

ARAB-HISPANIC COOPERATION AND ITS FUTURE TRAJECTORIES



Annual Report
2024

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COMMITTEE

Annual Report 2024

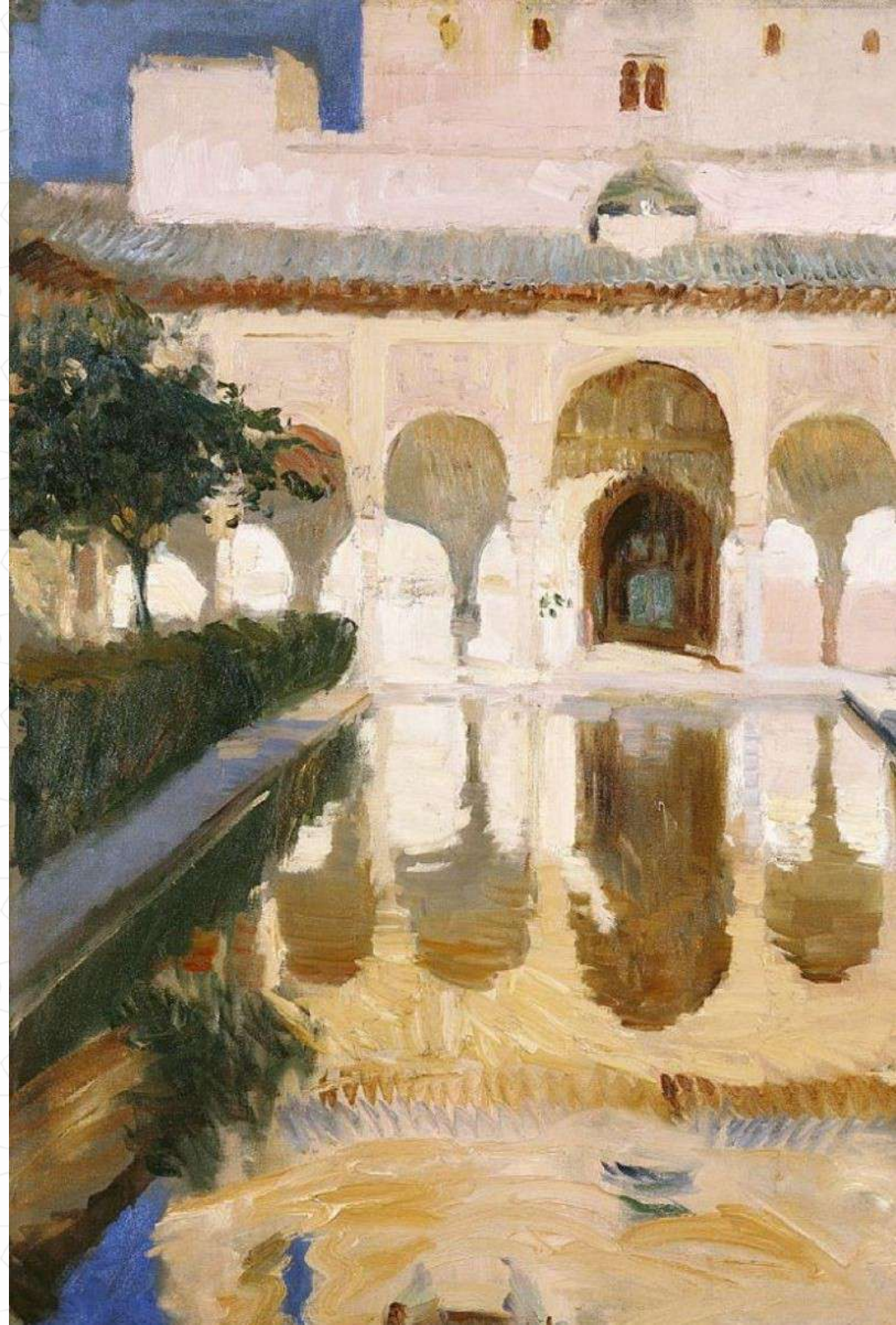
Andalus Committee

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August 24th, 2024

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Our Committee in Numbers



7

Universities



40

Nationalities



100

Researchers

About the Andalus Committee

The Andalus Committee was founded with the goal of exploring the emerging opportunities of the Global South by fostering an engaged community of young leaders contributing to global decision-making. We believe that our shifting world order requires reassessed approaches, and our goal is to fully seize its economic, cultural and diplomatic potential. As new actors emerge across the globe, we are inspired by Al-Andalus' ideal of *Convivencia*, convinced that civilizational exchanges and diversified cooperation are key to prosperity.

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Contents

Chairman’s Message	5
Editor’s Note	6
Economics & Trade Commission	8
I. Economic Overview	9
II. Avenues of Cooperation	12
III. Recommendations	15
Human & Cultural Links Commission	24
I. Regional Overview	25
II. Current Situation	31
III. Avenues of Cooperation	34
IV. Recommendations	36
Diplomacy & Multilateralism Commission	39
I. Regional Overview	40
II. Current Situation	43
III. Recommendations	49
Conclusion	52



Chairman's Message

The international scene is ever-changing. Yesterday's powerful entities are waning, while those previously defeated have risen. Imperial ambitions thought to be extinguished are reawakening, and certain hard-won gains are now under threat. This is what we might call the movement of history. The challenge lies in understanding how to navigate and accompany this evolution. Some believe that historical trends can be halted or even reversed. These conservatives and reactionaries are the perennial carriers of conflict, defending the old order against the emerging one. On the other hand, there are those who, like me, are convinced that change must be comprehended in its full complexity, recognizing both its continuity with the past and its novelty regarding the future. Those who understand and grasp the positivity of change are the true leaders of tomorrow.

This positivity stems from the fact that if the old order is dying and a new one is emerging, it is because the foundational conditions of the existing system are no longer suitable for its prosperity. Evolution is more than a convergence of external factors; it is the consequence of internal inadequacies and contradictions that the current world order can no longer endure. Change thus provides an alternative to an old model that has exhausted itself. This does not always mean its extinction but sometimes a correction of its excesses until equilibrium is restored. For instance, liberal parliamentarianism, seemingly opposed to royal absolutism, enabled reformist monarchies to persist to the present day, unlike reactionary ones that eventually collapsed. Similarly, Keynesianism and interventionism, which seemed opposed to market logic and liberalism, allowed capitalism to correct its excesses after the 1929 stock market crash, providing an alternative to communism. History is replete with examples where contradictions evolved into syntheses, offering solutions to systems otherwise doomed. Our world today faces a similar

challenge. The unipolar world order, which may have been tempted by an end to history under the aegis of the United States, no longer exists. Yet, the multipolar world envisaged by the BRICS+ is not yet a reality. In this transitional period, or "change of era" as Hannah Arendt might describe it, history is accelerating. It is our role, as students, to grasp the significance of this moment and to develop ways of thinking suited to this new era. The challenge is to look beyond the immediate present without speculating on a future too distant to predict.

