

the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural The clash of civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.¹⁶

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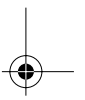
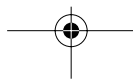
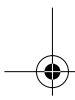
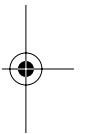
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There was nothing new in Huntington's claim; instead he furthered the idea propounded by new Orientalists such as Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes. Lewis initially used the term "the clash of civilizations" in a 1990 essay entitled "The Roots of Muslim Rage,"¹⁷ and Huntington admitted that he borrowed his article's title and theme from Lewis by quoting this tumultuous phrase. By stressing the clash, these new Orientalists have transformed conventional Orientalism, perceiving the East as the West's "silent-Other"¹⁸ and have begun to see the East as an active-Other. In doing so, they have tried to legitimate the West's interference in the Middle East in particular and in the Islamic world in general. In their view, the West has to meddle in Islamic world for the future of global system because "Muslim countries host the most terrorists and fewest democracies in the world."¹⁹

This thought undertaken by the new Orientalists has affected not only some Western policymakers but also caused counterreactions from the East, from Islamic countries. This counterreaction first began in the groves of academia. Studies such as Davutoğlu's "alternative paradigms" or Fouad Ajami's "clash of interests"²⁰ were a challenge to this notion. Such academic deliberations gave rise indirectly to some political initiatives too. For example, a report entitled *Our Global Neighborhood* called for a new kind of dialogue among civilizations and was adopted by the Commission on Global Governance, composed of prestigious public figures from well over 20 countries. Pakistan also hosted a conference entitled "Dialogue between Islam and the West" in autumn 1999.²¹ The initiative started by the Islamic Republic of Iran was somewhat more important and realistic. Mohammad Khatami, then president of Iran, proposed that the United Nations "designate the year 2001 as the 'Year of Dialogue among Civilizations' with ... the hope that" such a dialogue would "replace hostility and confrontation with discourse and understanding" during his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 21, 1998.²²

After Khatami's speech came international recognition, with the UN General Assembly adopting Resolution 53/22, and on November 4, 1998, proclaiming the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The UN General Assembly also adopted Resolution 54/113 on December 10, 1999, calling upon governments to encourage all members of society to take part in promoting dialogue among civilizations. Because this initiative was an alternative to the notion of the "clash of civilizations," nearly all countries declared their sympathies for it. On November 13, 2000, the UN showed its determination for the dialogue by adopting a subsequent resolution, 55/23, inviting "governments, the United Nations systems, and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations to ... promote the concept of dialogue among civilizations."²³

Despite these amiable efforts, it appeared after the September 11 assaults that sympathy is not enough to realize such initiatives. It was also a great irony that al-Qa'ida attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Consequently, it soon became obvious that the sympathies had to be transformed in and though the institutional structures to be and remain effective. To this aim, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on November 21, 2001, entitled "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations," determining

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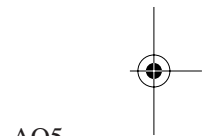
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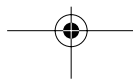
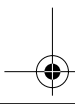
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the initiative’s objectives, principles, and participants, as well as a program of action.²⁴ The program of action invited “states, the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations and civil society ... to promot[e] dialogue among civilizations.” The UN was not the only international organization forced to initiate such a “dialogue” after the tremor felt because of the September 11 attacks ; indeed, this tragic event has also given rise to many similar initiatives aiming at mitigating the clash of civilizations notion in one way or another, one of which was the Organization of Islamic Countries and European Union (OIC-EU) Joint Forum.

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In the beginning of 2002, Turkey, whose role until then in the Dialogue among Civilizations consisted only of issuing some statements, increased its profile by organizing the Istanbul Forum on the grounds that Turkey is a bridge between the East and the West. This situation forced Turkey to attempt a role in solving the growing crisis . The ministers for foreign affairs of the OIC, observer countries, and EU member and candidate countries came together on February 12–13, 2002, in Istanbul to share their assessments of the world political situation and to promote understanding and harmony among civilizations. Turkey hoped that the Istanbul meeting would help to prove that the concept of a “clash of civilizations” was invalid and ensure that cultural divisions were not a source of conflict.²⁵ In this context, while Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit stressed that “terrorism was the chief issue before humanity for it to wrestle and solve,”²⁶ Foreign Minister İsmail Cem underlined that the meeting would “give the whole world a message of peace, cooperation, and harmony” among civilizations.²⁷ Turkey also hoped that the forum would help reassert its seasoned role as a bridge between the West and the Muslim world. Therefore, Cem stressed the fact that as the only country in the process of EU membership and a member of the OIC, Turkey was holding such a forum to aim for harmony and the understanding of differences in a period when the thesis of a clash of civilizations was high on the agenda.²⁸

