

***CIRCUMVENTING THE EAST-WEST CULTURAL IMPASSE:  
EXPLORING MEANS OF BOLSTERING GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC  
DEVELOPMENT BY FOSTERING NORTH-SOUTH  
COOPERATION WITHIN TIME ZONES<sup>1</sup>***

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Any attempt at cultural hegemony threatens global democratic development. The modern world faces Huntington's apocalyptic prediction that the clashes between cultures will become the future front lines of global politics<sup>2</sup>. History is indeed filled with such clashes, while examples of cooperation are few and far between. Intercultural dialogue has always been the primary countermeasure, but it has proven inefficient. *Cultural conflicts are persistent and therefore difficult to manage.*

On the other hand, attempts to impose certain cultures over others in the era of globalization have led to their self-destruction. Sizeable segments of existing cultures can be preserved, however, if they choose the alternative to take part in global cultural development by offering those unique elements, which also represent universal values. *Countries that do not impose their entire national cultural model but act the framework of internationally meaningful compatible segments of it are expected to gain broad and systematic international support.*

Additionally, thinking in such broad terms as “civilizations” leads to false statements. For example, it is false that Islam itself is a problem instead of Islamic fundamentalism<sup>3</sup>. It is a mistake not to take into account the internal cultural divisions present in all civilizations<sup>4</sup>. The problem is not the clash between “our values” and “their values,” but between our declared values and our short-term interests<sup>5</sup>.

These observations necessitate the search for new global guidelines for strengthening democracy. Overcoming cultural conflicts is not the only method, and they can be tackled from other directions. Processes in North Africa, India and China do not stem from the global cultural clash. *Instead of dialogue between civilizations, it is better to look for opportunities to create*

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<sup>1</sup> text based on published description of a Project with the same title developed for the National Endowment for Democracy, USA in the e-magazine <http://ejpp.eu/index.php/ejpp/article/viewFile/85/71>

<sup>2</sup> “The Clash of Civilizations”

<sup>3</sup> Bulliet, R., The case for islamo-christian civilization, Columbia University Press, 2004

<sup>4</sup> Said, E. W. The Clash of Ignorance, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance>

<sup>5</sup> Loy, D. R. The West Against the Rest? A Buddhist Response to „The Clash of Civilizations”, <http://www.inebnetwork.org/thinksangha/tsangha/loy-westrest.html>

*networks of parties who have an interest in enacting common policies.* Such linkages may ease cultural rivalry and strengthen democratic development.

Therefore the proposed project is for examination of the prospects, creation of a strategic framework and making the first specific steps for cooperation in certain segments of the North-South axis, which are not challenged by cultural rivalry and offer an innovative means to positively impact democratic development. It does not claim to offer a universal solution. Rather, its aim is to look for opportunities in suitable international communities, such as *one of the 24 time zones*. Another limitation is that only some countries with certain experience in the democratic transition may join the initiative from the outset. These may be *South Africa plus some European countries* -- an issue that should be investigated.

### ***Significance***

Civilizational clashes seem to be justified primarily in the context of archaic cultural (not geographical) separation between the “individualistic” West and the “collectivist” East. Because there is *no rational conflict of interest*, finding a logical and lasting solution seems impossible. Alleviating the chronic problem of conflicting values by *seeking dialogue and preaching tolerance seem ineffective*. The approach of seeking “unity in diversity,” which does not work even in Europe<sup>6</sup>, is doomed to fail because it presupposes differences and remains closed in its historically burdened context.

Dialogue should be an important auxiliary tool of democratic development, instead of the primary instrument. It simply does not eliminate the social causes of cultural conflict. Dialogue is an element of negotiation, which encourages each side to protect its interests. Therefore, it does not guarantee that parties will remain vested in their cooperation, as well as in their common policies<sup>7</sup>. Outside factors begin to play the primary role: who, how, for how long and for what purpose prompts, directs and maintains a dialogue. Ineffective dialogue is more dangerous than the complete lack of dialogue.

Therefore the project should first assess (1) the strengths and weaknesses of existing international East-West initiatives, (2) the extent to which alternative North-South cooperation routes offer solutions, (3) whether the new approach is realistic and its limitations, (4) the prospect of linking the idea of intra-time-zone North-South cooperation with the existing East-

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<sup>6</sup> Something that Amartya Sen calls “Pluralistic Monoculturalism”

<sup>7</sup> Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right.

West clashes and (5) whether the idea of collaboration unbound by historical context can be embedded into one of the major UN initiatives for global democratization, to give it new impetus, or vice versa, whether it can be developed independently as something fundamentally different.