The emergence of a multipolar system—which I prefer to call multilateral, since the “poles” might remind of the empires' areas of influence—is inevitable. As nations rethink their partnerships and reimagine their alliances, considering the entire world as their neighbor, we should already be exploring new high-potential collaborations they could implement. To this end, I founded the Andalus Committee, bringing together students from universities around the world to promote a multilateral world order and explore promising new, international partnerships. This first report focuses on Arab-Hispanic relations, a textbook case of both high-potential and under-exploited collaboration. My interest in this topic stems from my personal history, having grown up in Morocco, uniquely linked to the Hispanic world by Spain through geographic proximity and shared history, particularly Al-Andalus. These interconnections have always seemed obvious to me, but an academic exchange in Cairo revealed that the Hispanic world can appear much less familiar in the rest of the MENA region. I hope this report will illuminate the partnership's potential for skeptics and the indifferent on both sides.

The report focuses on three fundamental axes—economy and trade, human and cultural ties, diplomacy and multilateralism. Each axis demonstrates that, despite the challenges highlighted, the Arab world, Latin America, and the Iberian Peninsula have compelling reasons to collaborate more closely in the future. Economic synergies between Latin American and the Arab world

are undeniable. Beyond mere commercial complementarities, both areas have experienced the excesses of ultra-liberalism and share an interest in proposing alternative economic models. Additionally, most countries aspire to reduce their dependence on raw material prices and develop high-value industrial sectors. Human and cultural ties are even more compelling. The large Arab diaspora in Latin America serves as a remarkable model of cultural and economic integration. These communities, true ambassadors of the Arab world in Latin America and vice versa, should be central to new Arab-Latin American cooperation, sharing their expertise in economic and multicultural integration. Academic research must also play a key role. The arrival of the Spanish in America brought with them numerous legacies inherited from the Arab-*Amazigh* civilization through *Al-Andalus*. The extent of Arab influence on the American continent remains an area ripe for further exploration, with the Iberian Peninsula serving as a bridge between the two worlds. Furthermore, both regions share a common aspiration for international reform that should be more inclusive and equitable. A shared commitment to national sovereignty and peoples' right to choose their own destiny resonates across the Atlantic, even in Spain. The ensemble of these commonalities highlights their incredible synergy, as skillfully outlined in this report.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire Andalus Committee team for their remarkable work. Our members, spread across more than eight universities, dedicated six months to exploring ways to improve relations between these regions, showcasing seriousness, rigor, and creativity. While young people may have flaws, they also possess the unique ability to break free from old models of thought, allowing them to reimagine possibilities in truly innovative ways. It is to this youthful energy that I wish to pay tribute, hoping it will contribute to raising awareness of the immense potential between the Arab and Hispanic worlds and inspire many other global collaborations. I

would also like to thank all those who assisted us during the drafting of our report, starting with our advisors: Prime Minister Youssef Chahed, Vice-President Marwan Muasher, and Secretary General Nicola Giammarioli. Seeking more practical guidance, we turned to experienced professionals who could shed light on the realities of inter-state relations and the feasibility of our recommendations. Their insights were invaluable. Additionally, I extend my gratitude to Casa Árabe, the strategic center for Spain's relations with the Arab world, for their unwavering support of our initiative from the outset and throughout the drafting process.

I sincerely hope that this report meets our high aspirations and marks the beginning of a long series of works, aimed at making the future multilateral world more functional and effective. Please also note that this is our first report, and that we would be delighted to receive any feedback or advice for improvement in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Lahlou', with a stylized, cursive script.

Azzedine Lahlou
Chairman



Editor’s Note

Dear Readers,

Through this first report, we tried to capture how the Arab world, Latin America, and the Iberian Peninsula can work together more closely.

In the Economics & Trade section (starting on page 8), we explore the economic synergies between these regions. We look at how they might cooperate to reduce dependence on raw materials and develop high-value industries. The Human & Cultural Links section (from page 24) examines the remarkable integration of Arab communities in Latin America. We also touch on the fascinating historical connections, like the Arab-Amazigh influences that came to the Americas via Spain. Finally, our Diplomacy & Multilateralism section (from page 39) discusses how these regions share similar views on international reform and national sovereignty.

It has been an incredible journey leading this team of fellow students from across the globe. For six months, we poured our minds into this report, balancing studies and research sessions and debates. We may not have all the answers, but we hope our perspective can inspire others to look at Arab Hispanic relations in a new light – these relations are too often overlooked or misunderstood, despite their potential. I am also grateful to our advisors and institutional partners for their time, feedback, and support throughout.

Bonne lecture,

Louai Allani-Guellouz
Editor-in-Chief

Economics & Trade Commission

For the past six months, the Economy and Trade Commission has been exploring opportunities for economic cooperation between the Arab and Latin American worlds. Unlike the other two commissions in this report, we did not include Spain in our study, as we felt the socio-economic contexts were too distinct. Instead, we concentrated on the potential of the Latin American-Arab partnership, which we believe remains underutilized, rather than analyzing the two regions separately, as existing literature on them is already well established. Our goal is to encourage more economic, political, and academic leaders to examine more closely this promising avenue for commercial cooperation.

Commission Chair: Charlotte Pontevia

Commission Vice-Chair: Garrett Wilson

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I. Economic Overview

The goal of this Commission is to identify unexploited and underexploited avenues of economic cooperation and collaborative development between the Middle East and Latin America. Broadly speaking, these two regions can be grouped into two blocs marked by strong cultural, historic, linguistic, and economic ties. Countries in the Middle East and North Africa shall make up, for the purposes of this report, the Middle East-North Africa region (“MENA”), and those in Central America and South America shall compose, for the purposes of this report, the Latin America region (“LATAM”).

LATAM has a combined population of 664,155,299¹ and a combined GDP of \$7.09 trillion USD² in 2023. Comparatively, the MENA region has a total population of 473,272,080³ and a combined GDP of \$3.49 trillion USD.⁴ Adjusted to a per capita basis, LATAM and MENA are more closely positioned, averaging \$10,681 USD and \$7,377 USD per capita in 2023, respectively. In 2023, the LATAM GDP grew at an average rate of 2.2% and is predicted at 1.9% in 2024,⁵ whereas MENA showed lower growth at 1.9% in 2023 but is predicted at 2.7% in 2024.⁶ Both regions can be considered to be predominantly Middle-Income

Countries (MICs) according to World Bank criteria, with Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of \$9,566 USD for LATAM⁷ and \$7,330 USD for MENA in 2023.⁸ As stated, the goal of the Economy and Trade Commission is to bring light to new avenues for economic cooperation and, eventually, growth between MENA and LATAM. To achieve this, this report will begin with a broad economic analysis (1), presenting the current situations of both regions. Next, we will explore avenues for cooperation (2), diving into the strengths of both regions, and identifying unexploited opportunities for mutual growth. Finally, from these analyses, we will present a set of recommendations (3) rooted in this Commission's research and understanding of the current state of economic relations between MENA and LATAM.

¹ "Population, total - Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

² "GDP (Current US\$) - Brazil, Guatemala, Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Spain." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

³ "Population, total - Tunisia, Egypt, Arab Rep., Morocco, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

⁴ "GDP (Current US\$) - Tunisia, Egypt, Arab Rep., Morocco, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

⁵ "Preliminary Overview of the Economies of Latin America and the Caribbean 2023." CEPAL, ECLAC, 2023.