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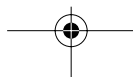
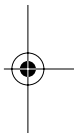
The Rise of the Alliance of Civilizations

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Three days after the Madrid train bombings by al-Qa’ida-inspired terrorists that killed 191 people on March 11, 2004, a general election was held in Spain. Socialist Party leader Luis Rodriguez Zapatero won the general election, beating Jose Maria Aznar, an ardent supporter of Bush’s war on terrorism. Indeed, Anzar had often made his support clear. For instance, in his visit to Washington on February 22, 2003 he stated that “Spain is committed with an active role in contributing to an appropriate response to the threat that Saddam Hussein’s regime entails for international peace and security” and added Spain’s readiness “to fight together [with America] against weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.”²⁹ However, in accordance with his statement, the Anzar government sent Spanish troops to Iraq. The terrorist attacks in Madrid were perceived as a consequence of Anzar’s Iraq policy, and this perception influenced the results of the 2004 elections. Zapatero’s promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq and to search for a new way to combat terrorism

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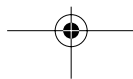
was well-timed and culminated in his landslide victory. Within hours of taking power, Zapatero ordered Defense Minister Jose Bono to “do what is necessary” for the Spanish troops to return home in the shortest possible time.³⁰ He declared the Alliance of Civilizations as a new way to combat terrorism.

5 Zapatero proposed the “Alliance of Civilizations between the Western and the Arab and Muslim world” to the secretary general of the United States in his speech at the fifty-ninth UN General Assembly on September 21, 2004. Zapatero also underlined the initiative’s importance by saying that “some years ago a wall collapsed. We must now prevent hatred and incomprehension from building a new wall.”³¹ In December 2004, the Spanish government and the UN agreed to establish a small working group³² composed of representatives from the UN and Spain to prepare an initial concept paper for the initiative. In June 2005, the Turkish government, represented by Prime Minister Erdoğan, accepted the Spanish invitation to cosponsor the initiative. To guide this initiative, on September 2, 2005, the UN secretary general established a High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations, whose members were “specialists in the field of inter-civilizational and intercultural relations.” The group’s objectives were: to provide an assessment of the new and emerging threats to international peace and security; to identify collective actions to address these trends; and to recommend a practicable program of action for states, international organizations, and civil societies.³³

20 The initiative was “a ... reactive framework: on the one hand, responding to Huntington’s argument ... and on the other hand reacting to the fact that the USA and Spain were ... the main targets of large-scale terrorist attacks.”³⁴ Therefore, it was formed in order to fight terrorism and insecurity at the global level through non-conventional means.³⁵ In a world encountering a serious threat from terrorism, it was not surprising that the initiative received broad support. Within a few months, Argentina, Costa Rica, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Poland, Turkey, the Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, and Tunisia declared their support for the initiative, as did the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. In addition, the initiative received support at different forums and conferences, including the XIV Ibero-American Summit (November 2004), the EuroMed Parliamentary Assembly (Cairo, March 2005), and the first summit of Arab and South American governments (May 2005).³⁶ However, the United States, France, Germany, Russia, China, and the European Union chose to remain silent at this early stage.

Turkey’s Inclusion in the Initiative

40 Upon Kofi Annan’s insistence that a Muslim country co-sponsor the initiative together with Spain during the 2004 General Assembly meeting of the United Nations, Zapatero contacted Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan. There are many reasons behind Zapatero’s choice of Turkey as a co-sponsor, but two of them are of primary importance. Firstly, Turkey is an Islamic country culturally but a Western country politically. Secondly, Turkey has the same strategy as the Western world





regarding the struggle against terrorism, the main incentive of the initiative.³⁷ Turkey's cosponsorship was discussed during Erdoğan's visit to Spain in March 2005. After deciding to support Zapatero's proposal, Erdoğan appointed his chief foreign policy adviser, Rafet Akgünay, as Turkey's representative for the project. Ultimately, the UN officially announced the launch of the AoC initiative on July 14, 2005, just one week after the tragic July 7 terrorist attacks in London. Hence, the moment chosen for the announcement highlighted the initiative's strategic dimension.³⁸

