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Esteemed Mr. Prime Minister Erdogan,
Esteemed Mr. Prime Minister Zapatero,
Esteemed Mr. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon,
High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Mr. Sampaio,
Your Excellency,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In the name of the Government of the Czech Republic, I would like to thank the Turkish government and the United Nations for their first-rate preparation of such an undoubtedly important forum as the Alliance of Civilizations.

Since its creation in 2005, the Alliance of Civilizations has come a fair distance and has become a respected initiative which has joined together many countries and international organizations. In the relatively brief time of its existence, it has presented a number of ideas, projects and activities that have contributed to greater understanding between various cultures and religions. It has also greatly assisted in overcoming political and cultural differences and stereotypes.

We believe Turkey can play an important role in this area, considering its geographic location, diverse history, its unique secular experience and long-term efforts toward dialogue between Christianity and Islam. The fact that the summit of the Alliance of Civilizations is taking place in Istanbul is an example of this.

We welcome and support the informality of this association as a tool for interactive dialogue enabling partners to exchange opinions on a neutral platform. Global discussions of the Alliance of Civilizations may contribute greatly toward an expression of the common will of all cultures to share together the basic principles leading to mutual respect and understanding. However, if it is to be successful, it should also remain an initiative open to all states expressing an interest in participating in it and the will to take part in fulfilling its goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In global policy, as well as in the policy of individual countries, there is frequently an apparent conflict between those accused of political idealism and those to whom political realism is attributed. The former tend to be seen as naïve dreamers, while the latter are seen as brutal cynics. But history has shown many times that it is precisely this apparent idealism which has led to real improvements in situations, peace and prosperity. In 1989, just as in 1918, after many long years of efforts toward statehood and independence for the Czech nation, the motto "Truth Prevails!" was heard. The motto on the Czech Presidential standard grasps this well that it is not certain when and how, but apparently idealistic policy brings real results - it prevails. For the last time in our history, it is precisely these value ideals of the western world that have been shown to be a powerful weapon in the hands of the completely "unrealistic" efforts of dissidents.

The initiatives of the Alliance of Civilizations could appear to some to be too idealistic. But I am convinced that this is an initiative truly leading to improved relations between cultures and religions. A realistic policy, which may pursue well thought out - but narrowly limited - national interests at the expense of others usually sows bitterness and frustration and reaps enemies. To this day we are reaping that which was sown by the very realistic policy of European colonization and decolonization in Muslim countries.

But this is not just about ancient history. In this world there are countries – and certainly not only Muslim countries – whose authoritarian or totalitarian regimes are contentedly ruling with the silent support or ignorance of the West. Regimes, which prevent the modernization and prosperity of their countries, are also robbing their inhabitants of the possibility of affluence. Aside from the psychological frustration of their inhabitants, a focal point for future socially- and economically-motivated unrest is created. In various forms - including terrorism – this reaches back to the countries of the rich West. Consciously or unconsciously, political realism here leads one's own country toward mortal danger.

If we do not want to neglect, but rather to communicate and cooperate, we must again look at the norms and ways of life of the West in the light of cultural relativism. If we do not want to provoke conflict, it is necessary to communicate with an open mind.

However, the cultural relativism has its limits. There are certain values that have universally stood the test of time. Without our classifying them with a cultural or civilization label, we see that adherence to these values anywhere in the world leads toward peace, prosperity and contentment. We call these human rights. We cannot use cultural relativism, as an excuse to not act where there is a conflict with a visible violation of human rights. It would mean closing our eyes due to the utilitarian reasons of realistic policy.

Ladies and gentlemen,
as the former president Vaclav Havel said:

the idea that all people have equal and inalienable rights, that they are born with the right to freedom and that their dignity must be respected under all circumstances took shape on European soil. It remains one of the basic tenets of the European political order. This idea was adopted and developed significantly by the United States of America before subsequently becoming the property of humanity as a whole, when it was incorporated into documents of the United Nations.

The documents of the European Union also comprise a set of basic human and civil rights that constitute its spiritual foundation and also provide a meaning and ethos for its expansion and enhancement.

