

# The Alliance of Civilisations. The double meaning of the Palma de Mallorca meeting

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**Máximo Cajal**  
Spanish Ambassador

In his speech at the UN General Assembly meeting, on September 21st 2004, the Spanish prime minister proposed an *Alliance of Civilisations between the Western world and the Arab and Muslim world* and suggested to the Secretary-General the possibility of setting up a High Level Group to carry out this proposal. This group, made up of twenty eminent figures, met formally, for the first time, in Palma de Mallorca (Spain) between 27th and 29th November 2005.

The meeting in Palma was the climax of the first stage of a process whose principal milestones were, during the course of 2005, the co-sponsorship of this initiative by the Turkish prime minister in June, with all the symbolic and political significance that this entailed; the announcement of the initiative by Kofi Annan in mid-July, which meant its formal acceptance by United Nations; and the designation of the Group members at the beginning of September, a decision that left the way clear for their work to begin. This sustained series of specific steps consolidated the visibility and credibility of a project that, from its launch until the present day, has aroused the active and explicit interest of some thirty countries and international organizations, thus simultaneously underlining its institutional strength. The proposal also provoked scepticism, and in some cases a distrustful distancing of positions, while here in Spain it was greeted by the relentless (and still continuing) harping on of an opposition that has so far been incapable of formulating a minimally coherent and rigorous position

capable of giving expression to their small-mindedness.

The fact is that by the end of last year another group had formed, this time informal and spontaneous, which had been joined by countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Thailand, as well as by Iran and Jordan; Italy and the United Kingdom; Argentina, Costa Rica and Mexico; Egypt, Tanzania, Tunisia and South Africa, along with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the Ibero-American General Secretariat and the European Commission, whose support was later confirmed by the EU itself. The United States of America also joined, having announced in September its proposal of contributing to the projects being considered under the umbrella of the Alliance of Civilisations. In 2006, it has been European countries above all that have individually joined this support group: Austria, Belgium, Slovenia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland and Switzerland, along with Afghanistan, El Salvador, the United Arab Emirates, Kazakhstan, Qatar and Senegal.

The members of the High Level Group, designated on the basis of their strict personal merits and according to a geographical and cultural distribution in harmony with the global character of the work entrusted to them, received from the Secretary-General their "terms of reference". These constitute a mandate to assess, firstly, certain events – "new and emerging threats" – that endanger international peace and security, in particular those that come from the forces that fuel extremism; secondly, to identify collective action that would be capable of facing them; and finally, to recommend a series of specific measures and practices aimed at bridging

the widening gap between the West and Islam, without forgetting the interdependent nature of different civilizations and cultures. In the light of these recommendations, it will be the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the United Nations – in consultation with the co-sponsors, that is, with the Spanish and Turkish Prime Ministers –, to determine, at the end of this year, how to present the Action Plan to the international community.

Palma de Mallorca was also the setting for the beginning of a process, of a collective exercise of reflection, whose aim has always been, from the very beginning, to make one more step forward – as the Prime Minister said in the opening session of the meeting –, in relation to other partial, sectorial or regional initiatives that were already under way, many of whose objectives are similar to those pursued by the Alliance of Civilisations and should therefore be taken into account within its ambit. The additional value he referred to in his speech, is precisely provided by the eminently political perspective and the global dimension implied by the fact that this proposal is incorporated in the United Nations Organization and that it has been supported by Kofi Annan.

If, as Rodríguez Zapatero also said, the aim pursued is to foster knowledge, understanding and mutual respect, moderation and appreciation of diversity, as well as an awareness of the growing and inevitable interdependence between peoples and nations, the instrument to achieve these objectives cannot but be a coalition between governments, international organizations and civil society. This requires concerted action on a world scale that will help close the widening gap that is opening up, both

On 14th April 2005, Narcís Serra, president of the Fundació CIDOB, presented in Rabat the study *"L'Image de l'Espagne au Maroc"* which was carried out by Noureddine Affaya and Driss Guerraoui.

