



Symposium

On

**The Meaning of Averroes and
Maimonides for Our Times:
How to Make the Mediterranean
Space a Community of
Reason, Tolerance, Progress, and Prosperity**

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Report

In Cooperation With:

NYU-Abu Dhabi, the NYU Center for Media, Culture, and History, the NYU Center for Religion and Media, the NYU Department of Spanish and Portuguese, the NYU Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, and the NYU King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center, and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

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Welcome by John Brademas

John Brademas, President Emeritus of New York University and former member of the United States House of Representatives, opened the conference by welcoming participants to a gathering based on the hope of improving relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Drawing on his 22 years serving in the House of Representatives, Mr. Brademas argued that institutions of higher education and culture can play a key role in increasing understanding between people of different faiths and cultures.

Universities, with their history of free inquiry and expanding knowledge, can play an important role in promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. While serving on Capitol Hill, Mr. Brademas authored two measures designed to improve understanding of different cultures, one of which was the International Education Act of 1966, authorizing federal grants to colleges and universities for the study of other countries and cultures. The second was the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Act of 1975, which has enabled Americans every year, in museums and galleries across the country, to view an extraordinary number of art objects and artifacts from other nations, and has enabled American art to be shared around the world. In defending both pieces of legislation Mr. Brademas argued that the reason the United States has suffered such serious problems in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere is our ignorance of the histories, the societies, the cultures and languages of those countries.

As president of New York University from 1981 to 1992, Mr. Brademas strove to transform NYU from a regional commuter institution to a national and international

residential research institution, and thusly invested heavily in international education. NYU now has thousands of students from an estimated 130 countries attending classes. Particularly importantly, New York University has a number of centers abroad—in London, Paris, Prague, Florence, Madrid, Ghana, Buenos Aires, Shanghai, and Tel Aviv. This September marked the opening semester of the new NYU Abu Dhabi campus. NYU Abu Dhabi serves the Middle East as a portal to the global university that is NYU, with its first class of students drawn from the region, the U.S. and the rest of the world. The hope is that the enterprise will serve as a contribution to the free flow of ideas and intellectual exchange in the Middle East.

Mr. Brademas pointed to his major new endeavor, the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress, which is partnering with institutions in the United States and overseas as part of its Project on Cultural Diplomacy: a series of conferences to raise the profile of international cultural exchange. In 2009, the Brademas Center released a report to Congress and the President entitled *Moving Forward: A Renewed Role for American Arts and Artists in the Global Age*, which called for an expansion of international arts and cultural exchanges. The report recommended that international arts and cultural exchanges be integrated into the planning strategies of U.S. policymakers as a key element of public diplomacy, as essential to U.S. national security and the promotion of American interests around the globe. The arts community has observed firsthand the value of international artistic exchanges in promoting moderation and tolerance among widely diverse religious and cultural groups. It is critical that such exchanges be two-way, person-to-person

endeavors in order to promote the human connection, and in order to sustain such connections over time. Also, cultural exchanges must be sensitive to local needs, practices, and aspirations.

Mr. Brademas ended by emphasizing that universities and cultural institutions, through programs like this symposium on “How to Make the Mediterranean Space a Community of Reason, Tolerance, Progress, and Prosperity,” can do much to fight ignorance and intolerance and promote dialogue between persons of different faiths. While many gather here in New York for such an enterprise, Mr. Brademas especially urged countries in the Arab world to fund programs that appeal to the common purpose of relations with neighboring states and regions.

Opening Remarks by Mustapha Tlili

Mustapha Tlili, founder and director of the New York University Center for Dialogues: Islamic World–U.S.–the West, opened the symposium by asking how the lives of two great intellectuals of twelfth century Spain, Averroes and Maimonides, could be applicable today. Averroes and Maimonides, Mr. Tlili explained, are universally recognized as two of the greatest philosophers of all times. In the case of Averroes, it is generally admitted that without his influence, European/Western philosophy and enlightenment would be inconceivable. However, why would a non-academic, a non-philosopher, or a person not particularly interested in European medieval history, take time to come and participate in a conversation focusing on two medieval philosophers with strange-sounding names?

