The Local Dimension of the Alliance of Civilisations

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A) PRECEDENTS

A.1) The Alliance of Civilizations initiative:

A.1.a) The initiative:

It was in September 2004, in his speech addressing the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations that Prime Minister Zapatero launched the idea of an Alliance of Civilizations for the first time, and proposed to the Secretary General the creation of a High Level Group to push forward this initiative. This proposal was immediately seconded by the Prime Minister of Turkey, becoming the co-sponsor of the Alliance.

Following the proposal and after some months of consultations and preparations, the 15th of July 2005, Kofi Annan announced the launch of the Alliance as a formal UN initiative. This was followed by further consultations, and finally the composition and *Terms of Reference* of the United Nations High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations were unveiled the 2nd of September of the same year.

A.1.b) The HLG Process and the Report:

The High Level Group (HLG), co-chaired by Federico Mayor of Spain and Mehmet Aydin of Turkey, was composed by twenty members[1] representatives of different geographical backgrounds as well as from diverse cultural and religious realities. During one year starting November 2005, the HLG hold four plenary meetings (Majorca, Doha, Dakar and

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[1] For the full list of the HLG members as well as for the HLG Report in different languages and other information: www.unaoc.org

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Istanbul) as well as other meetings and regional and topical initiatives (a working meeting in New York, activities in Geneva, Vienna, Quito, etc.) preparing the High Level Group Report which was delivered to the Secretary General in 13th November 2006 in Istambul (with the presence of the co-sponsoring Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey).

Already during the preparatory process an effort was made to involucrate different international and intergovernmental organisations in the initiative. Therefore several organisations were invited to address and interact with the HLG, among them UNESCO, OSCE, OIC, the League of Arab States, ISESCO, and UCLG.

The report finally delivered to the Secretary General was an action-oriented one composed by two parts, the first one devoted to the analysis, the political dimension and the general recommendations, and a second one devoted to action specially focusing in four main fields of action: education, youth, migration and media.

During the process of the report, a *Group of Friends* –formed by an increasing number of member states- was established to give support to the initiative within the UN system. In 18th December 2006 the report was presented in New York to the whole UN system through and informal plenary debate at the General Assembly, receiving a strong support both by many member states and their regional groupings.

A.1.c) The High Representative, the Implementation Plan and the 1st Forum:

Following the recommendations of the HLG Report, a High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations was created through the nomination of Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal and also former Mayor of Lisbon, in April 2006.

Since them, the High Representative has been the responsible for the development of the initiative through many different actions, including the elaboration of an Implementation Plan and the celebration of the 1st Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid[2] in January 2008, where several hundreds of people participated -including 89 official delegations-representing the worlds of politics, international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, foundations and business; and where a list of practical agreements for action were presented.

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[2] For more information: www.madridaocforum.org

After that, several of these actions have started to be implemented, including the signature of partnership agreements with some international institutions (UNESCO, Council of Europe, League of Arab States, ALECSO, ISESCO and UCLG), as well as the put into practice of projects such as the Online Media Literacy Clearing House[3], a Rapid Response Media Mechanism, the first call for projects of the Alliance of Civilizations Youth Solidarity Fund, and a short-list of Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) Supported Projects[4].

B) THE LOCAL DIMENSION OF THE ALLIANCE

B.1) Global versus local, the nature of the local actors, general aspects:

Indeed local authorities and municipalities for their nature do have an important and strategic role to play in an initiative and process with the characteristics of the Alliance. Their experience and proximity to the citizen are central in achieving what the High Representative stresses as the core need of the Alliance "*to deglobalise its universal objectives and produce local results*"[5]

But the principles of proximity and those linked to the concept of subsidiarity are not the only ones to be taken into account here. Many local authorities and governments are –in contrast with those who are supposed to do so[6]- not only contributing with the 0,7% of their budget to policies of international cooperation and development, but in some cases even with higher percentages around the 1%. This gives them credibility and shows their non-conditioned commitment when dealing with policies of international cooperation; something that it is not so clear in the domains of the traditional actors of international affairs –the states- that in too many cases do condition or link their policies of cooperation to geo-strategic policies priorities in the so called "national interest".