The Turkish media gave extensive coverage to the announcement of the initiative, and dramatized and exaggerated Turkey's role in the project with such headlines as "A Turkish Stamp on the World Parliament."³⁹ Davut Dursun and Yasin Doğan wrote that "the initiative would increase Turkey's influence in international arena" in their columns in *Yeni Şafak*, a Turkish newspaper tilted towards the AKP government.⁴⁰ Sami Kohen, a prominent columnist on Turkish foreign policy, viewed the initiative as an opportunity for Turkey and pointed out that Turkey should make more contributions to the project.⁴¹ Unlike Kohen, İter Turkmen, the former Turkish minister of foreign affairs and a retired ambassador, wrote in his column in the daily *Hürriyet* that the initiative could help to advance mutual respect between the West and the Islamic world, but the main responsibility related to the prevention of terrorism was in the hands of Muslim countries.⁴² The most striking critics came from *Milli Gazete*, a Turkish newspaper favorable to the National Outlook Movement but an opponent of the AKP. Abdullah Özkan accused the initiative of marking the Muslim world as a source of "jihad fanaticism."⁴³ Özkan also wrote that the project would not serve peace and cooperation because of its "USA patent", pointing to American support of the initiative.

While the debate on the Turkey's role in the Alliance of Civilizations continued in the Turkish press, Zapatero and Erdoğan met with British Prime Minister Tony Blair on July 27, 2005, and Blair said he welcomed the struggle to create an Alliance of Civilizations. In his statement related to the initiative, Erdoğan praised Blair's comment that terrorism aimed to create a conflict between the West and the Muslim world, and added that "there is a prevalent structure rejecting an alliance among civilizations and we have to break down this structure."⁴⁴ Erdoğan also stressed that "Turkey's EU membership will mean that the meeting of civilizations would occur in the framework of EU."⁴⁵ Later, Erdoğan continued to equate Turkey's EU membership with the Alliance of Civilizations on different occasions. In his statement to the French newspaper *Le Monde*, he reiterated this discourse by saying that "Europe cannot be a world power without the Alliance of Civilizations" and that Turkish accession was an opportunity for the EU to constitute the Alliance of Civilizations and be a world power.⁴⁶

Erdoğan also tried to explain the importance of the initiative to the public and to civil society establishments in Turkey. In his address to the nation on July 29, 2005, he underlined that Turkey "has undertaken pioneering of peace and democracy" and that the AoC initiative was an important part of this mission.⁴⁷ In his opening address during the Meeting of Religions, which took place on September 25–30,

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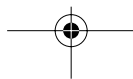
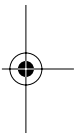
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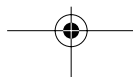
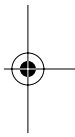
2005, in Hatay, Turkey, Erdoğan invited everyone to “say no to the clash of civilizations, and say yes to the Alliance of Civilizations” and emphasized that “the history does not have to go towards the clash of civilizations ... we must intervene in the course of the history” in order to reach the Alliance of Civilizations.⁴⁸

5 Despite all positive wishes and expectations, there was also some criticism on the Turkish side. Erdoğan complained about the lack of comprehension of the importance of the initiative by friendly countries, especially France, despite the violent incidents that continued throughout autumn 2005 among different groups in that country.⁴⁹
10 Underlining the fact that the prejudice in the West about Islam is a deep-rooted one, Mehmet Aydın exemplified the cartoon crisis for his claim. He added “the West has to respect our prophet like we respect the Christ. Do [we] offend the Christ by cartooning?”⁵⁰ The cartoon crisis was not on agenda of Muslim world when Aydın made this comment. Later, the crisis seemed to intensify and even had the potential to become a global conflict between the West and the Muslim world, and as such, it
15 was the first great challenge to the AoC initiative.

Flemming Rose, the culture editor for a right-of-center Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, had published 12 cartoons depicting Muhammad as a terrorist on September 30, 2005. Only two weeks later, 3,500 protestors organized in Copenhagen to non-violently protest the cartoons, calling for a formal apology
20 from the paper. Upon Rose’s and *Jyllands-Posten*’s refusal, tensions escalated. On October 12, ambassadors from 10 mainly Muslim countries asked to meet Danish Prime Minister Andre Fogh Rasmussen to discuss the government’s reactions to the cartoons. Rasmussen, however, refused to meet the ambassadors, saying that “I will not meet with them because it is so crystal clear what principles Danish democracy
25 is built upon that there is no reason to do so As prime minister, I have no power whatsoever to limit the press—nor do I want such power.”⁵¹ As the debates about the cartoons continued, the first official meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations met in Spain.