In order to answer this question, Mr. Tlili discussed the original ideas for the symposium and the film “Out of Cordoba,” which was screened at the symposium. Mr. Tlili began to develop this symposium after Jacob Bender, the director of “Out of Cordoba,” came to discuss his project and to seek advice and assistance a few months after September 11. Mr. Bender’s endeavor was particularly appealing because of the topicality of the intellectual challenge that both Averroes and Maimonides addressed – how to consider the place of faith and reason in human affairs? The debate that swept post-September 11 America over religion, pluralism, tolerance, and other concerns related to the question of how to live together in a diverse society would not have surprised either Averroes or Maimonides in 12th-century Spain. These were times of uncertainty in the Mediterranean region, after the golden age of *convivencia* – three centuries of social peace, intellectual brilliance, and economic prosperity.

Mr. Tlili then discussed contemporary developments towards regional unity and cooperation in the Mediterranean space. Near the same time as Jacob Bender completed his film project, French President Nicolas Sarkozy began the establishment of a new framework for cooperation between the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Under the co-presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy and Husni Mubarak, the President of Egypt, and in the presence of the heads of states of the 27 countries of the European Union and the countries of the southern Mediterranean, the initiative produced on July 13, 2008, in Paris, a declaration that says, under a section reading “a strategic ambition for the Mediterranean:”

Europe and the Mediterranean countries are bound by history, geography, and culture. More importantly, they are united by a common ambition: to build together a future of peace, democracy, prosperity and human, social, and cultural understanding. To achieve these common objectives participants agree to continue with renewed dynamism the quest for peace and cooperation, to explore their joint problems and transform good intentions into actions in a renewed partnership for progress.¹

Mr. Tlili explained that, from a distance, we are often tempted to see Europe as a continent receding from the world stage and in conflict with itself and with its past. However, Mr. Tlili argued that today's Europe is a continent full of potential provided the region harnesses the forces and wealth encapsulated in the initiative of the Union for the Mediterranean – an initiative in which the metaphor of Averroes and Maimonides and their times, the metaphor of *convivencia* – finds its clear meaning. The Mediterranean region today is home to 475 million people: 272 million Europeans and 200 million non-European Arabs and Jews. Mr. Tlili stressed that the challenge for a re-tooled, re-invented Europe is to find an answer to the question of how to make the Mediterranean space once again a community of reason, tolerance, progress, and prosperity for all 475 million of its inhabitants.

In conclusion, Mr. Tlili expressed his wish that the symposium would help to counter the rising tensions of the last two years in both Europe and the United States, over what has ominously crystallized as “the Muslim Question,” by changing the tone of the conversation and offering grounds for hope.

¹ Joint Declaration of the Summit of the Union for the Mediterranean, July 13, 2008, Paris, France. <http://www.info-france-usa.org/spip.php?article1043>.

Mr. Tlili thanked the NYU departments and centers that co-sponsored the symposium: NYU-Abu Dhabi; the NYU Center for Media, Culture, and History; the NYU Center for Religion and Media; the NYU Department of Spanish and Portuguese; the NYU Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies; and the NYU King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center. Mr. Tlili also thanked the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which was established four years ago at the initiative of Spain and Turkey and with the endorsement of the international community precisely to bridge the divide between cultures and civilizations, in particular between the Muslim and Western worlds.

Mr. Tlili then introduced the participants: Jacques Lezra, Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese at NYU, and Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgam, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, as well as a distinguished writer and poet; Jean-Christophe Menet, Diplomatic Adviser to the French Inter-Governmental Office for the Union for the Mediterranean at the Elysée Palace; Jorge Sampaio, High Level Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and former President of Portugal; and Jerónimo Páez-López, former director of the El Legado Andalusí Foundation.

Panel Discussion 1: Reflections

Mr. Tlili opened the first panel by expressing hope that the film would inspire how we act in the present. He expressed hope that the message people take from the film would be that there are sources of inspiration in the past, and that a *convivencia* between the three monotheistic religions is no less possible today than it was in Andalusian Cordoba.