⁶ "Middle East and North Africa Economic Update — April 2024." World Bank, 2024.

⁷ "GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$) - Latin America & Caribbean." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

⁸ "GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$) - Arab World." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

Latin America

Regarding GDP, LATAM sees a clear divide between its two most economically powerful countries (Brazil and Mexico) and the rest of the region. With GDPs of \$2.17 trillion USD and \$1.79 trillion USD respectively, Brazil and Mexico together account for almost 56% of Latin America's total GDP of \$7.09 trillion USD in 2023.⁹ Furthermore, they comprise just more than 50% of the region's population in 2023, with 216,422,446 inhabitants in Brazil 128,455,567 in Mexico.

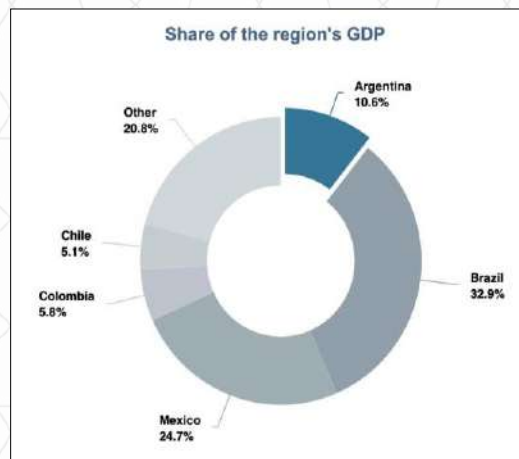


Figure 1: Share of LATAM GDP

As a result of stifling political and policy uncertainties, high rates of violent crime, and lagging economic competitiveness, Latin America's 2024 economy is expected to grow at the slowest rate in comparison to other global regions, with South Asia and East Asia/Pacific in the lead, followed by Europe/Central Asia, MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, and

⁹ "GDP (current US\$) - Brazil, Latin America & Caribbean, Mexico." World Bank Open Data, 2023.

finally Latin America in last place.¹⁰ Nonetheless, treating the region as a monolith with identical struggles would negate its inherent diversity, particularly in terms of economics.

Latin America, a region rich in cultural diversity and resources, presents a complex tapestry of economic landscapes. Countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico each have unique economic narratives shaped by their historical, political, and social contexts. Despite abundant natural resources and potential for growth, these nations have experienced varying degrees of economic success and challenges. LATAM countries have witnessed strong economic recovery following the disastrous consequences of COVID-19 in 2020. The region's most strategic sectors have seen particularly rapid growth: agri-food, finance, healthcare, and fintech. LATAM is one of the world's leading exporters of pulp, metals, meat, and a host of agricultural products. It has also a competitive edge in fast-growing sectors—to be explored below—that investors seeking to diversify their suppliers could

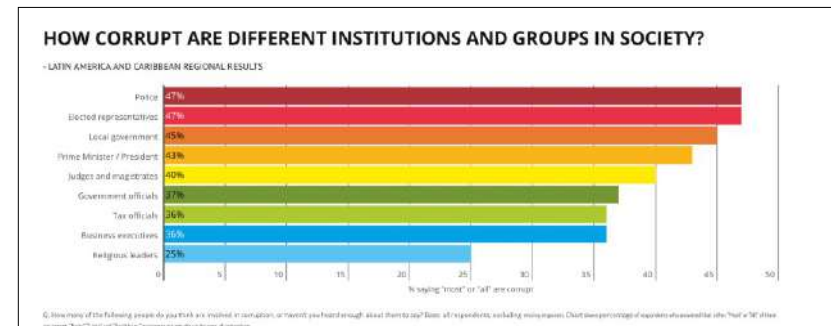


Figure 2: Bribery Rates in LATAM & the Caribbeans

¹⁰ "Competition: The Missing Ingredient for Growth?" World Bank, LACER, 2024.

capitalize on even further.¹¹ However, high levels of perceived corruption among police, elected representatives, and local governments suggest deep-seated issues in governance, undermining public trust and deterring both domestic and international investment. This perception creates an unstable business environment, leading to higher costs for public projects due to corruption, taxes, inefficiencies, and, often, poor quality public services. For economies, particularly those heavily reliant on foreign investment like many in Latin America, corruption erodes economic vitality by increasing operational costs and risk, thereby reducing profitability and attractiveness to investors. When key institutions such as the judiciary and government officials are viewed as corrupt, it complicates the enforcement of contracts and property rights, essential elements for economic stability, social trust, and growth.

Middle East and North Africa

The MENA region is one of significant diversity when it comes to GDP, even more so when adjusted to a per capita basis. On the one hand, Saudi Arabia emerges as an economic giant, being the only country with a GDP over \$1 trillion USD,¹² more than double its closest peer, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Adjust this, however, to the two countries' respective populations, and a different story is told: The per capita GDP in Saudi Arabia is just over \$30,000 USD, while it is nearly \$54,000 USD in the UAE in 2022. Egypt's GDP (\$476.75 billion USD) is close to that of the UAE (\$507.06 billion USD), with a population nearly 12 times greater, drawing a stark contrast between the UAE's

strong GDP per capita and Egypt's comparatively miniscule \$4,295 USD per capita in 2022.¹³ This figure, along with Tunisia and Morocco's comparatively modest per capita GDPs of \$3,747 USD and \$3,494 USD, respectively, stand out against the strong figures of the Gulf States and their oil-rich economies, such as Qatar, with a per capita GDP of \$87,661 USD.¹⁴ Despite this income diversity, there are many shared economic interests between the countries of the MENA region, namely in energy production and foreign investment. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a dynamic economic and commercial zone. Since the 1990s, some Gulf countries have succeeded in reducing their direct dependence on fuels. The group is largely dominated by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two largest economies in terms of GDP and population, which together account for 73% of the GCC's gross domestic product and 76% of its population.¹⁵

The MENA region's total trade in goods, as a percentage of GDP, was 65.5% in 2021, reflecting a relatively open economy. However, intra-regional trade remains low, accounting for only 17.8% of total trade and 18.5% of total exports, despite shared language, culture, and geographic proximity. The GCC largely dominates the share of intra-regional trade, while intra-regional exports for non-GCC Arab countries have remained below 2% of their trade flows.¹⁶ There is therefore a big difference between the export capacities of MENA countries outside and inside the GCC. To illustrate, while several Maghreb countries have made progress at national level, economic integration across the Maghreb remains at a standstill. Mutual distrust, past grievances, territorial conflicts, and nationalist rhetoric continue to paralyze any collective advancement for

¹¹ "Cultivating Ties: Deepening trade and investment between Latin America and the GCC." The Economist Impact, Dubai Chamber of Commerce, 2022

¹² Ibid

¹³ "Population, total - Tunisia, Egypt, Arab Rep., Morocco, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Jordan." World Bank, World Bank Group, 2023.

¹⁴ "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Overview." World Bank, World Bank Group, 2023.

¹⁵ "The Mirror between Latin America and the Arab World." Rodríguez Marín, IE Business, 2022.