30 **The First Meeting, Palma de Mallorca**

The representatives of the Alliance of Civilizations gathered in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, on November 27–29, 2005. Because the caricatures did not “become a microcosm of the wider conflict between Islam and the western world,”⁵² the cartoon
35 crisis did not occupy any place on the agenda of the meeting. Participants from Turkey focused on terrorism and the future of the initiative. In his statements during the meeting, Erdoğan mostly addressed terrorism and the questions related to its definition. Having emphasized that terrorism stems from the lack of dialogue among civilizations, Erdoğan said that it is “possible to end terrorism only through the Alliance of Civilizations.” He said that the first thing to do is to end “the confusion
40 between terrorism and the armed resistance to occupation” and remove the religious adjectives before the concept of terrorism, as in the case of Islamic terrorism.⁵³ According to Erdoğan, the initiative’s role is crucial in putting into place these corrections and ending “the clash of civilizations.” He emotionally underlined that





“we are planting a seed for an Alliance of Civilizations to grow in our world and this will help the seeds of hundreds of thousands throughout the world to sprout.”⁵⁴ In the working paper for the High Level Group announced on November 18, 2005, Erdoğan’s concerns about “Islamic terrorism” were reiterated by these words: “Terrorism is only one of the problems we face and ... less than one-fifth of terrorist acts committed last year can be attributed to a pinpoint as ‘Muslim terrorism.’” Despite all this, the concept of Islamic terrorism is “an element of a massive intellectual, political, economic, and military mobilization,”⁵⁵ he claimed.

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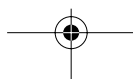
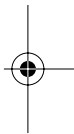
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In addition to terrorism, Erdoğan offered some perspectives on how the initiative must move in the future. Having admitted the initiative’s disability to act by saying that “a great deal of these initiatives only highlight the need of dialogue by merely describing the current situation but fail to offer a strategic and pragmatic approach on what needs to be done in conference terms,” Erdoğan proposed that common values of civilizations should be made “more visible” and that “an effective and strong answer could be given to ... the scenarios based on the inevitability of a clash of civilizations.” Furthermore, he stated in his address at the opening of the High Level Group meeting that the notion of an Alliance of Civilizations “should be supported by an effective bottom-up civil society movement.”⁵⁶ In his opening statement in Mallorca, Mehmet Aydın, minister of state of the Turkish Republic and the cochair of the Alliance of Civilizations, also proposed that the initiative must be “an action-oriented project at all levels, from education to politics” and efforts must be undertaken that may have a more immediate impact on larger population.⁵⁷

Cartoons depicting Muhammad as a terrorist stirred another crisis between the West and the Islamic world after *Magazinet*, a Norwegian Christian newspaper, reprinted the cartoons on January 10, 2006, with the aim of showing its support for *Jyllands-Posten* and highlighting the freedom of speech issue. After outcries against the publication of cartoons began to spread across the Middle East, Muslim politicians and religious leaders accused the Western world in general and the Danish government in particular for not censoring the cartoons. Reactions and counterreactions deepened the crisis. Numerous publications around Europe republished the cartoons with several new, and perhaps more offensive, images⁵⁸ to demonstrate their support for freedom of press on February 1–2, 2006. After these publications, the outcries in the Muslim world turned into violent protests targeting Western embassies and fast food chains, and even included political actions such as recalling ambassadors to Denmark and the boycotting of Danish products.

This deepening of the tension between the West and the Muslim world damaged the struggle to create the Alliance of Civilizations and forced Erdoğan and Zapatero, the cosponsors of the initiative, to do something in turn. Later, they issued an appeal for “respect and calm” in their call published in the *International Herald Tribune*.⁵⁹ Having underlined the danger of the crisis resulting from cartoons “in a globalized world ... in which a local incident may have worldwide repercussions,” Zapatero and Erdoğan wrote that “it is vital that we cultivate the values of respect, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.” In their view, respect, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence could be achieved by initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations.