Jacques Lezra, Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese at New York University, presented a historical overview of the life and times of Averroes and Maimonides. Professor Lezra began by noting that he did not altogether agree with the argument of Maria Rosa Menocal in her book, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, which featured prominently in Jacob Bender's film. Through conversation with Menocal's argument, Lezra argued that in order for "*convivencia*" to be an applicable model for the present it would be necessary for it to shed its sentimental and paradisaical connotations. In turn, "*convivencia*" could be an effective model if it is understood as a period of complex relations.

Professor Lezra began by recounting his experience of shock and terror during the March 2004 Madrid train bombings. He was shocked that many of the bombers were originally from Tangiers, Morocco, where Professor Lezra's father was born and raised, and where Professor Lezra himself spent summers as a child. He asked himself, how had Tangiers become the home of the Madrid bombers? Was it revenge for the conflict between Israel and Palestine? Was it revenge for the loss of Al-Andalus? Professor Lezra referenced the monument built to honor those who died in the 2004 attacks, the epigraph of which contained the word "*convivencia*." Professor Lezra asked, what is *convivencia* now? What was it historically?

Professor Lezra identified two sides of Al-Andalus. On the one hand, Al-Andalus appears as an ornament or a paradise, because it embodies a culture of tolerance and of

“*convivencia*,” which can literally be translated as “living with-ness,” or “requiring tolerance.” On the other hand, Al-Andalus can also be used by extremists such as Bin Laden to justify terrorist attacks on non-Muslims, because it refers to a period when Muslim subjects held a privileged status relative to non-Muslims.

The word “*convivencia*” is generally considered untranslatable and actual translations have changed over the years. Lexically, the term “*convivencia*” did not exist during the period of Al-Andalus. The coexistence of multiple cultures and religions in Al-Andalus had no single name in Arabic or Hebrew. It was not until 1948 that the translation or connotation we are most familiar with today came into vogue. In that year, a Spanish exile used “*convivencia*” not only as a historical term but also as an alternative to political fundamentalism.

Professor Lezra provided a brief history of the Islamic conquest of Spain and the subsequent period of Al-Andalus, wherein Muslim rulers allotted minority rights to their non-Muslim subjects and creativity, scholarship, and cultural vitality flourished. However, Professor Lezra also pointed out that although communities of different faiths coexisted in Al-Andalus and contributed to this cultural vitality, not all groups were afforded equal status. Jewish and Christian subjects held certain rights under the Muslim leadership, but this *dhimma*—or religious minority—status was inferior to that of Muslims and resulted in distinct societal divisions. Professor Lezra recounted the story of Ibn Daoud, a Jewish philosopher, historian, and astronomer who served as an advisor to a Muslim vizier, and as a result of his religion went largely unrecognized until the vizier’s death.

Professor Lezra concluded that in order for “*convivencia*” to be a useful term today, we must temper its sentimental connotation of coexistence with the complex reality of its social relations.

Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, addressed the question of reason and religion in the Mediterranean space, asking: can religion play a positive role in the Mediterranean space? Ambassador Shalgham emphatically stated that religion has not been, is not, and will not be part of the solution. Rather, it is part of the problem. Ambassador Shalgham argued that one of the major problems in Al-Andalus, despite its culture of coexistence, was that eventually religion prevailed over reason—just one result of which was Averroes’ exile in Morocco. Ambassador Shalgham compared the writings of 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza to those of Averroes and Maimonides, all of whom accorded a sort of superiority to reason over religion.

Ambassador Shalgham then raised a second question, what happened in Al-Andalus? He acknowledged that we usually associate “*convivencia*” and coexistence with Al-Andalus, but argued we should use different criteria. For example, we should prioritize freedom in addition to diversity, because the greater freedoms present in Al-Andalus set it apart from the other major capitals of Damascus or Baghdad.

Ambassador Shalgham then pointed to contemporary extremists who claim that religion and a strict constructionist reading of the Qur’an are the solution to what they see as problems in modern globalized societies. To counter this view, Ambassador Shalgham

pointed to the example of the Prophet Mohammed who put into place laws of balance between the three monotheistic religions in Medina. Ambassador Shalgham argued that modern-day extremists are taking advantage of groups that are ignorant of the many aspects of Islam and the Qur'an that call for balance, respect, and coexistence.