#### Why is there a need for a study on the image of Spain in Morocco?

If we want to speak about dialogue and alliance, what we need most is to get to know one another. Understanding and recognition. This recognition normally expresses what we think of the *others*. More than once, while discussing certain issues, the question has come up as what the Spanish think of the Moroccans. However, the question on what *they* think about us is not so usual. This study wishes to discreetly deepen the mutual understanding from the point of view of the *others*, in order to put Moroccan-Spanish relations on a new footing, jointly implicating themselves in a new dynamic of cooperation, exchange and communication.

At the same time, the study "The image of Spain in Morocco" is in itself a dialogue between the philosopher Noureddine Affaya and the economist Driss Guerraoui. Each one, through their own points of view and fields of analysis, uses the study to record this Moroccan view of Spain and the Spanish. Their objective is the restoration of constructive communication between Morocco and Spain, and the identification of the most pertinent dimensions of their entangled cultural and human relations. They have both been surprised by the lack of reference material to be used as the basis to discover the image of the Spanish in the mind of the Moroccans and that would make the Spanish an object of reflection.

According to the philosopher it is a matter of rising the awareness amongst the institutional leaders, the media and the various actors on the importance of the images in improving the relations between these two neighbouring countries, since the prejudices are already

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*"clouding people's judgment and conditioning their opinions"*. He believes that the relations between the two countries are marked by stereotypes from the past that, when added to the present day clichés, hinder any opportunities of exchange or possibilities of communication. *"One's own image, and the one of the others, in the process of identification and differentiation, generates attitudes and gives rise to opinions and value judgments which affect our views while qualifying a neighbour, appointing a colleague or judging an adversary"*. This symbolic image can be anchored in a web of prejudices so that all that is left is dialogue without the will to communicate. *"How can we fight against old prejudices while knowing that they continue to affect our behaviour and influence our policies, especially when they become the object of the media and political rhetoric?"* questions Noureddine Affaya and *"Can we prove the falseness of an opinion to people or communities that have prejudices?"*

Since there are opinions and value judgments that stay with us over time and spread through social and cultural exchanges, this study tries to combine *"the search for the genealogy of the image of other people and the empirical investigation into the nature of the Spanish presence in the Moroccan identitarian space"*, and aims for understanding the Moroccan perception of the Spanish in order to reach a renewed communication between them.

The economist Guerraoui places this study in the context of the transnationalisation of the economies, the globalisation of exchanges and the growth in interdependence between all of the components of the worldwide system. The political leaders, companies and civil society actors have to take into account the changes in the behaviour of individuals and social groups, as well as the fast evolution that takes place in their attitudes, customs, values and perceptions in their own environment and that conditions their relations with other people. This empirical study tries to

identify the cultural, social, economic and political challenges arising from people's behaviour and attitudes. This approach then focuses on the international dimension, as in the case of the image of Spain in Morocco, in order to identify the perceptions the Moroccans have of their future relations with their neighbour Spain, and then explores the expectations for future Moroccan-Spanish cooperation, mutual understanding, reciprocal friendship, sustainable and shared development. Understanding the actual state of the actors' representations is an essential step in order to evaluate the social and cultural changes required and to secure *"proper instruments that will help in decision making, and therefore, in the elaboration of the most appropriate public and private policies"*.

The survey looks at the degree of knowledge the Moroccans have about Spain, the perception of Spanish institutional and economic evolution, the appreciation of the relations between Morocco and Spain and the possibility of improving them.

The study's results show that *"the route to improve the mutual image will be long and slow (due to the historical burden and the presence of many differences) although there are chances of finding a short cut"*. Luckily, one of the promising results, when looking to the future, is that the image of Spain among the Moroccans is positive. As a matter of fact, 69.4% of the people interviewed showed a real affection and a genuine respect for the progress made by Spain in political, economic and socio-cultural fields. The Moroccan society has shown that it is ready to build a common future with Spain based on relations of neighbourhood and friendship, in a framework of a special relationship. This will be a great benefit for both countries and a guarantee of peace and prosperity for the entire region.