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Therefore, these initiatives needed to be strengthened for a livable world. To mitigate the crisis, Erdoğan sent letters to world leaders in which he pointed to the importance of the AoC and explained the main reason behind Turkey's participation in the initiative: "our ultimate goal is to bring our own unique contributions to mankind's ideal of achieving 'unity in diversity.' The Alliance of Civilizations initiative ... aim[s at] the fulfillment of this noble idea."⁶⁰

The Second Meeting, Doha: A Reaction to the Cartoon Crisis

At the height of the crisis in February, the second meeting of the Alliance of Civilizations was held on February 25–28, 2006 in Doha, Qatar, with the agenda aiming to find ways to ease the cartoon crisis. The meeting started with a stress on how specific events endanger the initiatives that aim to bridge the civilizations. For instance, in his statement at the opening session of the meeting, Kofi Annan said:

It is important that we all realize that the problem is not with the faith but with a small group of the faithful—the extremists who tend to abuse and misinterpret the faith to support their cause.... We must not allow these extreme views to overshadow those of the majority and the mainstream.⁶¹

In addition, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, the secretary general of the OIC, proposed some solutions to the current situation in his opening address. He said that

the remedy to this dilemma and troubling trend should be sought by eliminating all the manifestations of prejudice from educational textbooks and from media, enacting laws on 'Equal Treatments' as adopted by the Council of Europe since the year 2000, disseminate respect for cultural and religious pluralism, and give Muslims in diaspora more chances to participate in public life.⁶²

Given the role of the AKP in the election of İhsanoğlu as the secretary general of the OIC, it can be said his views have largely reflected Turkey's policies. Consequently, he summarized Turkey's propositions in three sections: broadcastings introducing civilizations through satellite channels; the attachment of lectures of the history of civilizations to the curriculum in the UN member states; and the rearrangement of press freedom.⁶³

In addition to such propositions to solve the cartoon crisis, Turkish Minister of State Aydın made an "accusatory" address in which he mentioned the dangers of prejudices about Islam in the Western world. Before the meeting, he complained in his interview that the West does not love Islam's prophet despite Islam's love of the West's prophet.⁶⁴ This accusatory tone was the one of the reasons behind the absence of the EU's representatives in the meeting. Although Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik and the European Union's foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, were invited, they refused to attend on the grounds that there would be an accusatory tone towards the EU and freedom of press in the joint declaration at the end of the meeting.⁶⁵

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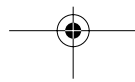
Aydin maintained his tone during the meeting too. He pointed out the roots of the crisis by saying that the reasons

AQ25 behind the cartoon crises ... lie in centuries-old prejudices, a kind of arrogant cultural mindset fed and maintained by a certain type of growing Islamophobic social milieu, and a political vision and praxis that seem to carve their ways largely through enlarged self-interests, unfounded generalizations mainly relying on exaggerated or even invented differences. 5

AQ26 Complaining about the present order of power as “reluctant to harmonize itself with the order of moral and spiritual values and responsibilities,” Aydin called for change by pointing out the world’s need for the AoC initiative, which “has already become a full-functioning international instrument to identify and to diagnose certain sensitive world problems that force us to think and act not only with the guidance of reliable knowledge but also with wisdom and full ethical responsibility.”⁶⁶ According to him, love, or at least respect, can be constructed by initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations and its control over media and education. 10 15

AQ27 After the second meeting, Turkey’s policymakers exercised a great deal of effort to have the initiative embraced by the West, and especially by the Muslim world, by talking about the importance of the initiative in all the meetings they attended. At an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in Salzburg on March 11, 2006, Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül stated that the initiative “has indeed been timely” and “it is time ... to be pro-active so that we can increase the number of allies for our values and ideals”.⁶⁷ In his address at the summit of the Arab League in Khartoum, Sudan, on March 28, 2006, Erdoğan stressed the importance of new circumstances that the world faces, which “require international cooperation and solidarity more than ever.” According to Erdoğan, although “with its multi-faced relations, rich history and cultural assets, [Turkey] feels a special responsibility to actively participate in efforts to maintain dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures.”⁶⁸ Turkey’s struggle alone was not enough to realize that mission. Consequently, “everybody should come together around this mission, all efforts are focused on this mission and this is the only way to give next generations a peaceful world.”⁶⁹ 20 25 30

AQ28 The Alliance of Civilizations initiative was also on Erdoğan’s agenda during the Conference of the Parliamentary Union of the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Istanbul on April 12, 2006, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) conference on the Middle East, in the Sinai resort of Sharm el-Shaykh, Egypt, on May 20–21, 2006. Erdoğan took part in a panel discussion entitled “Strengthening Cooperation and Dialogue” in a WEF conference and pointed out that “the dialogue is only a means; the world should pass beyond the dialogue and reach the alliance which is an end.”⁷⁰ Erdoğan not only demanded support for the initiative in the period after the meeting; he also warned the West to avoid behavior that would harm the initiative. Having criticized the existing “discriminatory” laws toward Muslims in Europe, at the Arab League summit he 35 40





went on to say that “we do not want a clash between civilizations but there are those in the world who do, there are attempts to portray Muslims as members of a religion associated with terrorism.”