Ambassador Shalgham argued that the Middle East today is not lacking "*convivencia*" as coexistence, but rather lacks justice. He pointed to the example of the suffering of Palestinians, and also to the many freedoms denied to women, minorities, and citizens generally, because those who consider themselves fundamentalists block Enlightenment views as well as what Ambassador Shalgham considers any kind of societal progress. Substantive solutions to these problems would be democracy, enlightenment, education, gender equality, and justice, broadly defined. Pointing to yet another great problem in the Middle East—the violent divide between Sunnis and Shi'a—Ambassador Shalgham argued that without justice, neither peace nor *convivencia* is possible.

Ambassador Shalgham concluded that in Al-Andalus there was Enlightenment, but religion ultimately prevailed, leading to its downfall. Religion cannot be a tool for peace, because it is used as a justification for terrorism by fundamentalist religious groups. These groups, he argued, are killing our future. In the United States it is possible for a person to belong to any religion and today Europe is united, due in part to the participation of Christian democratic parties. Would these same results be possible in the Middle East?

Mr. Tlili then opened the discussion to floor debate. The first question from the floor asked, should we use historic Cordoba as a model? Professor Lezra responded that we should ask ourselves, are there other models available that might be more useful or more appropriate than *convivencia*? The answer is to be specific about the conditions under which Cordoba developed, and to understand that it developed under specific circumstances with internal and external limits which are no longer necessarily applicable. There should be a necessary historical differentiation between that past and today, and part of this is investigating what type of historical role the term "*convivencia*" plays. Professor Lezra suggested the solution of more differentiation, more attention to the genealogy of *convivencia*, and more understanding that terms and models have a historical complexity and cannot be modularly transplanted into different times and contexts. Ambassador Shalgham argued that it is not possible for history to repeat itself, so hoping that it will by copying historical models will only lead to disappointment.

In response to the question, what does enlightenment mean in Islamic culture, Ambassador Shalgham stated that apart from philosophy, "Enlightenment" refers to a kind of secularism that came after the Middle Ages. The problem in the Middle East, he said, is that it is impossible to be an individual because of the tribalist culture. Secularism is important—if Muslims cannot live side by side with each other, they cannot live side by side with Jews or Christians. Mr. Tlili added that the closest Arabic translation of Enlightenment is "modern thinking." Arab societies were influenced by the colonial powers and part of this colonial legacy was that Western philosophy started to filter into these societies. For example, many Muslims and Jews who fled from Spain went to

Morocco and Tunisia and they brought with them the legacy of knowledge and civilization gained in Al-Andalus. There was also the influence of trade in goods and ideas. All these ideas led to the creation of modern universities in Tunisia which in turn became centers of the liberation movement. Students at these universities were imbued with the ideas of Enlightenment and modernity. There were similar intellectual connections in Egypt – several scholars (such as Mohammed Abdou and Taha Hussein) went to France and brought ideas back to Egypt. The Cold War divided the Middle East into different ideological camps. The 1967 War marked the end of the socialist ideologies that proliferated in several countries and led to Islamism. However, there is a new generation of Muslim social scientists who are debating how to reconcile religion and reason.

When asked what the role of women is in this discussion, Professor Lezra responded that “the woman” is more than a symbolic figure and her situation today is different from the situation in Cordoba. One problem with comparison is that there are few surviving first-person accounts of women from Cordoba. Mr. Tlili interpreted the question to be asking more about the state of women today in the Islamic world, to which Ambassador Shalgham asserted that women are against themselves in the Islamic world. For example, according to Shari’a law, one man is equal to two women. Unfortunately there is a lack of courage to discuss these issues in the Islamic world.

One audience member pointed to the definite division in western culture between the worldly and the spiritual. Does this make for a distinct cultural distinction, because Islam prescribes social, political, and economic laws? Ambassador Shalgham responded

that the problem in the Arab world is precisely the difficulty in separating religion from the state. Some scholars today are differentiating between an Islamic nation and an Islamic state, but the question refers not to a necessary tie between Islam and politics, but to the historical rise of political Islamism, which proliferated after pan-Arabism collapsed in 1967. According to Ambassador Shalgham, when religion and politics mix, both are damaged. Arab countries cannot afford to use the same political methods as those from the 7th century, because politics, culture, and also religion have changed so significantly.