¹⁶ "A Mercantile Middle East." Saidi, Prasad, 2013.

the Maghreb economies, whose regional trade is less than 5% of their total trade, far behind any other regional trading bloc in the world. Contributing to the aforementioned issue is that Maghreb economics, except for Morocco, remain poorly diversified, relying mainly on natural resources exports.¹⁷

II. Cooperation Avenues

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, the strategic importance of building robust international partnerships cannot be overstated. The evolving economic landscape presents a compelling case for strengthening the economic relationship between the Hispanic and Arab worlds, which holds significant untapped potential. While the current trade and investment flows between the two regions are relatively limited, there are clear areas of complementary and mutual interests that could drive economic engagement in the years ahead. This section delves into the multifaceted avenues for cooperation between these two economic zones, highlighting their individual interests as well as mutual benefits that could be met through increased collaboration.

Interests for Hispanic Countries

Hispanic countries, namely those in LATAM, see several key opportunities in strengthening their economic ties with the Arab world, especially with the GCC. Leading among these is the prospect of

¹⁷ "Economic Integration in the Maghreb: An Untapped Source of Growth." International Monetary Fund, 2019.

¹⁸ "Cepal Report." CEPAL, United Nations, 2023.

¹⁹ "OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2019-2028." OECD iLibrary, OECD, 2019.

engaging with international markets and expanding exports of critical products. Latin America is a major agricultural producer—accounting for over a quarter of global exports in agricultural products, namely fruits, vegetables, coffee, soybeans, and meat; the region also leads exports in other products such as metal, pulp, and several other commodities.¹⁸ The region is abundant in fertile land and water resources, positioning it well to increase food production and exports.¹⁹ For example, the World Resources Institute report (2019) projects a 92% increase in beef production in Latin America between 2010 and 2050.²⁰ One country with great potential is Brazil, the world's largest producer and exporter of halal meat. Economic growth in LATAM will also be driven by industries that necessitate engagement with global markets, specifically manufacturers of medical devices, pharmaceuticals (vaccines included), and agricultural goods.

Beyond trade, Latin American firms are also showcasing increasing interest in securing investments from the GCC. LATAM is home to rapidly growing healthcare, financial, and fintech industries which require large investments for growth. According to a survey of over 200 senior executives in Latin America from a wide range of sectors, only 5% of them were engaging with Arab countries for funding, while 28% stated they were willing to do so given the perceived ease of business and favorable investment conditions relative to those in Latin America. As indicated by the same report, between 2016 and 2021, the GCC allocated \$4 billion USD in investments to LATAM countries, with the UAE contributing 77% of this total, Saudi Arabia 22%, and Qatar 1%.²¹ The GCC's vast wealth and growing appetite for diversifying their investment

²⁰ "World Resources Report." World Resources Institute, World Resources Institute, 2023.

²¹ "Cultivating Ties: Deepening trade and investment between Latin America and the GCC." The Economist Impact, Dubai Chamber of Commerce, 2022

portfolio present an opportunity for LATAM companies seeking capital to fund their expansion.

In terms of energy, Latin American countries could significantly enhance their energy security by increasing trade with the Arab region. By importing fossil fuels and derivatives, such as polymers, from Arab states, Latin American countries can diversify their energy sources. This diversification enhances the region's energy security by reducing dependency on a single source or region for their energy needs. Therefore, it mitigates risks associated with geopolitical tensions, supply disruptions, and price volatility in global energy markets. At the same time, GCC countries, particularly those investing heavily in state-of-the-art energy extraction and processing technologies, could provide LATAM with insights into advanced energy technologies including renewable energy technologies, infrastructure, and know-how to help accelerate their economies into decarbonization.

Lastly, Latin American countries could also benefit significantly from knowledge exchange with Arab countries in terms of building infrastructure. GCC countries have quickly and successfully executed several road, electricity, telecommunications, and residential infrastructure projects. By leveraging the expertise and experience of the GCC in these areas, LATAM could enhance its infrastructure development initiatives, which is one of the largest limitations for growth in the region.

²² "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Market and Country Profiles." Food Export, Food Export Association of the Midwest USA, 2023.

Interests for Arab Countries

A critical concern for GCC countries is food security, as they import over 80% of their food due to the arid climate and water scarcity that significantly limit local agricultural production.²² Latin America, with its vast and diverse agricultural sector, presents an invaluable opportunity for the GCC to secure a stable and reliable source of food imports. By increasing trade with LATAM countries, Arab nations can diversify their food sources, reducing dependency on traditional markets and mitigating risks related to geopolitical tensions or supply chain disruptions. Furthermore, establishing long-term agricultural trade agreements with LATAM countries could offer more favorable pricing, quality assurances, and a steady supply of essential commodities, ranging from grains and meat and poultry to fruits and vegetables. Furthermore, Latin America's vast water resources, which account for 60% of the world's freshwater reserves, have earned it a reputation as the "world's water bank." Conversely, Arab countries face water shortages and are the world's biggest importers of agricultural products, with an estimated annual food import bill of \$120 billion USD, translating into a per capita demand of \$350—three times that of China.²³

The dynamic and start-up-oriented economies of Latin America offer great investment opportunities for Arab countries. These range from direct investments in agricultural projects, which are directly tied to enhancing food security, to infrastructure development, renewable energy, mining, healthcare, and financial services. The fintech sector in LATAM has been growing significantly during the last few years. In

²³ "The Arab World and Latin America: Long-standing Migration, an Expanding South-South Partnership." Khader, Blesa, IEMed, 2020.

2021, fintech investment in Latin America reached a record \$5 billion USD across 120 deals, up 150% from \$2 billion USD in 2020.²⁴ Moreover, it is estimated the fintech markets in LATAM will see a revenue compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 29% until 2030.²⁵ Such investments not only promise attractive returns but also facilitate the GCC's strategic interest in diversifying its investment portfolio beyond hydrocarbon extraction and export. Moreover, investing in key sectors such as infrastructure and energy aligns with the GCC's vision of playing a pivotal role in global energy transitions and infrastructure development, thereby contributing to their economic resilience and sustainability. The GCC, with its sophisticated banking and financial markets, is well-positioned to invest in LATAM's fintech innovations. As of 2021, there were more than 2300 fintech companies founded in the region, with 512 of them being established in Mexico, 279 in Brazil, and 272 in Argentina.²⁶ This engagement could range from venture capital funding for start-ups to establishing partnerships for technology exchange and financial inclusion initiatives. Such collaborations not only serve the GCC's interests in tapping into new markets for their financial services but also support their ambitions to become global hubs for fintech and innovation.

Several LATAM and Arab states are making significant headway in their respective energy transitions. However, many non-GCC Arab countries lack strong policy mechanisms to expand access to private investment for unconventional renewable energy resources. One exception, Morocco, has seen significant renewables development and private investment due in part to robust auction frameworks for clean energy, namely concentrated solar power (CSP). Auction-related knowledge transfer from a single state, though, may be insufficient;

²⁴"Pulse of Fintech H2 2021: Emerging Markets LATAM." KPMG, 2022.

²⁵"Fintech Projected to Become a \$1.5 Trillion Industry by 2030." Milan Fintech Summit, 2023.

LATAM countries like Chile, for instance, have established robust auction designs which have brought down the cost of auction prices through increased private competition. These avenues for cooperation will be discussed in more detail in Section IV, Recommendations below.