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The Third Meeting: Dakar

The third meeting took place in Dakar, Senegal, on May 28–30, 2006. During the Dakar meeting, the High Level Group of eminent personalities continued their work in the four key areas—education, media, youth, and integration—that had been identified during the second session in Doha, Qatar, in February. They were also expected to submit their report outlining recommendations and practical solutions on how Western and Islamic societies could solve misconceptions and misunderstandings among themselves to the secretary general in November 2006. In doing so, interim recommendations for the final report were reviewed, and the participants gave guidance to the Alliance secretariat for drafting the report. There was neither attendance nor any statement from Turkish politicians, except for Mehmet Aydın, and as a result, the meeting received less coverage than previous meetings in the Turkish media.

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After the third meeting, Turkish diplomacy continued to search for support for the initiative and warned those who were endangering the initiative. In his speech at the Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on June 21, 2006, Gül called on CICA members to support the Alliance of Civilizations project.⁷¹ Erdoğan, in his speech in the summer session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on June 28, 2006, made a clear appeal for support, saying “I believe that we will not be left alone in our Alliance of Civilizations initiative, and that the international community, particularly the Council of Europe and member states, will gather around this goal.”⁷² In addition to Gül and Erdoğan, Turkish Parliament Speaker Bülent Arınç called “on all parliament speakers to form a ‘Platform for Dialogue among European Civilizations’ in an effort to contribute to” the Alliance of Civilizations in his speech at the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments in Copenhagen, Denmark, on June 30, 2006.⁷³

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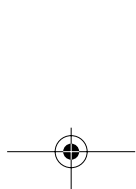
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Mehmet Aydın reiterated his previous statements accusing the West of jeopardizing the initiative by increasing its accusatory tone. During the meeting with Kofi Annan at UN headquarters in New York on June 29, 2006, Aydın stressed that “Islamophobia has become very noticeable in most of the world including the West” and added that “Islamophobia should be fought against in the same way anti-Semitism is fought against.”⁷⁴ Turkish policymakers articulated their despair after Israeli assaults on Lebanon, and Erdoğan said that his government might review its copartnership in the AoC initiative if “developments continue in a negative way.”⁷⁵ Despite these accusatory reactions, AKP leaders were aware that the continuity of initiative was more profitable than its collapse, for Turkey in particular, and the world in general. In his joint statement with his Spanish counterpart Jose Luis Zapatero, Erdoğan changed his reactionary tone to the Lebanon crisis and declared





that “there is no time to lose. In order to declare a ceasefire and peace, the time for action is now. Our future is in danger. We cannot remain as spectators to the continuity of human tragedy.”⁷⁶

Concluding Meeting: Istanbul

A multinational group of prominent scholars, politicians, and religious leaders gathered in Istanbul on November 11–13, 2006, for the presentation of a report outlining recommendations for the initiative, prepared by the High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations. According to the report, “the key reasons for the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies are not religious, but political.” The report also stated that “the conflict over Israel and the Palestinian territories is the central driver in global tensions.”⁷⁷ On receiving the report, Secretary General Annan said that “the problem is not the Koran or the Torah or the Bible, the problem is never the faith, it is the faithful and how they behave towards each other.”⁷⁸ Erdoğan also underlined the importance of report by saying that

at a time when the increasing polarization between major cultures and belief systems throughout the world urgently needs to be addressed, the presentation of this Report and its recommendations to the international community constitutes a hopeful and exciting step in efforts to sow the seeds of respect and understanding.⁷⁹

Going beyond what was contained in the report, Erdoğan also emphasized Turkey’s growing role and importance in world politics by referring to Turkey as “the symbol country of the alliance.” Shortly after this meeting, Erdoğan summarized what he understood from the initiative and reemphasized the importance of Turkey for the initiative in his statement to the United Nations General Assembly on the Alliance of Civilizations on December 18, 2006.⁸⁰ For Erdoğan, the initiative “is a global response to a global threat” and so it “stands out as the most important global peace project of the twenty-first century.” Turkey is “a democratic, secular Republic, with a market economy ... where the majority of the people are the Muslims” and a “source of inspiration for the peoples of the region that wish to see modernization, pluralism, democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms in their own countries.” Precisely for this reason, “Turkey presents an important opportunity and is a model country which can negate the ‘clash of civilizations’ scenarios.” He also stated that as a Muslim country, Turkey’s EU membership “will be a concrete example that will prove that the Alliance of Civilizations is possible.”