Further addressing the question of secularism's value in society, Professor Lezra suggested that the answer has two sides. On one hand, secularization is necessary and should be universal, because secularization is the route to modernity. On the other hand, there are different forms of secularization and it is necessary to be attentive to the changing ways in which society deals with religion. The process of de-secularization is important to recognize. For example, a pressure towards separating religion and politics is positive and Islam has a different tradition of achieving this, but to expect countries in the Middle East to adopt secularization as it is practiced in France is problematic. Assuming that secularization is the inherent goal allows secularization to become a veil for another type of orthodoxy.

In response to a question on the "ground-zero mosque" controversy, Mr. Tlili explained that the subject is a very complex issue, made worse because it was a public relations disaster. First, it was a mistake on the part of the Islamic center's founders to forget that they launched their project to the public during an electoral season, which

would manipulate the meanings of their statements in order to forward political campaigns. Second, the reactions to the Islamic center are part of something deeper that has been going on in the United States over the past few years, starting with the election of Barack Obama as president. After September 11, then President George W. Bush made a very important speech differentiating the terrorist attacks from Islam. Until 2007, all polls showed that problems of Islamophobia did not exist. Muslim Americans were mainly middle class and there was cooperation between security agencies and Muslim communities. Then there were several controversies after Obama's election, such as the continual controversy over whether or not Obama is actually a Muslim, as well as several attempted terrorist attacks since 2008.

As to how a local issue became a national one, Mr. Tlili stated that the Islamic center became a metaphor for American rejection of Islam and Muslims; that politicians took advantage of the issue; and that the issue of the Islamic center is compounded by problems the Obama administration is facing in other fields as well as by the general, negative attitude created by the economic crisis.

Mr. Tlili argued that we are witnessing the emergence of the "Muslim question," which should trigger grave concern because of the violent history that minority communities in different parts of world have experienced when their community becomes a "question" to be considered by the majority. The discourse surrounding Islam and Muslims has become violent and extremely negative. Education is helpful in the long run, but controversies like this one are problematic in the short term.

In response to Mr. Tlili, **Jacob Bender** stated that in the same speech that Mr. Tlili referred to, former President George W. Bush also mentioned the Crusades and articulated the “you are with us or against us” mentality that continued throughout his presidency. The attempt to reach out to Muslim leaders was overshadowed and in fact counteracted by the Bush administration’s actions. To this Mr. Tlili pointed out that the actions and attitude of the Bush administration was not reflected in polling about American attitudes concerning Muslims. Rather, attitudes towards Muslims changed radically after the election of Obama.

An audience member asked if the Sunni-Shi’a rift is the reason that Iraq has yet to form a government so long after elections there, to which Ambassador Shalgham responded that the problem in Iraq is deeper than the rift between Sunnis and the Shi’a. There are several minority groups in Iraq and under the rule of Saddam Hussein, the question of religion did not exist. There is now a sectarian confrontation, but the actual problems are equality, citizenship, and justice. It is simply a matter of time before these issues explicitly emerge. He pointed to the example of Egypt, where there is a problem between Muslims and Christians, but the actual issues at stake are equality, freedom, democracy, and citizenship.

Panel Discussion II: Policies

As moderator of the second panel discussion, Mustapha Tlili opened the panel by asking: how can we build policy in the future? The previous panel agreed that the past is the past,

but the future can be charted. Where are we today in terms of creating and living a cooperative culture in the Mediterranean space, and where can we go?

Jean-Christophe Menet, Diplomatic Adviser at the French Inter-Governmental Office for the Union for the Mediterranean, works daily towards building such a space. He presented the goals of the Union for the Mediterranean, as well as its history, functions, and challenges. Mr. Menet stated that the difficulty in creating a common Mediterranean space is the current lack of unified vision in the policies of the countries that make up that space. The Union for the Mediterranean was created with the idea of articulating and facilitating that vision. Created at the initiative of French President Nicolas Sarkozy to organize cooperation between countries in the Mediterranean region and their respective governments, the Union for the Mediterranean includes all 27 countries of the European Union and 16 countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