In this context, many initiatives to mitigate the conflict between civilizations exist both within and outside the UN: the Alliance of Civilizations, the UN Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations (2001), UNESCO, the EU, the Anna Lindh Foundation, Cultural Corridors of South East Europe, etc. However, it seems that none go beyond the creation of dialogue between opposing cultures. They do not recognize the limitations of dialogue. Also, because their objectives and activities overlap, they are competitors rather than allies in promoting intercultural dialogue. The idea of strengthening historically unencumbered cooperation should not compete with existing schemes for intercultural reconciliation.

The project concept particularly concerns the UN initiative “*Alliance of Civilizations*” and the extent to which the idea of North-South cooperation can be tied to it.

The Alliance of Civilizations, proposed in 2005 by the prime ministers of Spain and Turkey, was approved by over 70 countries, including the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, both in terms of its structure and its objectives<sup>8</sup>. Its main assumption is that it can reduce the risk of the creation of a “wall of misunderstanding” between the West and the Muslim world by encouraging dialogue surrounding “mutual understanding and respect.” It features measures in four key areas of cultural understanding<sup>9</sup>: education, media, youth and migration. Among its projects is the creation of a UN Institute for the Alliance and a summer school for young people<sup>10</sup>. However, it lacks an established mechanism for decision-making and its source of funding is not secured.

I find that the initiative is reminiscent of a permanent round table between the two worlds under the supervision of Turkey and Spain, led by their national interest to become mediators<sup>11</sup>. The initiative has a clear East-West orientation<sup>12</sup>. “The Alliance” is designed as a partnership between ministries and certain UN departments. Civic and private organizations are included only insofar as implementing centralized government strategies.

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<sup>8</sup> information following from interviews with officials at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mfa.bg/bg/pages/view/270>

<sup>10</sup> The Regional Strategy for Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation in Southeast Europe is the first regional document within the initiative.

<sup>11</sup> Republic of Turkey, Alliance of Civilizations, National Strategy

<sup>12</sup> <http://africa.mfa.gov.tr/mopy-sunusu.en.mfa>

More importantly, this initiative is formed by both distant historical elements and more recent chapters in political history including the Cold War. Like most initiatives, this model is based on polarization. The West must cease to be a pole and become assimilated in many key areas, including trade, science and culture. The West should become a partner to the rest of the world rather than attempt to reshape its unique identity and assert its universalism.

Existing initiatives are the works of practicing politicians. In contrast, the exploitation of the relatively unexplored prospects for active common policy-based North-South cooperation can provide a ground for innovation and realism. This broadens the group of actors -- *besides politicians the group of partners would include also scholars, public figures, businessmen and internationally respected activists.*

### ***Hypothesis***

The project proposed is based on a hypothesis resulting from the dramatic changes in the effectiveness of instruments used in the development of democracy in the current *era of globalization.*

The first aspect of the leading hypothesis is that *international East-West relations are jaded by an unproductive cultural and historical context, unlike most North-South relations;* therefore, the shift in balance between the two axes, i.e. activation of various North-South interactions, can be used to gradually reduce cultural tensions along the East-West axis. Can the strengthening of beneficial common practices along the North-South “Axis of Cooperation” discourage its participants from continuing to fight their futile cultural battles along the East-West “Axis of Confrontation”? In what areas should we look for such opportunities? Which aspects of the relations along the North-South axis have a realistic potential to turn it into an “Axis of Cooperation”?

Another aspect of the hypothesis is that *in a globalized environment intercultural dialogue loses its effectiveness as a tool to strengthen democratic development.* Therefore, it is productive to seek alternative means. Globalization, in fact, brings a growing scope of opportunities in this respect. Cooperation within certain organizations involved in the implementation of joint policies becomes essential. Could the creation of dynamic supra-national organizations pave the way for an integrated networking society of the future to replace the current model of isolationist cultures?

The hypothesis has yet another aspect. Intercultural dialogue relies on intellectual tools, such as education. Meanwhile, *the relations surrounding history and culture could rest on a*

*wider foundation of interaction amongst the government, private and civil sectors.* Is it conceivable to organize joint annual meetings of governments, public and private partnerships or business initiatives, which aim to strengthen democratic development?

Last but not least, instead of pushing dialogue between conflicting parties, in the modern world, it is now possible to engage in *efficient public diplomacy of good democratic practices within nonbiased international publics.* Is it possible to include international academic and intellectual circles in the propagation of democratic best practices, separately from the routine actions of foreign ministries?