Turkish politicians continued to emphasize the importance of the initiative and promote the project at other international forums during the first quarter of 2007. Most of their speeches at international organizations and conferences contained references to the Alliance of Civilizations. For example, addressing the African leaders at the opening of the eighth African Union Summit of heads of state and government held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on January 28, 2007, Erdoğan, after

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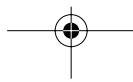
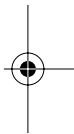
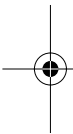
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noting that the aim of the project is to “form extensive cooperation, peace and an atmosphere of cohesion by means of highlighting common values of different cultures and religions,” emphasized that as many countries as possible should give support to the initiative for it to be effective.⁸¹ Since that time, Turkish politicians have begun to focus mostly on domestic politics, and the AoC initiative has lost its privileged position in the government’s agenda.

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While politicians from the AKP advocate the importance of the initiative, secular, neo-nationalist (*ulusalci*), and some marginal Islamic groups in Turkey have condemned the Alliance of Civilizations as an anti-secular, imperialist, and Christian project, respectively. Haydar Bař, the leader of a very conservative religious community and a marginal political party, described the initiative as a trick of Christian civilization and its stooge, the AKP, in his speech during his party’s rally, titled “Neither the EU nor the United States but Independent Turkey” in July 2007. The same accusations against the initiative have frequently been reiterated in his movement’s newspaper, *Yeni Mesaj*, and its television station, Mehtap.⁸² A columnist from *Cumhuriyet*, one of the most secular newspapers in Turkey, wrote that “the initiative is against the secular movements pursuing a nationalist project.”⁸³ Neo-nationalist leaders and columnists opposed the initiative on the grounds that it is a part of Greater Middle East Project led by the United States.⁸⁴ On the official webpage of Tuncay Özkan, one of the most popular neo-nationalists in Turkey, the initiative is described as the invasion of Turkey by the United States.⁸⁵

A General Evaluation

The Alliance of Civilizations project certainly constitutes a new perspective in Turkish foreign policy: Turkey has assumed the position of the spokesperson of Islamic world and for the first time has undertaken a pioneering role in a global initiative. The novelty of this initiative becomes all the more obvious when it is recalled that Kemal Atatürk “had no interest in pursuing an active” foreign policy towards the Middle East in particular and the Muslim world in general because “he rejected the Ottoman Islamic heritage” and embraced Western values.⁸⁶ Although Turkish foreign policymakers collaborated with Muslim countries on some ad hoc issues and even participated in some organizations set up by Muslim countries, Atatürk’s Western-oriented credentials remained as a cornerstone of Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey’s involvement in the Korean War and its becoming a NATO member in the first part of the 1950s strengthened the traditional approach, and Turkish policy towards the Middle East became but an extension of Turkey’s pro-Western foreign policy.⁸⁷ For example, Turkey played a major role in the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 with a view to “enhancing Turkey’s value to the West as an ally.”⁸⁸ This pro-Western policy towards the Middle East has, of course, experienced some aberrations, such as pro-Middle Eastern policy in 1970s because of the Cyprus question and Islamist foreign policy during a pro-Islamist government in

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1996–1997, but in essence Turkey has consistently pursued its traditional policy towards the Middle East. Consequently, undertaking the role of spokesperson of the Islamic world seems to be a challenge to Atatürk’s heritage because it manifestly declares that Turkey is a Muslim country, not a Western one. Turkey’s leadership role in the Alliance of Civilizations is also a challenge to the traditional Turkish foreign policy because the initiative is an attempt to clear the terrorist image of the Middle East and the Islamic world and to pursue a pro-Middle Eastern policy. As a result, it can be said that the Alliance of Civilizations project is a reflection, and can be seen as a result, of the “Middle Easternization of Turkey’s foreign policy.”⁸⁹

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It is true that Turkey had pioneered some regional organizations and took a subsidiary role in global initiatives. However, it declined to undertake any pioneering role in global initiatives until the Alliance of Civilizations.⁹⁰ At this point, one may argue that the initiative is not original because it is under the UN framework, and that it is not global because it includes only the Muslim and Western worlds, not the entire world. Yet the reactions to the initiative prove that it is global. States and regional and international organizations ranging from Europe⁹¹ to Asia declared their support for the initiative and underlined its necessity in a period when the world needs to solve the terrorism problem. It is also original because its initiators were two independent states, not the UN or other organizations.