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[3] www.aocmedialiteracy.org
[4] All this information can be found at: www.unaoc.org
[5] Jorge Sampaio, Alto Representante de las Naciones Unidas para la Alianza de Civilizaciones: "*La Mujer y la Alianza de Civilizaciones – oportunidades y desafios*" Buenos Aires, 28-29 de Abril de 2008.
[6] Meaning the rich member states of the UN system, which most of them have failed in their reiterate compromises of achieving the goal of devoting 0,7% of their GDP in policies of international cooperation for sustainable development.

At this stage it is relevant to recall some of the final conclusions of the "Conference of Barcelona" of last September when, while reaffirming the principles of *trust and credibility*, *readiness to intervene* and *complementary with other actors*, the local actors themselves underlined that:

> "*Globalisation has given a rise to a blend of cultures that coexist in the big cities. Local authorities are able to prevent culture clashes, stimulate dialogue between the different groups and promote social cohesion.*"[7]

Moreover, in the words of the High Representative:

> "*...Cities are at the forefront of efforts to build bridges between communities (...) Cities are where the impact of globalization becomes most visible: people from a diversity of cultures mixing together, being exposed to different traditions and religions, different kinds of food and music. Cities are microcosms where people from a diversity of nations and backgrounds come together – and also the space where tensions are being played out...*"

who also affirmed that:

> "*...But the multicultural make-up of many modern cities also presents challenges (...) In this regard, cities reflect at a local level the fault lines that divide cultures and communities globally*"[8]

B.2) The UCLG and the Alliance:

B.2.a) From Dakar to Jeju:

In coherence with what it has been said until now, since the birth of the Alliance process, efforts have been made -from both sides- to ensure the appropriate interaction between the UN initiative and the local authorities through their global interlocutor, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

Already in the third plenary meeting of the High Level Group of the Alliance[9] –this means as early as the same process of comprehensive

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[7] Final Conclusions. *The role of local authorities in peace building.* Summary of the Conference of Barcelona, September 2007.

[8] Jorge Sampaio, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations. Second World Congress of UCLG. *Changing cities are driving our world. Intervention at the Open Ceremony.*

conceptualisation of the Alliance was taking place-, UCLG was invited to address and exchange its views, and this was done through the participation of Wim Deetman, at that time Mayor of The Hague and President of the UCLG Commission on Cities Diplomacy.

This was followed by a series of contacts and continued with a plenary round table devoted to the Alliance at the UCLG World Council of Marrakech[10] in 2006, which drove to the 2nd UCLG World Congress in November 2007[11], that counted with the participation of the High Representative Sampaio, and formally endorsed the objectives of the Alliance, as well as accepted in principle the invitation to become a member of the *Group of Friends* of the Alliance and to participate in the 1st Alliance Forum in Madrid.

B.2.b) The Madrid Forum and the MoU:

Following other informal contacts[12], finally the participation of local governments at the 1st Alliance of Civilisations Forum in Madrid was a relevant one[13]. Indeed the President of UCLG, Bertrand Delanoë, strongly emphasised the essence of the role and support of local actors to the Alliance in his address to the Forum:

> *"There is no city in the world that has not been enriched through its history by the diversity of cultures of its citizens. This is why we have the profound conviction that local leaders should commit to the harmonious integration and preservation of diversity in our towns and cities, to develop policy initiatives that foster mutual respect, dialogue and genuine equality. This is what constitutes the real*

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[9] That took place in Dakar (Senegal) 28th and 29th May 2006.

[10] This, under the title *The Alliance of Civilizations: the role of local governments*, took place the 1st November 2006 and with the participation of Omar El Bahraoui, Mayor of Rabat & President of the Moroccan National Local Authorities Association (acting as chair of the session); Bertrand Delanoë, Mayor of Paris and Co-Chair of UCLG; Manuel Manonelles, Special Advisor of the Co-Chair of the UN HLG for the Alliance of Civilizations; Wim Deetman, Mayor of The Hague and Chair of the UCLG Commission on Cities Diplomacy and Hikmet Sahin, Mayor of Bursa, Turkey. The debate counted with the participation of Abdel Meneem Al-Ariss, Mayor of Beirut and Wolfgang Schuster, Mayor of Stuttgart, and others.

[11] Which took place in Jeju, South Korea.

