



PROPOSAL OF THE SPANISH FEDERATION OF MUNICIPALITIES AND PROVINCES FOR THE CREATION OF A WORKGROUP ON THE LOCAL DIMENSION OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE COMMITTEE ON CITY DIPLOMACY OF THE UNITED CITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (UCLG)

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The creation of this group is approved by the UCLG World Council.

I.- BACKGROUND

The proposal of the **Alliance of Civilisations** emerged as a response to the urgent need to overcome the gap that is widening between the western world and the Arab and Muslim world. It attempts to respond to the principles of international ethics on which the foreign policy of the Member States of the United Nations is based, and to the commitment to international legality, the full respect of human rights free of sex discrimination and the support of multilateralism which the United Nations represents.

In order to determine the content, a high level workgroup was constituted, responsible for creating a report and action plan to promote a new peace culture and a dialogue among civilisations.

In January 2008, the **1st Alliance of Civilisations Forum** held in Madrid, brought together representatives from the international community to debate about the design and scope of the initiative and where, in accordance with the recommendations of the HLG¹ report, they recognised the importance of the local dimension of the initiative, a matter which was reflected in the signing of the **Memorandum of Understanding between the UCLG and the AC**² which is supported by three fundamental pillars: the importance of cities in the promotion of dialogue among cultures, the role of the UCLG as a facilitator for the participation and involvement of local governments in the Alliance; and finally, the recognition of the diplomacy of cities as a key instrument for promoting dialogue between cultures.

In June of the same year, organised under the sponsorship of the UCLG, the **1st International Conference on City Diplomacy** was held in The Hague, which included in its activities a debate between city mayors from around the world on the local dimension of the Alliance of Civilisations and the contributions that Local Governments can make in its practical implementation. The result of this Conference was the **Hague Agenda on City Diplomacy** in which, among other issues, the signatories expressed their concern about *"the rise of extremism in our societies, of intolerance and tensions between and among communities of different cultures, ethnicities, religion and traditions, which often become a source of conflict"*.

The local dimension of the UN initiative was conceived as another demonstration of the enormous diplomatic action that cities have been developing and which should be

¹ High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilisations.

² Alliance of Civilisations.



contained within the context of a common action with other authorities and levels of government, sustained by **four priority areas of action** recognised by the initiative: **youth, education, migration and the media**, issues which are all intimately linked with the day-to-day reality of Local Governments.

It is our opinion that these areas of action justify by themselves the intervention of Local Governments and the recognition of the UCLG as the body to direct the local actions towards the initiative: furthermore, the experience of the day-to-day running of Local Governments in the management of culture, ethnic and religious diversity in their cities makes them key players in the initiative. In view of all of these circumstances, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP) proposes the constitution of a workgroup on the Alliance of Civilisations within the framework of its Committee of City Diplomacy, the reasons for which are explored in the following section.

II. FOUNDATIONS

Throughout its history, the municipality has been characterised by its vocation to organise and promote human cohabitation. Living in peace and freedom is the synthesis of wellbeing for citizens and the goal that every municipal activity should aim for, creating a human and habitable space. Therefore, it is the municipality as a space which provides the widest representation of human life with a sense of cohabitation and local community, which is not defined solely by its localisms but also by its sense of openness and universality.

Today, our cities present a diverse reality: diverse in colours, diverse in ethnic groups, diverse in religions... Globalisation, which has emerged with evident intensity in our cities and towns, has configured an open, racially-mixed and multicultural society with diverse concerns and desires which are different to those that it had a few years ago. In short, this globalization has configured new needs in social structures to which the Local Governments have had to respond through the development of new policies and the innovation of public services.

The migratory processes carried out throughout the last few decades have culminated in a crucible of cultures, giving rise to knowledge and mutual enrichment, to respect and tolerance, to knowing that cities are environments of cohabitating where social policies take on a special dimension. But also, this new reality configures a reinforcement of the urban social identity: the feeling of belonging to a city is reinforced to a greater extent than other feelings of belonging to certain communities.