Therefore, also the concept of the Alliance of Civilizations, through which people in high positions from areas of political, cultural and societal life want to carry out dialogue between Muslim and Christian countries, is consistent with the European Union's external relations policy.

The European Union once again affirms the validity of these principles and its strong determination to act according to their spirit. In no way does the European Union have any wish to conquer the world with its culture in accordance with more sinister European traditions. It does not wish to give the world any lessons or force anything upon it. It has no intention of exporting its own customs or traditions contrary to the wishes or sensibilities of the recipients. Where it will not and must not give ground, however, is in its emphasis on the universality of fundamental human and civics rights and the common task of defending them.

States and nations cannot truly get along well together unless they are capable of communicating to each other what they consider bad, immoral and unlawful in each other's behavior. And no economic interest is important enough to take precedence over solidarity with those who suffer or are being persecuted.

The policy of appeasing evil and making concessions to it, driven either by immediate, short-term or sectional interests, or even by the illusion that evil will eventually disappear of its own accord, has proven tragically false on numerous occasions. As the continent that gave rise to two of the greatest wars and two of the mightiest totalitarian regimes of modern times, Europe is well aware from its own experience what catastrophes may result from concessions to evil, which is why it must not repeat them in any form.

Rights, of course, can be respected only in the context of man's universally shared responsibility for the world and his fundamental solidarity with others. This has been reinforced considerably by the fact that humankind now lives for the first time in a global and globally interlinked civilizations, that human destinies are thus linked in one single destiny.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, the Czech Republic is a country that is among the successful economically- and politically-developing countries of Central Europe, but in the past this was not always the case. Tragic experiences with ethnic and religious hatred, as well as a failure of respect toward cultural and religious diversity have taught us to especially value human rights and basic freedoms. Although 60 years have passed since the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the universal values contained within it must still be defended and developed against all who would seek to in any way limit or dispute them.

The Czech Republic appreciates that it can be part of the group of friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, which occurred at the 1st forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in January 2008 in Madrid. As the Minister for Human Rights and Minorities, I have been charged with the management of the issues of the Alliance of Civilizations in the Czech Republic. The Government of the Czech Republic has also entrusted us with the preparation of the National Action Plan on the Alliance of Civilizations.

Respect for human rights, which is an inseparable part of the policy of the Czech Republic, is a necessary condition for deeper intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The result of this dialogue is the traditionally good relations that exist in the Czech Republic between churches and religious societies, the state and civic society in general.

The Czech Republic is also connected to the fulfillment of the goals of the Alliance of Civilizations through the EU and supports its activities focused on removing prejudices and promoting greater understanding. In this regard, we have welcomed the preparation of the EU-Oak Action Plan in the fall of 2008, which includes the following areas:

- o Promotion of human rights and political reform;
- o Media and access to information;
- o Intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity, including exchanges and promotion of people-to-people contacts;
- o Immigration and integration;
- o Prevention of polarization and radicalization.

Cooperation is envisaged in the form of information exchange, sharing of best practices, co-sponsorship of projects and specific joint initiatives.

We will continue to support programmers of the EUROMED Mediterranean Partnership focused on support for the development of media, support of education, development of civic society, support to young people and equality for women.

From a global perspective, the Czech Republic is convinced that the Alliance of Civilizations should expand its activities into all regions of the world and not narrow discussions only to relations between the Christian and Muslim world. Intercultural and interfaith dialogue should take place in their entire scope among other existing religions. For this reason, we support additional complementary initiatives such as the interfaith and intercultural dialogue with the UN or the Kazakh initiative for cultural and religious diversity: "Common World: Progress Through Diversity."

At the same time, it is necessary to unequivocally condemn any efforts to intimidate and terrorize from the side of those who do not wish for any dialogue, and who have no honor,

either for one another or for the values we share. The spread of a culture of fear and violence must be prevented by the spread of a culture of peace, freedom and progress.

Working with young people, making efforts toward professional media and enabling quality education, are time-consuming, long-term efforts. These idealistic positions of the Alliance of Civilizations do not have to be to everyone's liking, and may impinge on many national interests; nevertheless, they may be crowned with very real success, such as the prevention of fundamentalism and terrorism.