Mutual Interests

The trade relationship between Latin America and the Arab countries—especially GCC—exhibits clear synergies and complementarities, despite the relatively low overall trade volumes between the two regions.

Prior to the pandemic, bilateral trade was growing, with imports from LATAM to the GCC increasing sharply from \$9.6 billion USD in 2016 to \$17.2 billion USD in 2019. These imports consisted primarily of essential commodities like gold, meat, iron ore, cereals, sugar, and coffee, with Brazil accounting for the largest share at 42%, highlighting LATAM's role as a key supplier of food security to the GCC region.²⁷ In turn, the GCC exports fertilizers, plastic polymers, aluminum, and ammonia to LATAM, which are fundamental inputs for the latter's agricultural sector. This two-way trade in essential goods demonstrates the complementary nature of the economic relationship, where the regions rely on each other for critical resources.

However, the total value of GCC exports to LATAM has remained relatively low, at around \$2.5-3.5 billion USD annually between 2016-2020. This suggests significant untapped potential to deepen the trade ties, which both sides are actively exploring, such as through a proposed

²⁶"Cultivating Ties: Deepening trade and investment between Latin America and the GCC." The Economist Impact, Dubai Chamber of Commerce, 2022

²⁷ Ibid

bilateral trade agreement between the GCC and Mercosur. Overcoming logistical challenges, like the lack of direct maritime links, will be key to realizing the full potential of this complementary economic partnership.

III. Recommendations

GCC Sovereign Wealth Funds’ (SWF) investments in LATAM

Expanding Gulf SWFs into the LATAM market presents a tremendously strategic opportunity, leveraging the GCC’s pool of capital to bring essential innovative infrastructure projects alive in LATAM. It gives LATAM countries an accessible pool of capital (1) in the context of uncertainties regarding the Federal Reserve’s—and by extension LATAM Central Bank’s—interest rates and related monetary policies. This is what presents GCC SWFs—with their geographic and asset-class diversification strategy—as a crucial bidder for the LATAM markets while giving them access to a growing market potential (2), which is heavily backed by local governments as they contribute to the countries’ sustainable development. LATAM witnessed 3,235 transactions—including M&A, Private Equity, Venture Capital, and Asset Acquisition—with a total aggregate value of \$74,12 million dollars²⁸ USD in 2023, which further stresses the significant investment opportunities in the region. Indeed, the region boasts a population of over 650 million,²⁹ with rising disposable incomes and increasing internet

²⁸ "Latin America - Annual Report 2023." TTR Data, 2023.

²⁹ "6 Reasons to Expand Your Startup in LATAM." Floowi Talent, Floowi Talent, 2023.

³⁰ "Mexico - Trade Agreements." International Trade Administration, 2023.

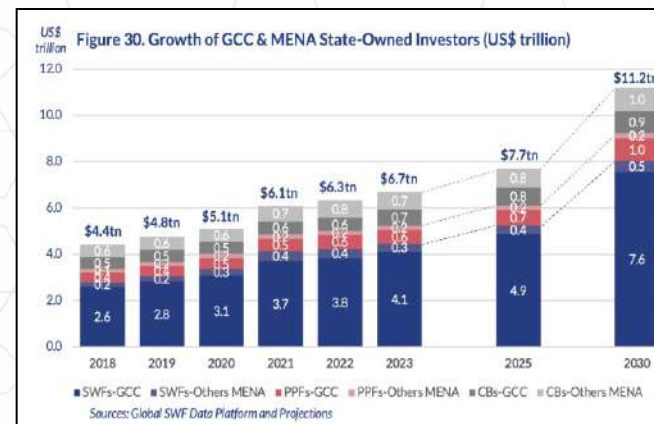


Figure 3: Growth of GCC & Mena State-Owned Investors

penetration, which means a consumer base ripe for investment and market penetration. For instance, Mexico alone, with its recent signing of 13 new trade agreements, offers preferential access to over 50 countries,³⁰ positioning it as an ideal launch pad for international expansion. The country's large domestic consumer market of over 120 million³¹ people provide ample opportunities for Gulf SWFs. In that sense, LATAM’s growing sectors align perfectly with the asset classes GCC’s SWFs invest in,³² which are mainly related to the Technology Media and Telecommunication (TMT) (1), renewable energy (2), and consumer goods (3) sectors³³.

³¹ "Mexico's new furniture revolutionaries." BBC News, 2015.

³² "Sovereign Wealth Funds Report 2023." ICEX-Invest in Spain, IE Business School, 2023.

³³ "2024 Annual Report: SOIs Powering Through Crises." Global SWF, 2024.

1.1 Infrastructure Sector

With over \$26.1 billion USD invested in “green assets” by Sovereign Investors, the Gulf SWFs have been involved in half of these transactions, constituting \$13 billion USD of investments across asset

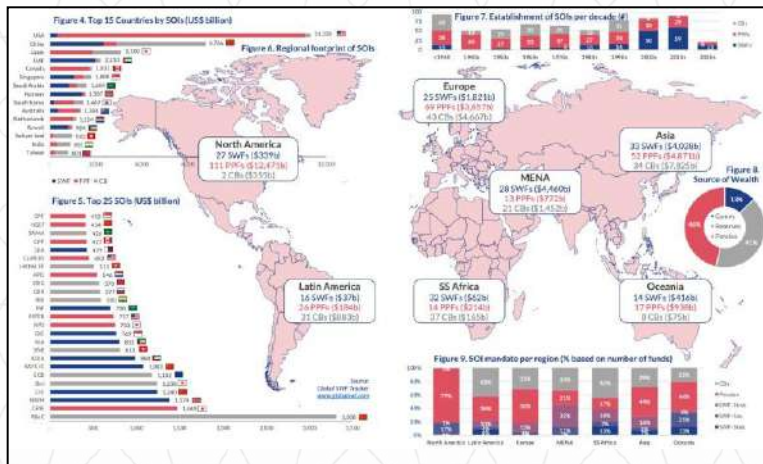


Figure 4: Worldwide SOIs Figures

classes,³⁴ including climate tech, renewable energy, basic resources, and infrastructure.

The Gulf’s active commitment stems from its willingness to diversify the sub-region’s overly oil-dependent economy (1) while providing a national vision to their population (2). In this context, Saudi Arabia’s

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ "Saudi Arabia Wealth Fund Taking Steps for Increased Transparency." Yahoo Finance, Yahoo, 2023.

³⁶ "Saudi PIF and Patria Investments Partner on \$12 Billion Infrastructure Project in Brazil." Gulf News, Al Nisr Publishing LLC, 2023.

SWF, the Public Investment Fund (PIF), deployed \$31.6 billion USD in 49 deals, which increased its deal volume by a third between 2022 and 2024.³⁵ Saudi Arabia’s SWF is effectively backing up the country’s Vision 2030 projects, diversifying its portfolio through a cross asset and market investment strategy. Indeed, in 2023, nearly a quarter of the PIF’s investment were infrastructure related. For example, the PIF formed a consortium with Patria Investments, a leading alternative asset management firm in Latin America, to invest in Brazilian infrastructure. The consortium raised \$1.2 billion USD³⁶ to finance the operation and expansion of a major brownfield toll road project in the Brazilian state of Parana. Hence, this project demonstrates that Gulf states’ SWFs can contribute their asset diversification strategies to the support of Latin America Infrastructure projects.