Iolanda Onghena  
Intercultural Programme Coordinator  
Fundació CIDOB

globally and – let's not close our mind to reality – within our own societies. A few months after the meeting in Palma, when the cartoons published some time earlier by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* came to the attention of the public, this incident – that was apparently banal to us Westerners but that set off a wave of emotions in Islamic

societies together with unacceptable violent protests–, harshly shown the relevance of that diagnosis. The need was clearly shown to rise up against those who incite hate and intolerance, in any place and using any kind of arguments, distortions, ruses and pretexts, Similar considerations were expressed in Mallorca by the Turkish Prime Minis-

ter and the Secretary-General himself, Kofi Annan, in the message he sent to the Group members. The former emphasized the different nature of the work they had been entrusted with if compared with other similar experiences., According to Erdogan's opinion, these ones only describe the present situation and underline the need for dialogue,

but they lack of a pragmatic and strategic approach concerning what should be done in concrete terms. This is the real difference, the originality that the Alliance of Civilizations provides. Annan, on his side, asked them to assess the alarming developments taking place; the growing levels of intolerance, extremism and violence, and the evident tensions between East and West that, if not stopped, could even threaten world stability. It is up to the Group to consider this alarming situation and propose a collective answer aimed at reducing these tensions. Its basic task, he said, is to manage that this common humanity triumphs over perceived differences, that the awareness of living in the same world becomes established, that there is no other choice but to understand and respect one another. *For, in the end, your work is not only for an Alliance of Civilizations. It is equally for a global civilization for all members of all societies.*

The meeting in Palma partly coincided with that one held in Barcelona by the European Union to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Euromediterranean Process. Here the EU commented, for the first time, on the Alliance of Civilizations. Its members committed themselves to acting jointly against racism, xenophobia and intolerance and to encourage intercultural dialogue

through the Anna Lindh Foundation and in support of the Alliance of Civilizations. While taking place in Doha the meeting of the High Level Group on February 27th, the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs reiterated their explicit support in Brussels. They did it in the conclusions they assumed about the muslim world reactions to the publication of the cartoons.

Mallorca was the starting point of an ambitious and complex task. All that was needed was a few minutes dedicated to the challenge to be faced. Therefore it was inevitable that – under the direction of their two co-presidents, the Spaniard Federico Mayor Zaragoza and the Turk Mehmet Aydin –, the members of the Group should dedicate their first interventions to present their own personal points of view regarding the assignment they had received and their particular view of the world situation. Little by little the boundaries were marked out, which was imperative in order to avoid the risk of dispersion. Everybody there was very aware indeed that the Alliance of Civilizations cannot expect to solve the problems that afflict humanity. But what it can do, and this is its commitment, is identifying the problems – without shying away from the ungrateful task of pointing the finger at where it hurts most –, and provide the necessary prescriptions to remedy such

problems. In this task the Alliance can count on the international scene actors, whose help is necessary not to waste all the efforts and shutter all hopes.

In this way a certain number of general issues were identified in this first review which makes it possible to define what is at stake. Such matters as the interdependence and the complementary nature of civilizations, to the point of considering that only one civilization exists; the multipolar and complex character of the relation between current conflicts and challenges, which leads us not to concentrate on the terrorist threat alone; the incompatibility between religion and the practice of indiscriminate violence and terrorism; the urgent need to focus our attention on relations between the Muslim and the Western world, between Islam and secularized Christianity; the weight of political and economic grievances based on the inequality of power, and the resentment due to the way this power is exercised. All these topics and the need to establish and activate a widespread discourse radically opposed to that one dominating at present moment and used by extremists to justify their attitudes. Certain areas of priority action were also identified in Palma. These included education, both formal and informal; media, and communication in general; youth; migratory movements; and women.