[12] Among them an informal working meeting with the High Representative organised by the Foundation for a Culture of Peace in November 22nd 2007 in Barcelona.

[13] Participants included the Mayor of Paris –and Chair of UCLG-, the Mayors of Madrid, Barcelona, Cordova and the Governor of El Cairo, as well as the Mayor of Istanbul, who chaired the last plenary session of the Forum. A delegation of the secretariat of UCLG was also present, leaded by the Secretary General, Elisabeth Gateau.

essence of our unwavering support to the Alliance of Civilizations".[14]

And it was during the Forum itself -the 15th January 2008- that the Memorandum of Understanding between the Alliance and UCLG was signed, establishing the modalities of work and cooperation and recognising, among other issues, the importance of cities and City Diplomacy in the promotion of dialogue among cultures, and the role of UCLG in involving local actors in the Alliance work and initiatives.

B.3) The action at the local level:

As it is above mentioned the HLG Report established four main fields of action for the work of the Alliance: education, youth, migration and media. It has been also commented the principles by which, the role of local authorities are perceived as key ones for the implementation of the Alliance process and initiatives.

In this context, the following are some suggestions of possibilities for joint action and cooperation between the Alliance and the local actors – meaning mayors and municipalities- mainly through the UCLG framework. In all senses the following is a contribution which is not a closed proposal but intended to be the basis for a debate in order to build a much more coherent and complete proposal.

In a more concrete and detailed approach, in his two addresses to the 2nd World Congress of the UCLG, Jorge Sampaio already made some specific proposals. On the one side he suggested strengthening the ties between the Alliance and UCLG –something which has already been done through the Memorandum of Understanding, the entrance of UCLG into the *Group of Friends* and the participation at the Madrid Forum-; and on the other one, he called upon local authorities to contribute to the development of the "National Strategies for cross-cultural dialogue" linked to the Alliance, through their experience and know-how.

B.3.a) Education and Youth

At the local level, the activities directed to education and youth are very connected, probably even more than in other levels, since in many countries municipalities do have competences both in education and in

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[14] *Third plenary session of the Alliance of Civilizations chaired by Kadir Topbas, Mayor of Istanbul.* www.cities-localgovernments.org

youth and implement most of them in an integrated manner. The HLG Report makes different recommendations in these two areas, especially in "*promoting participation: involving young people in community councils, etc.*"[15]; and linked to other areas –such as migration- and directly focused on local authorities, when recommends that "*Municipal governments and local foundations should expand support for the establishment of youth community organisations*"[16]. It is important to underline the fact the HLG Report "*recognize*(s) *youth not only as a source of mobilizations, but as an autonomous actors and partners.*"[17]

In the particular field of education, a strong endorsement of civic, peace and cross-cultural education is done through the HLG Report[18], something which is interdependent with the youth policies given the fact that in these fields the role of youth organisations –specially at the local level- is conditional to achieve success. Interlinked between education and media is the issue of *Media Literacy*[19] which can be addressed both from a formal and non formal approach, and can have its own relevant space of work at the local level both linked to the non-formal and civic-education field, as well as the local media one.

Again here the capacity of extracting recommendations on good practices on the basis of many successful policies –and also from the mistakes- by different municipalities around the globe (the creation and function of youth councils in many cities, the policies of support to youth organisations and their involvement in non-formal education, initiatives in the area of mediation and violence prevention, observatories, etc.) could be of tremendous help in the work of the Alliance.

B.3.b) Migration

It is clear that one of the central areas for stronger interaction and cooperation between the Alliance and the municipalities is the one related to the issue of migration and those policies and actions to promote integration through social inclusion and the appropriate participatory structures and mechanisms.

This is a key point of reflection and daily work by the political and administrative actors at the local level since many years ago. In Europe, for instance, efforts have been done in order to create tools and spaces

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[15] UN HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, paragraph 6.1, p. 29
[16] UN HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, p. 38
[17] UN HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, para. 6.12, p. 28
[18] UN HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, in particular in paras. 6.3 to 6.8; pp. 25-26
[19] UN HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, para. 6.7, p. 26

where diverse municipalities can exchange experiences and policies in this field, in order to learn from the multiple experiences and strengthen their capabilities. The *European Network of Cities for Local Integration Policies for Migrants*, known as CLIP (*Cities for Local Integration Policy Network*) led by the city of Stuttgart, is a good example of that. In a more general scope there is the *UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy* which, is not only centred in the issue of migration, but also focused on issues of social inclusion and participation which are central for a proper integration process, as it has been acknowledged by the HLG report.