Therefore, the fundamental reason for Local Governments to intervene in an initiative such as the Alliance of Civilisations is a practical one, as the flow of knowledge present in the everyday operations of Local Governments regarding the management of multiculturalism cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the action areas of the initiative (youth, education, migration and the media) are inherent in the activity carried out by Local Governments, which execute countless policies and implement different types of services for these areas.

The second reason which justifies the presence of Local Governments in the development of the initiative has a conceptual nature: the municipality is a fundamental part of State and the issues that the State is concerned with also concern the municipality. Or in other words: Local Governments are also the State. The implementation of public policies is no longer a question of just one level of government, but which occurs on different levels, requiring the participation of different governmental bodies to achieve good results.

And lastly, an issue of an organic nature; if the Alliance of Civilisations HLG report establishes that the local dimension of the initiative should be directed through the UCLG, it seems logical that a workgroup should be formed in the heart of this institution to work within it and carry out the appropriate actions in order to fulfil the commitments assumed by the UCLG with the signing of the *Memorandum of Understanding between the UCLG and the AC*.

Taking these three questions as a reference, and bearing in mind the existence of a Committee on City Diplomacy within the UCLG, it appears that this is the appropriate forum within the organisation for forming the workgroup, given that we understand that the local contribution to this UN initiative is another demonstration of city diplomacy. Furthermore, this proposal coincides with the content of the Hague Agenda, a document generated by this Committee, which requires the participation and implication of Local Governments and the Associations that represent them in the common effort to achieve peace, justice and human security.

III.- OBJECTIVES

III.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVES:

- To promote and encourage the involvement of Local Governments in the Alliance of Civilisations Initiative and to facilitate the fulfilment of the commitments contained in the Memorandum of Understanding between the UCLG and the AC.
- To articulate mechanisms that will enable the promotion of the values that inspire the Alliance of Civilisations, in defining and developing, through Local Governments, its public policies.

III.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- To elaborate and develop the work programme of the UCLG with the Alliance of Civilisations.
- To consolidate effective mechanisms so that the UCLG may be recognised as an actor with a capacity to influence politically in the development of the Alliance of Civilisations Initiative carried out by the United Nations.
- To generate a space of political reflection for Local Governments which serves to channel the actions that they carry out on a daily basis in their cities in relation to the management of cultural diversity and the action areas defined in the initiative (youth, education, migration and the media).
- To promote innovative practices in the area of the Alliance of Civilisations, which may generate a multiplying effect among local governments.
- To promote the orientation of the cooperation projects carried out by Local Governments towards issues related to the Alliance, in close collaboration with the Commission for Decentralised Cooperation of the UCLG.
- To contribute to the consolidation, visibility and effectiveness of the Alliance of Civilisations on a local scale.

IV. ACTIVITIES

- 1.- To configure the participation of Local Governments in the design and organisation of the 2nd Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations programmed for 2009 in the city of Istanbul.
- 2.- To prepare a meeting of Mayors who are committed to the AC coinciding with the 2nd Forum in Istanbul.
- 3.-To promote the participation of local governments, through their national associations of reference, in the definition and development strategies of the National Plans of the AC.
- 4.- To organise seminars in the four work areas of the Alliance of Civilisations, education, youth, migration and the media, in order to study in depth their local dimension and the impact that the initiative may have in the development of local public policies.
- 5.- To create didactic material to distribute in schools with the objective of raising awareness of the Alliance of Civilisations among children.
- 6.- To promote a communication campaign through the local media to bring the initiative of the Alliance of Civilisations closer to citizens, placing particular emphasis on the mutual knowledge between cultures and on the value of intercultural societies.
- 7.- To build a database of good local practices in the area of the Alliance of Civilisations which may be accessed online from the UCLG website.
- 8.- The creation of an International Network of Cities for cultural diversity and cohabitation, and a local agenda for cultural diversity and cohabitation which may be transferred to the Forums on the Alliance of Civilisations organised by the states and the United Nations. In this way, the city networks and local governments related to peace issues which are already operating will be taken into account, incorporating them in a way which is compatible with the spirit of the Alliance of Civilisations Initiative.
- 9.- Others which the group determines in developing its activity.

WORKGROUP SECRETARY: FEMP

For more information contact Juana Lopez Pagan
(T) + 34 913 643 700 (F) + 34 913 655 482 internacional@femp.es