

Alliance of Civilizations: A Misplaced Union

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Articles & Testimony

At first glance, the Alliance of Civilizations, or AoC, founded by Turkey and Spain in 2005, seems like a sensible and strategic undertaking. In the post-Sept. 11 world, it boldly promises to bring two clashing civilizations peacefully together. But this is a fundamentally incorrect assumption.

In fact, Turkey and Spain belong not to opposing civilizations, but to the same one Western civilization. While the two countries have different religions, in the 21st century, civilizations are not about religions but shared values and institutions. The two nations share Western values such as liberal democracy, free markets, gender equality, secularism and rule of law.

Turkey and Spain are both members of many Western institutions, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

They are allies in the foremost Western security club, NATO, and part of the European Union family, as Spain is a member and Turkey is in accession talks with EU.

The AoC, which will hold a summit in Istanbul on April 6 and 7, is a misplaced entity. It represents a view of the modern world distorted by religion, as it suggests that Turkey and Spain cannot belong to the same civilization due to their different faiths.

The AoC, which was established on the initiative of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, implies that Turkey does not belong to the West. This is not a good way of promoting Turkey's EU membership. Simply put, a Turkey that does not see itself as Western cannot hope to join the EU.

Ever since the AKP's ascension to power, some analysts have suggested that Turkey's rapprochement with Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah, and Sudan is guided by Islamist motives. Others have disputed this claim, saying the AKP is loyal to Turkey's Western orientations. The AoC, however, suggests otherwise, offering a glimpse into the AKP mindset; according to this party, Turkey is not a member of the West.

United States President Barack Obama will visit Turkey during the AoC summit in Istanbul. Obama is traveling to Turkey as part of a European visit, stopping in Istanbul after attending NATO and EU summits. With this visit, the U.S. president hopes to counter Turkey's alienation from the West by emphasizing the country's Western inclinations.

Obama will tell the Turks that they belong to Europe and the West, while the ongoing AoC summit will suggest otherwise. By purporting that Spain and Turkey belong to different civilizations it suggests that the United States and Turkey do too.

In its current form, the AoC runs counter to Obama's message of a Western Turkey. Turkey and Spain both belong in the Alliance for Europe.

[Read the Spanish translation of this op-ed on ABC's website \(http://www.abc.es/20090406/opinion-firmas/union-enfocada-20090406.html\)](http://www.abc.es/20090406/opinion-firmas/union-enfocada-20090406.html)

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