1.2 TMT (Technology, Media, and Telecommunication) Sector

Gulf SWFs have been increasingly involved in TMT investments globally, to diversify their portfolios and capture long-term growth opportunities by leveraging the exponential use of tech across various sectors, from chemicals to finance. For instance, in March 2023, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) partnered with US private equity giant Apollo to acquire US chemicals distributor Univar Solutions for \$8.1 billion USD,³⁷ demonstrating ADIA's interest in strategic acquisitions in high-growth sectors, including technology-related industries.³⁸ Equally, in May 2024, UAE-based Mubadala announced its

³⁷ "Univar Solutions to be Acquired by Apollo Funds for \$8.1 Billion." Univar Solutions, Univar Solutions Inc., 2023.

³⁸ Ibid

acquisition of a majority stake in New York-based asset manager Fortress Investment Group for approximately \$3 billion USD.³⁹

LATAM's technology sector is rapidly growing, with a focus on innovative areas such as fintech, edtech, and healthtech. LATAM's IT market size is meant to reach \$56.53 billion USD in 2024, with a CAGR 2024-2029 of 5.67% projecting a market volume of \$74.49 billion USD by 2029.⁴⁰ In 2023, it saw a surge in investment in technology startups, with over \$13 billion USD raised across the region. Chile's edtech market is thriving, with a projected CAGR of 15.9% in 2024,⁴¹ driven by increasing demand for online education solutions. More generally, LATAM's fintech ecosystem grew by 340% between 2017 and 2023, with 57% of the total market located in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia.⁴² LATAM's health-tech market is equally expanding rapidly, fueled by increasing healthcare expenditure and the adoption of digital health solutions. Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia are key markets witnessing substantial growth. For instance, The Digital Health market in Brazil is projecting a \$2,755.00 million USD revenue in 2024 and a promising annual growth rate (CAGR 2024-2028) of 8.20%. This growth trajectory is expected to propel the market volume to \$4.74 billion USD by 2028, reflecting the sector's non-neglectable opportunities for expansion. Among the various market segments, Digital Treatment & Care is poised to emerge as the largest market segment in Brazil, with a projected revenue value of \$1,370.00 million USD in 2024, underscoring the

³⁹ "Mubadala Capital's \$3 Billion Fortress Bid Clears Key US Regulatory Hurdle." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 10 May 2024.

⁴⁰ "IT Services in LATAM." Statista, Statista Inc., 2023.

⁴¹ "Online Education in Chile." Statista, Statista Inc., 2023.

⁴² "Study: Fintech Ecosystem in Latin America and the Caribbean Exceeds 3000 Startups." Inter-American Development Bank.

growing emphasis on telemedicine and remote patient monitoring within the Brazilian digital health landscape.⁴³

1.3 Renewable Energy Sector

The renewable energy sector equally presents tremendous potential as it received \$17.6 billion USD in renewable energy investment in 2021, with solar and wind projects dominating the sector. For instance, Brazil's wind power capacity has grown significantly, reaching over 20 gigawatts (GW) of installed capacity in 2021, making it one of the largest wind markets in Latin America. Mexico has also witnessed rapid expansion in solar energy capacity, with over 6 GW installed by the end of 2021, supported by declining costs and favorable regulatory frameworks. Chile has over 6.2 GW of installed renewable capacity as of 2021, driven by favorable government policies and abundant natural resources. For instance, the Chilean government pledged \$50 million USD to six green hydrogen projects involving key players in the green hydrogen market, such as GNL Quintero, CAP, and Air Liquide, which have ongoing green hydrogen initiatives in Chile.⁴⁴ Mainly willing to exit from their heavily oil-dependent economies, Gulf SWFs have been actively investing in renewable energy infrastructure globally, to diversify their portfolios and capitalize on the shift towards sustainable energy. In May 2024, PIF's wholly owned company Badeel and ACWA,^{45, 46} in which PIF has a 44% stake, signed a power purchase agreement (PPA) with the Saudi Power Procurement Company to develop three new major solar

⁴³ "Digital Health in Brazil." Statista, 2024.

⁴⁴ "How Chile Is Becoming a Leader in Renewable Energy." World Economic Forum, 2023.

⁴⁵ "PIF's Badeel and ACWA Power Invest in 3 New Solar Projects in Saudi Arabia." Sustainability Middle East News, 2023.

⁴⁶ "Saudi Arabia's Economic Vision 2030." Arab News, 2023.

projects in Saudi Arabia. This brings PIF's total investment in the solar industry to over \$6 billion USD, committing to develop 70% of the country's renewable energy by 2030. On the UAE's side, Mubadala has deployed more than \$20 billion USD in clean energy projects, including

solar energy initiatives, reflecting the country's potential to utilize solar power. Hence, renewable energy can constitute an area of synergies

where GCC's SWFs can leverage their already existing knowledge to further develop this market in LATAM.

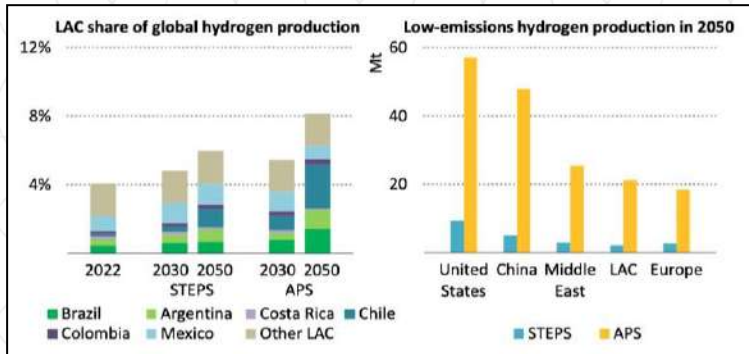


Figure 4

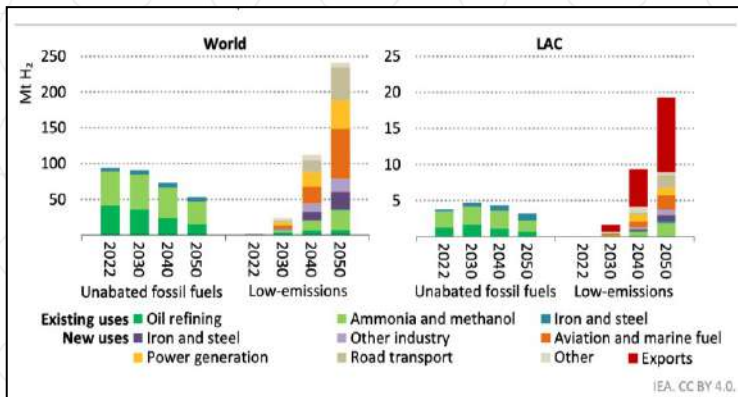


Figure 5: Hydrogen and Hydrogen-based fuels demand and exports by sector globally and in LAC in the Announced Pledges Scenario, 2022-2050