### ***Limitations***

The aim of this project, unlike existing initiatives, is not to strive for universal applicability. Not all North-South relations are devoid of cultural confrontation, and then there are those that are simply irrelevant to the strengthening of democracy. The study is based only on appropriate and relevant sectors of the North-South axis (for instance some time zones), and covers not only the public sector, but also the private sector and civil society.

Thus the constructed model will be limited to the time zone GMT +2. This is one of the largest zones with 29 countries, which is particularly suitable for the conceptual design. This time zone crosses through several very distinct geopolitical subgroups: starting with the Baltic States (Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), former European USSR members (Belarus, Ukraine) to the north, through parts of the Balkans (Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria) and the Middle East (Israel, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Libya) and down to a large swath of Sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo; and finally South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia. Each subgroup has historically been affected in its own way by the traditional East-West conflict. But from a North-South perspective, it is hard to find traces of this conflict between the groups unlike other time zones. Specifically, none has dominated over the other. Can these areas converge and work together more as a mechanism supporting democratic development?

The project does not necessarily place the emphasis on states but rather focuses on the unused capacity of business, scientific and public circles, specifically organized for this purpose. This may be a first step towards common policies ending in joint projects (academic and scientific programs, trade projects, etc.) and even the gradual formation of a common elite in the area.

### ***Project Goals***

The Time Zone project involves both research and practical part. It should be focused on creating practical products like:

- (1) A *Strategic Framework for North-South Cooperation* outlining areas of common policies
  - (2) A Model of an international think-tank in time zone GMT +2
  - (3) A *Roadmap of North-South Cooperation* containing exemplary initiatives: joint bilateral annual cabinet meetings, festivals, free trading zones, etc.
  - (4) A Model for management and financing of future initiatives
  - (5) A Model for public diplomacy in the time zone propagating the best practices to avoid cultural conflicts in different countries
  - (6) Model of an international conference to boost the development of practical ideas for North-South cooperation
- Etc.

The project has several elements that form a system. None of them can be omitted for that reason. Before the activities however the primary step is the creation of a *Strategic Center* of the project. This center should include just several figures with complementary expertise, but equally attracted by the prospects of the project. They should combine political, research, multicultural and administrative capacities. By definition, this core team should have an international profile. Once formed, the Strategic Center should design, manage and control the implementation of the Time Zone project.

These elements are:

- Political
- Research
- Strategic plan
- Organizational
- Administration

In more detail:

**Political:** The first task of the Strategic Center is to make the project politically and economically feasible. Its goals as well as various details should be discussed with political figures and changes to the initial idea should be made in order to secure political support to the project. This will lead further to a financial support.

**Research** (exemplary schedule):

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Method</b>
Research on the impact of globalization on democratic development; identification of the leading values and defining a mission	Analysis of existing theories; Interviewing experts; Historical Analysis
Analysis of latest research on North-South international relations and outlining a North-South Model of policy networking	Secondary Analysis of existing research results (e.g. The North-South Institute, The Institute of the North, etc.); Interviewing experts
Critical comparative analysis of theories and practices of East-West relations: classifying their positive and negative aspects and comparing this model with the North-South model	Own analysis; Interviewing experts
Strategic analysis of the potential of the groups of countries within the GMT +2 time zone for cooperation in the North-South axis; Vision Statement	Case Study; Historical Analysis; Interviewing experts; Applied Strategic Analysis of (1) Competitive Advantage, (2) Strategic Sets; Brainstorming Session
Identifying the areas with highest potential for common policies for democratic development in the North-South context	Secondary Analysis of existing research results; Policy Analysis; Interviewing experts; Brainstorming Session
Creation of models: (1) an informal public diplomacy, (2) management and financing of initiatives in the time zone, (3) generation and selection of initiatives	Own analysis; Consultation
Analysis of the practical aspects for future development of the concept: (1) modeling a time zone think-tank, (2) modeling an international conference for development of the time zone concept	Consultation
Critical self-assessment of the work	Ex ante and ex post control; critical overview of the work completed by tutor and 2 experts

Strategic Plan: A plan for international cooperation of this rank which is not a typical action of a single state requires a strategic plan supported by participating countries. Only when this project is strategically managed it could secure the necessary level of consent among different participating parties and thus significant durability and viability. The plan should contain a detailed strategic framework and short (e.g. 2-year) plan of action followed by budget.

The organizational and administrative elements of the project would follow from that plan.

In the early stages of conceptualization of the project concept it would be most effective and efficient that ideas are developed in the same way the project is developed in future – in a cooperative, inclusive, dialogical manner. Consent is the key to the success of such a plan because it contains uniquely no element of competition at all. Therefore full consent (not consensus though) is not only possible but also necessary. So, may the project is set on the practical grounds of an international think-tank starting from its early formative stage.