In terms of its history, the idea of a Union for the Mediterranean went through three phases of creation. The first phase was the creation of the European Union out of the European Economic Community, at which point the relationship between partners became more ambitious. In the second phase, the Barcelona Process put forward a comprehensive approach—political, economic, and cultural—and a neighborhood policy to create a “circle of friends” around Europe. In addition, the Anna Lindh Foundation was established to encourage dialogue in the Mediterranean. The final phase was marked by the emergence of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Mr. Menet underlined many innovative aspects of the Union for the Mediterranean. First, heads of state are directly involved in the process. Summit meetings take place every two years or more often if necessary. The first summit meeting was convened in 2008 and the second is scheduled for November 2010. Second, rather than being led by only French or European leaders, the Union is presided over by two presidents, one from the north of the Mediterranean and one from the south. Third, one major goal of the Union is to facilitate multiple countries cooperating on projects, rather than working only bilaterally. Fourth, a leading position within the organization is that of the Secretariat of the Union, which is dedicated to reflecting and addressing possible contradictions in the positions and policies of member states. The Union aims to move beyond the political problems of the region by speaking a common language that addresses common issues. Just as Averroes and Maimonides spoke a common language of the importance of reason, the Union is trying to highlight the common stakes for the region in order to effectively and cooperatively tackle problems.

Mr. Menet emphasized that the Mediterranean is at the heart of the critical issues and challenges of the 21st century, such as development and climate change. The Union attempts to separate these issues from any political impasse, and so approach them cooperatively as problems that affect the entire region. It is too early to say if this experiment will work—for instance, one critical challenge the Union faces is the Middle East peace process, which itself is fragile. However, there is a mutual dependency between Europe and the Mediterranean region; the EU is looking to gain global influence, and the Mediterranean region needs development. The Mediterranean space is a melting pot of

cultures and as such, is a critical area for the future of relations between the U.S., the EU, and the Arab world. Recently, new initiatives have addressed future relations through cultural and education programs, such as new Masters programs and improved student exchange.

Mr. Menet concluded that university exchanges can be considered the Averroes and Maimonides of 2010. The future of this region will not be about meetings of diplomats but about universities and research centers that exchange ideas and focus on issues. They raise awareness about the common heritage of the Mediterranean and study how to best move forward toward a common future.

Mr. Tlili noted that Mr. Menet's presentation provided a stepping stone for further discussion—can co-development provide shared prosperity? He turned the floor over to a video-taped presentation by **Jorge Sampaio**, former President of Portugal and High Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Mr. Sampaio framed his discussion by stating that we must use an empirical method when dealing with Mediterranean issues. Many reports from political, development, and research institutions highlight the complexities of the region, but such reports also suggest there is the possibility for cohesion and cooperation. Goals for such cooperation include breaking down walls of misunderstanding and replacing them with bridges of communication. This can be facilitated through co-development, but more so in surpassing co-development and encouraging equal participation and co-ownership in development projects. A final goal is, of course, peaceful relations.

Mr. Sampaio stated that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations prioritizes these goals specifically. The organization works to counter polarization, and furthermore, acts as a driving force that produces results. The Alliance of Civilization also aims to increase joint ownership and promote people-to-people contact through intercultural dialogues, and has called for additional measures on national and international levels to attain such dialogue and facilitate cooperation. The Mediterranean is facing several difficult challenges; the UN Alliance of Civilizations aims to bring together nations in the region as stakeholders in the same future in order to overcome such tensions.

The broad goals of the UN Alliance of Civilization include reinforcing trust, tolerance, and respect; contributing to good government; combating racism, discrimination, and xenophobia; promoting integration of migrants; and combating exclusion of people and communities. The Alliance approaches these goals through the specific focus areas of education, youth, media, and migration by opening avenues for cooperation; promoting development of stable organizations; and engaging a wide arrange of global partners, such as non-profit organizations, governments, and universities. The four year plan of action aims to achieve citizenship, gender equality, partnerships with governments and philanthropic organizations, expansion of intercultural exchanges, successful efforts of non-state actors, promotion of independence of press, investment in cultural diplomacy, and the promotion of sports diplomacy.

Mr. Sampaio concluded that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is convinced that people have more in common than they often realize and, given the opportunity, will

work together. The stakes are very high. Dialogue can unite or divide, and to succeed we must go beyond words to concrete actions.