The International Energy Agency's (IEA) Latin American Energy Outlook notes that Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is one of the regions with the lowest energy investment as a percentage of GDP—3%, compared with around 5% in the Middle East and North Africa.⁴⁷ As a brief overview, since 2020, LAC governments have invested \$14 billion USD on clean energy developments, mainly in clean cooking appliances and low-carbon electricity generation. Moreover, post-2014 LAC investment in oil and gas supply has been sluggish, while investment in clean-source electricity has been rising as a percentage of total generation; as such, there is significant potential for clean energy market growth and investment in the region. These prospects, however, are limited by LAC's relatively high cost of capital due to elevated interest rates and high inflation, which make it challenging to attract private equity. This may explain why Gulf-based firms like the UAE's Masdar do not have a significant presence in Latin America, apart from in some Caribbean Island states.⁴⁸

Low-emissions hydrogen is a critical market for Latin America's energy transition and has the potential to generate Arab-Latino cooperation in commerce and knowledge sharing. The IEA predicts that LAC—specifically, Chile, Mexico, and Argentina—could “produce low-emissions hydrogen at a lower cost than most other parts of the world,” along with the Middle East and Africa.⁴⁹ The aforementioned Latin American countries could capitalize upon their renewables abundance to build expertise in hydrogen exports given the immense growth prospects

⁴⁷ “Latin America Energy Outlook.” International Energy Agency, 2023.

⁴⁸ “Our Projects.” Masdar.

⁴⁹ “Latin America Energy Outlook.” International Energy Agency, 2023.

between 2022–50 in the IEA’s Announced Pledges Scenario (APS). It is important to note, however, that the technology required for pure hydrogen export is not yet fully developed. Latin American countries might be better off specializing in the “export of products manufactured with low-emissions hydrogen” which do not require this new infrastructure.

Aware of the aforementioned constraints to export capacity, the IEA has identified a key area for Latin American exports in the growing low-emissions hydrogen market: Low-emissions iron production. Iron production is incredibly energy-intensive and costly, hence why LAC’s “vast renewable energy resources and high-quality iron ore deposits” position it well to become a key player in electrolytic iron production. This would benefit Middle Eastern Gulf states keen on minimizing input expenditures in their more competitive industries. It is also plausible that MENA states like Oman, which is likely to become the world’s sixth largest clean hydrogen exporter by 2030, can support LATAM hydrogen producers through knowledge and technology transfers.⁵⁰ Oman’s case is particularly relevant given its position as a hydrocarbon producer economy with critical incentives to diversify and decarbonize. In sum, LATAM and MENA states have the potential to synergize renewable energy sector knowledge to accelerate the global energy transition and spur economic growth.

While clean energy production has been the focus of the above analysis, it is equally important to consider the role government policy must play in shaping the competitive framework for private investment in renewables. In North Africa, for instance, renewable electricity generation grew over 40% between 2010-2020.⁵¹ However, the IEA

notes that 75% of the aforementioned development has been driven by Morocco due to its “policies targeting private investments such as competitive auctions among independent power producers (IPPs) and corporate power purchase agreements (PPAs).” To illustrate, bid prices decreased by 25% for IPP auctions for CSP in Morocco between 2012 and 2015. With all North African states targeting to increase their installed renewable generation capacity at least tenfold by 2030 or 2035, more aggressive policy action on competitive auction frameworks will be needed across the region. Intra-regional dialogue in North Africa must be had to share information regarding Morocco’s strategic auction design, including “transparency, confidence in auction schedules, and institutional clarity in auction management.”⁵² Nonetheless, inter-regional conversations between LATAM and MENA on auction methods for renewable power could potentially initiate even more mutually beneficial conversations given the greater range of potential system comparisons. Chile, for example, witnessed significant declines in mean winning bid prices—“from \$79.3/MWh in 2015 to \$32.5/MWh in 2017, placing its prices among the most competitive internationally”—due in part to an attractive auction system and associated conditions. Chile has clear renewable portfolio targets and publicly declared auction dates, generating “long-term confidence in the market.”⁵³ Competitive auction structuring is just one policy tool required to encourage the private investment in renewables needed to advance the energy transition. While intra-regional knowledge frameworks exist in both LATAM and MENA, cross-regional dialogue has the potential to accelerate best practice dissemination and, subsequently, implementation in this area. This might be achieved through hosting a MENA-LATAM summit on energy policy frameworks with relevant government, private sector, and international advisory group stakeholders.

⁵⁰ “Renewable Hydrogen from Oman.” International Energy Agency, 2023.

⁵¹ “Clean Energy Transitions in North Africa.” International Energy Agency, 2023.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ “Clean Energy Auctions in Latin America.” Inter-American Development Bank, pp. 42, 2023.

1.4 Consumer Goods Sector

LATAM's consumer goods sector offers attractive investment opportunities, with a large and growing middle-class driving demand for a wide range of products and services. Peru and Ecuador, in particular, present fertile ground for consumer-facing startups targeting the underserved market of 33 million people. Peru's retail sector has experienced steady growth, with retail sales reaching \$51.8 billion USD in 2021, driven by increasing consumer spending.⁵⁴ Ecuador's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) market is expanding, with a projected CAGR of 2.7% from 2021 to 2026, supported by rising disposable incomes and changing consumer preferences. Additionally, Mexico's e-commerce market is booming, with online retail sales reaching \$29.1 billion USD in 2021, driven by increasing internet penetration and smartphone adoption.

Gulf SWFs have historically invested in a diverse range of consumer goods companies globally, aiming to capture opportunities in emerging markets and consumer trends. For example, in India's consumer goods sector, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) made a significant investment in Indian eyewear company Lenskart. The deal, announced in September 2023, involved QIA acquiring a 10% stake in Lenskart for a total investment of \$500 million USD. Thus, in the same way that QIA has been able to invest in an emerging market such as India, GCC SWF can equally leverage the LATAM consumer market to diversify their assets investments, within LATAM.

⁵⁴ "Retail in Peru." Euromonitor International, 2024.

⁵⁵ "The Future of Food Aid: Looking at the Egypt Case." Chicago Policy Review, 2024.

⁵⁶ "Food Insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa." Middle East Council, 2023.

Therefore, the above data showcases how substantial and mutually beneficial SWF investments in LATAM could be, especially in the TMT, renewable energy, and consumer goods sectors.

Food Security

1.1 Agriculture Diversifying Markets and Suppliers

The MENA region is highly dependent on foreign states for food security as it imports around 50% of its food needs; this reality is partly due to its water scarcity and climatic conditions that limit agricultural production, necessitating imports for staple foods like rice, wheat, and dairy. For example, countries like Egypt⁵⁵ import 80% of their wheat from Russia and Ukraine.⁵⁶ The war exposed MENA's vulnerability to external shocks impacting global food and commodities markets, namely in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. This exposure's impact goes beyond North Africa, impacting the GCC, where Saudi Arabia and the UAE increased subsidies by 13% and 20%,⁵⁷ respectively, to manage rising food and fuel costs, ultimately exacerbates their already dire fiscal deficits. However, LATAM countries such as Brazil and Argentina are major exporters of soybeans and beef, with Brazil alone exporting over \$20 billion worth of agricultural products annually, including soybeans and poultry. Furthermore, LATAM's gross production value in the agriculture market is meant to reach \$357.30 billion USD in 2024, with a 6.03% CAGR between 2024 and 2029, projecting a gross production value of \$478.90 billion USD in 2029.⁵⁸ For example, Argentina aims to

⁵⁷ "Subsidy Reforms in the Middle East and North Africa." Vidican Auktor, Loewe, German Development Institute, 2021.