B.3.c) Media

At a first glance, when dealing with the issue of media and the Alliance, one could get the false perception that this is an area where local actors have almost nothing to do, that this should not be a priority at all. There is a tendency to think that the work of the Alliance should be centred only in the mainstream media; but a more detailed analysis shows a very interesting field where some constructive work could be done.

Local media exist, and with a higher impact than the usually perceived. In many –not to say all- municipalities of a certain size, and even in many of those of a rather small one, local newspapers, journals, magazines, radios and even TVs exist, with a share which can not neither be denied nor ignored, and which is becoming proportionally more relevant in a progressively fragmentised "market"[20].

Moreover the experience shows that sometimes the proximity of local media to the citizens implies a major level of trust and complicity. In many cases, the relationship between these media and the local authorities is very close, even with relations of ownership[21]. This, and the fact that usually local media is at least less conditioned than the mass one to the market flows and dictates, could facilitate the work with contents and editorial policies close to the principles of the Alliance .

Most probably this is a field which needs to be much more studied and analysed, but it is also clear that this is a space of important potential. There are several examples of that, both in the positive but also in very

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[20] Especially in most developed countries after the irruption of the commercial free press or the blooming of TV channels –many of them of local scope- due to the digitalisation process.
[21] It is not so rare that local media –being local TVs, radios or news papers- are owned, totally or partially, by town councils or other bodies. In other cases, what is owned by the local authorities is not the specific radio or TV, but the technical infrastructure they use –studios, etc.- for their daily work.

negative side of this potential[22]. The involvement in this aspect of actors such as Audiovisual Regulatory Bodies and Councils, especially those that are internationally organised[23], could be of help.

B.3.d) The *religious dimension* and the management of the public space:

Although not directly acknowledged by the HLG Report, there are two other fields where local governments have to face daily and that are directly linked to the areas of work of the Alliance. These are what we could call the *religious dimension*[24] and the management of public space. They are two tremendously sensitive issues which have become some of the most complex challenges which have to be dealt by the local authorities. In many places, the red line between the "clash and the alliance" symbolically resides in these questions, and how this is managed and solved become issues of the highest political content. Initiatives such as the *International Network on Religions and Mediation in Urban Areas*[25], as well as other specific initiatives are of important help, but the need to contrast experiences, to work jointly to help to define clear guidelines consistent with the principles of the Alliance as well as with the principles of the countries of reception is of the highest urgency.

C) NOTES FOR CONCLUSION

In a some sort of open conclusion, it is more than clear that the work ahead is an important one. Some of the necessary tools and structures for interaction do exist and include, apart from those already mentioned, other UCLG Committees as the one on Culture and the Mediterranean Interregional one, as well as conferences as this one in The Hague.

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[22] This can be of tremendous dimension, as it was the case of the role of local radios in the genocide in Rwanda.

[23] Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities: www.rirm.org/en, European Platform of Regulatory Authorities: www.epra.org , Broadcasting Regulation and Cultural Diversity: www.brcd.net

[24] This includes not only the religious demands of many migrant communities which sometimes contrast with those of the local population, but also the more in-depth issue of the tensions which arise from the contrast between the more secular and lay traditions of many societies which are receptors of migration, and those of the migrants which are more religious centred.

[25] www.unescocat.org/religions-mediacio/

Two, among others, could be the lines to follow-up. On the one side, the creation of working groups together with the celebration of thematic meetings in order to jointly develop –UCLG, other local actors and the Alliance- guidelines and good practices which could be of help for future action in many municipalities and even in other levels of governance.

The other one could be linked to initiatives of important political and symbolic dimension in line with the involvement of certain municipalities – through the development of City Diplomacy or other special actions or methodologies such as twinings of special political incidence and relevance- especially in those areas were conflicts are more acute (the Middle East in broad sense, etc.). But this is an issue which is already being debated in other spaces of this conference, and therefore it would be necessary to follow these and other discussion which for sure will enrich also the themes discussed in this paper.