Mr. Tlili then turned to **Jerónimo Páez-López**, Former Director of El Legado Andalusí Foundation, to discuss art and culture in the region and in the context of globalization.

Mr. Páez-López began his presentation by describing how his own life brings together the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. Mr. Páez-López is from Granada, Spain, which he describes as “living between two countries and two civilizations,” even while being physically located in the heart of one. Regarding the day’s first panel, he argued that what he heard about *convivencia* reflected more a dream than a reality, as even in Al-Andalus there were many conflicts. Nevertheless, this period left an important and meaningful legacy of cooperation and coexistence. It is important, then, that we know the history of “the other” and the representation of “the other,” he continued.

Mr. Páez-López added that one of the biggest problems we face today is that many political leaders do not know much about their nation’s or their region’s history. They prioritize the short term rather than work towards the long term. Mr. Páez-López argued that Europeans must accept that people can work together despite differences of religion. He gave the example of two visions of Al-Andalus in Spain. On one hand, Franco claimed that Spain had nothing to do with the Arabs, and that the Arabs in fact represented a step backwards from Roman civilizations. On the other hand, there is much popular nostalgia for the cultural and intellectual brilliance of the Andalusian period, coupled with a sense of

mourning for its loss. The two visions demonstrate the lack of knowledge in Spain about the heritage of Arab intellectuals and the relation of that history to European history.

With the help of detailed photographs and maps, Mr. Páez-López then presented a timeline of Al-Andalus. For nearly 400 years, the Spanish people were tied culturally and politically to Arab and North African civilizations. The Arabs left an enormous cultural legacy in the region. However, travel literature shows that only 200 years after Spain was re-conquered, travelers considered the Maghreb to be a “different planet.” The aim of the El Legado Andalusi Foundation is to exhibit this history and cultural legacy.

Mr. Páez-López observed that Arab civilization declined when it stopped separating philosophy from theology. Today, it is still necessary to challenge perceptions and maintain respect for philosophies and ideas regardless of religious interpretation. Mr. Páez-López argued that a fundamental obstacle in Western civilization has been its refusal to assimilate the fact that Arab civilization was a central part of European civilization. As the West becomes more multicultural, the Muslim and Arab world is more willing to accept that shared history. It is now a matter of the West accepting it, too.

In conclusion, Mr. Páez-López stated that he would like to say to the Spanish people: even though you are Occidental with Greco-Roman roots, Arab roots have also shaped you, and this is something of which to be proud. It is possible to make links of solidarity but it will be necessary to change the books we read and the lessons we teach in order to uncover these roots and understand this shared past.

Mr. Tlili then opened the discussion to the room, beginning debate with the question: how do we turn around? How do we change perspectives? He suggested that in order to change perspectives it is necessary (in the long run) to improve cultural exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and education at all levels. In the short term, globalized media and the internet are faster methods of reaching people. How do we harness these resources? The question for governments is: what can you do to change perceptions in this globalized world? We can take measures to stop individual incidents of violence and misunderstanding, but in order to make a permanent shift, Europeans must accept their shared identity with the Arab world.

Mr. Páez-López responded that he is not optimistic. In his view, internet sources often provide too much information with too little analysis, and too little focus on geography, history, or critical analysis. How do we reach the young generation with accurate and clear information? They are products of an information revolution that has taught them to consume easy information quickly.

In response to the question of how to make people think critically about initiatives they are asked to support, Mr. Páez-López pointed to the critical importance of education at all levels of society. For instance, there are some 56 million Moroccan people: how do we manage this many people? There is lack of good historical literature in the Arab world on the subject of Al-Andalus. Is there a lack of interest in this topic? The Alliance of Civilizations works to answer this question. It was established with the objective of finding ways and means to connect cultures and identifying common ground, and does so by focusing on the particular issue of the media.

Marc Scheuer, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, responded that for the last few years, the Alliance of Civilizations has been working with a network of experts to help journalists gain a new perspective. The network brings together journalists from the East and West, and encourages joint reporting and joint training, which provides new perspectives on cultural issues. The network is becoming more and more effective, and other journalists are using the resource more frequently. When an issue is being raised for political purposes, the network tries to bring the media into the dialogue in order to discuss the inherent danger. While reaching out to journalists has proven effective, more needs to be done, especially in the area of education; for example, the Alliance needs to give more resources to teachers.