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What is to be noted is that Turkey has undertaken an active and leading role in the Alliance of Civilizations, a truly global initiative, and that role has been acknowledged by both Western and Muslim countries. In addition, Turkey has expended greater effort than Spain, the “owner” of the Alliance of Civilizations concept, to bring it to life. Turkish policymakers have searched for support for the initiative in all the meetings they have attended and have given greater support to civil initiatives related the Alliance of Civilizations project. For example, an international congress entitled “Woman in the Alliance of Civilizations” was held on January 28–29, 2006, in Istanbul, “for the purpose of contributing to the Project of Alliance of Civilizations and emphasizing the importance of the role of women.”⁹²

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Although it is a new perspective for Turkish foreign policy, and Turkey is quite willing to realize it, the initiative’s future remains ambiguous. One reason for this is that Turkey and Spain, co-sponsors of the initiative, have different expectations of the project. While Spain used the initiative to justify its withdrawal from Iraq in particular and combat against global terrorism in general, Turkey hopes to strengthen its prestige via the initiative. Erdoğan’s emphasis on the connection between Turkey’s EU accession project and the future of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative shows that Turkey also hopes to gain a strategic asset from the project. This strategic dimension may not be clear in Turkish foreign policymakers’ statements because they usually try to disguise it. For example, Erdoğan explained why Turkey has to enter the EU by saying that

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Turkey’s EU membership will help to bridge the cultural divide between east and west. It will constitute a step in mutually influencing Muslims and





Christians positively in their efforts to identify with each other. It will also strengthen the ground for an Alliance of Civilizations.⁹³

5 The statement mentions two concerns. Turkey either aims mainly to reinforce the alliance via EU membership or intends mainly to strengthen its hand in the accession process of the EU by using the initiative. To the extent that Turkey's preferred foreign policy aim is EU membership, the latter analysis seems more apt.

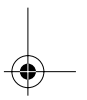
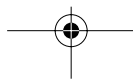
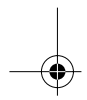
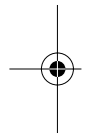
10 Beyond the difference in co-sponsors' expectations from the Alliance of Civilizations, the initiative may be steered by some powers that aim to use the initiative's popularity. For example, the United States' abstinence from the project in its first phase tried to use the project in accordance with its global aims when the initiative's popularity began to grow . On February 14, 2006, US Secretary for State Condoleezza Rice sent a formal letter to Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos in which she declared the United States' intention to collaborate with the proposal of the Alliance of Civilizations, in the hope that it is "compatible with our own program goals for the Middle East regions" and that it "promotes democratic reform, peace, and stability in the broader Middle East."⁹⁴ Russia, another superpower, did not give strong support to the initiative either, despite President Vladimir Putin's supportive, albeit vague, statement during a religious leaders' meeting in Moscow in July 2006.⁹⁵ It seems that the project suffers from the apathy and skepticism of other powers.

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25 Another problem for the future of the AoC is that Muslim and Middle Eastern countries have shown no real enthusiasm for the initiative. Iranian political leaders, for instance, have remained silent about the AoC, despite the former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami's active participation. Leaders of major Muslim countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan have not given strong support to the initiative either, but merely confined themselves to a few good words . As for many Muslim countries in North Africa, South Asia, and Central Asia, not a single word has been said about the AoC. In short, the initiative did not arouse strong interest among political leaders on duty in many Muslim countries and turned into a goodwill platform for some retired politicians, such as Muhammad Charfi, the former education minister of Tunisia; Mohammad Khatami, the former president of Iran; Moustapha Niassé, the former prime minister of Senegal; and Ali Alatas, the former foreign minister of Indonesia.

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35 In all, the initiative has some other significant problems in addition to the practical problems outlined above. Firstly, the term "Alliance of Civilizations" contains some conceptual problems, such as the fact that there is a great deal of ambiguity about what "civilization" means and who represents it. The concept of "alliance" also evokes a military connotation.⁹⁶ Secondly, the initiative embraces the West and the Muslim world, but pays little attention to other civilizations such as Judaism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Thirdly, it seems to be destined to remain a dream in terms of its grand objectives.⁹⁷ Lastly, paradoxically, the survival of the Alliance of Civilizations depends greatly on the continuation of the clash of civilizations, because the notion of "alliance" is reintroduced in the notion of "clash."





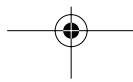
Acknowledgements

The authors thank Dr Tuncay Kardaş for his helpful comments and the anonymous reviewer of *Turkish Studies*.

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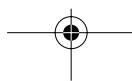
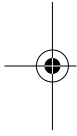
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