In answer to whether the Union for the Mediterranean takes the media into consideration, Mr. Menet responded that the Union focuses primarily on environmental issues, education, and research. It is still very much a process between diplomats and does not directly reach citizens to make them feel like they belong to a common region. Not many people would refer to themselves as “Mediterranean.” One of the main difficulties in achieving such a goal is information. The European Union was formed out of the European Economic Community, which used common coal and steel interests as a method of conflict resolution. Mr. Menet suggested that the “coal and steel” of the Mediterranean is information. The Union for the Mediterranean is working on a common heritage television channel, centered not on controversial issues but rather on generally interesting issues

such as tourism, food, and travel. Sixteen public television channels around the Mediterranean have committed to creating this programming.

A member of the audience suggested that the Union for the Mediterranean all comes down to politics. People from the Maghreb feel like they have more to win from this Union, but when they listen to European leaders, it is not encouraging, especially considering the positions these leaders frequently take on immigration. Mr. Scheuer observed that there is a degree of political appropriation of cultural issues. The Alliance is a light process and the goal is to address these issues through a coalition of many actors: governments, cities, regions, nations, media, etc., bringing in new voices and partners to showcase different perspectives.

In response to the question of the recent shift towards the far-right in many European countries, Mr. Menet stated that this mostly stems from the issue of immigration, which is very sensitive to the European public. In addition, the extreme right is growing with the economic crisis. These difficult issues must be tackled in cooperation with neighbors and partners.

An audience member inquired as to thoughts on more immediate action, as opposed to just education. How do we reach outside of diplomatic systems to affect people directly, or to at least affect popular discourse? To this, Marc Scheuer responded that the main challenge is to include intercultural skills in the way we interact, both on a diplomatic level and in daily interactions as citizens, neighbors, and friends. Mr. Páez-López argued that perceptions can be changed -- a few decades ago, the Spanish considered the English

foreigners and culturally removed. Today they are seen as cultural kin, whereas Arabs, who share more of a historical connection to Spain, are perceived as foreign.

In closing, Mr. Tlili stated the hope that Jacob Bender's film will be shown throughout the world—especially in the Arab world—and will continue to provoke necessary and productive dialogue.

Appendix I

Program

9:30 AM – 10:00 AM

Registration

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Welcome by

John Brademas (U.S.), President Emeritus of New York University and President of the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Center (10 min)

Opening Statement by

Mustapha Tlili (Tunisia/U.S.), Founder and Director, Center for Dialogues: Islamic World—U.S.—The West, New York University, on behalf of Co-Sponsors (10 min)

Remarks by

Jacob Bender (U.S.), filmmaker (10 min)

Screening of “Out of Cordoba: Averroes and Maimonides in Their Time and Ours” (82 min.)

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Panel Discussion I: Reflections

I. Averroes and Maimonides in Their Times: A Historical Perspective

Jacques Lezra (U.S.), Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish and Portuguese, New York University (25 min)

II. Faith and Reason in the Mediterranean Space Today: A Political Perspective, and Can Religion Play a Positive Role in the Mediterranean Space and How?

Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgam, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations (25 min)

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Lunch, hosted by NYU Abu Dhabi

2:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Panel Discussion I (continues)

IV. Floor Debate (60 min)

3:30 PM – 6:00 PM

Panel Discussion II: Policies

I. The Euro-Mediterranean Institutional Drive Towards a Common Destiny: An Assessment

Jean-Christophe Menet, Diplomatic Adviser, Inter-Governmental Office for the Union for the Mediterranean, France (15 min)

II. Can Co-Development Offer Shared Prosperity and Peace in the Mediterranean Space?

Jorge Sampaio, Former President of Portugal and High Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilizations (video-taped presentation) (15 min)

Marc Scheuer, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
(15 min)

III. Art and Culture in the Mix: The Mediterranean Space versus Globalization

Jerónimo Páez-López (Spain), Former Director, El Legado Andalusi Foundation (15 min)

IV. Floor Debate and Closing (90 min)

6:00PM – 8:00PM

Reception hosted by Dr. John Brademas