⁵⁸ "Gross Production Value in Agriculture in South America." Statista.

produce nearly 23.74 million metric tons of wheat by 2032, followed by an expected 6 million metric tons of wheat production in Brazil. For contrast, Ukraine⁵⁹ produces 5.2 million tons of wheat.⁶⁰ Therefore, strengthening the relations in terms of food security could help Arab countries mitigate their exposure to food stress by diversifying their wheat suppliers (1), while opening a new geographical market to LATAM wheat producers (2) such as Chile. This therefore illustrates the centrality of food security, making LATAM a substantial potential supplier for MENA countries.

1.2 Sharing Intelligence and Insights into Foodtech

Beyond fostering economic and food-related ties between LATAM and Arab states, commercial relations could spur inter-regional knowledge sharing and, subsequently, substantial international funding. This could be materialized by leveraging LATAM countries' expertise in the agricultural sector to help MENA countries such as Morocco, to further develop their local agricultural industry by bridging the gap between technology and agriculture. Brazil's adoption of Precision Agriculture (PA) technologies⁶¹ has boosted its productivity of crops by 206% and grain by 394% only by expanding its cultivated area by 61% in the last 40 years.⁶² Hence, its PA experience offers transferable knowledge to MENA for adopting sustainable farming practices.

⁵⁹ "How much grain is Ukraine exporting and how is it leaving the country?" BBC News, 2024.

⁶⁰ "Crop Production Volume of Wheat in Argentina." Statista, 2023.

⁶¹ "Precision Agriculture in Brazil: The Trajectory of 25 Years of Scientific Research." Cherubin, Agriculture, 2022.

⁶² Conab, Companhia Nacional do Abastecimento.

Indeed, as global population growth is expected to double food demand between 2005 and 2050,⁶³ agricultural productivity is more and more critical to hedge against food insecurity risks. This interest has been materialized by the increase of the funding for food-related programs. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) substantially increased its funding to the World Food Program by doubling its budget from 3.4 billion in 2021 to a historic \$7.2 billion in funding in 2023. Moreover, the Egyptian government received a \$500 million loan from the World Bank and signed a \$3 billion agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to minimize its exposure to food insecurity.⁶⁴ Once again, this illustrates the centrality of food security, making LATAM not only a substantial potential supplier for MENA countries, but also an example to follow in terms of food tech and agriculture.

Public Cooperation

1.1 Trade Agreements

GCC and LATAM countries can negotiate and ratify bilateral trade and investment agreements to strengthen their economic cooperation. One such agreement, the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), is a treaty designed to reduce tariff or non-tariff barriers between the signatory

⁶³ "Global Food Demand and the Sustainable Intensification of Agriculture." Tilman, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 2011.

⁶⁴ "US \$500 Million Project Will Help to Strengthen Egypt Food and Nutrition Security." World Bank, 28 June 2022.

parties. As of 1 May, 2024, 371 trade agreements were in force globally, but none existed between the GCC and LATAM countries.⁶⁵ As highlighted by the 2019 Inter-American Development Bank report, the implementation of PTAs could significantly increase bilateral trade between the GCC and LATAM countries, potentially increasing it by 60% from the current \$16.3 billion USD to \$26.1 billion USD.⁶⁶ In addition to PTAs, investment treaties such as bilateral investment treaties (BITs) play a crucial role in creating an enabling environment for foreign direct investment (FDI). The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the UAE and the Republic of Chile is an example of positive cooperation. On 25 April, 2024, in Santiago de Chile, Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade, and Alberto van Klaveren, Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed a joint statement announcing the successful conclusion of the CEPA negotiations and the final arrangements between the two parties. This agreement is a significant milestone in the UAE's CEPA programme, which aims to increase the value of the country's non-oil foreign trade to 4 trillion AED by 2031. Non-oil trade between the UAE and Chile amounted to \$305.1 million USD in 2023, representing a remarkable growth of 23.6% since 2019. It is also the first agreement that Chile signs with the Middle East.⁶⁷

For Mercosur and Arab countries, it is crucial to explore how businesses can jointly exploit the new economic opportunities that these agreements could create. The differences in levels of preparedness and development between these countries could highlight asymmetries, requiring a coordinated agenda between governments, businesses, and

⁶⁵ "Regional trade agreements." World Trade Organization, RTA Database, 2024.

⁶⁶ "New Horizons for Trade and Investment Strategies for the Gulf Countries and Latin America and the Caribbean." Inter-American Development Bank, 2019.

⁶⁷ "Chile and the United Arab Emirates finalize negotiations to sign an economic-trade agreement in 2024." América Economía, 2024.

academia to bridge these gaps. Mercosur and Arab countries are positioned in attractive markets with the potential to influence global trade rules. As cross-alliances and shifting economic coalitions proliferate, it becomes increasingly important to maintain the flexibility of partnerships while adhering to WTO rules. The fragmentation of global value chains, driven by technological advances and shrinking physical distances, requires new approaches. Urbanization, middle-class growth, and environmental awareness should be factored into trade strategies, with a focus on high-tech and green products.⁶⁸

1.2 Logistical and Diplomatic Ties

Logistics costs and business climate deficiencies in the GCC and LATAM regions are hampering trade and investment activities. These costs, including those related to documentary compliance, border enforcement, and inland transportation, pose significant barriers. Public-private collaboration can help reduce logistics costs and business climate uncertainties, thereby improving trade and investment opportunities. On average, customs clearance processes in both regions take 3-4 days, rising to 6-7 days in some extreme cases. In addition, high physical inspection rates, at 19.3% of shipments, contribute to longer customs processing times.⁶⁹ Reducing these inspections while maintaining quality controls could significantly boost trade. Another critical issue is the lack of direct air routes with adequate frequency between major cities in the two regions. Implementing trade facilitation measures such as Single Window (SW) and Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programmes can

⁶⁸ "Latin America and Caribbean Trade Relations with Arab Countries." Rosales, The Arab World and Latin America : Economic and Political Relations in the Twenty-First Century, 2016.

⁶⁹ "New Horizons for Trade and Investment Strategies for the Gulf Countries and Latin America and the Caribbean." Inter-American Development Bank, 2019.

provide substantial cost savings. Diplomatic efforts, such as the establishment of embassies or consulates, can further facilitate bilateral trade. The establishment of these diplomatic missions can increase trade by 20%, from \$16.3 billion USD to \$19.6 billion USD.⁷⁰ However, the largest LATAM economies such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico do not have full diplomatic representation in all GCC countries. Chile, Bolivia and Colombia for example do not have embassies or consulates in countries as important as Saudi Arabia or Qatar.

1.3 Alternative Economic Institutions

Many Arab countries (e.g., Egypt and Lebanon) and Latin American countries (e.g., Mexico and Argentina) share the particularity of having been confronted with the negative effects of neoliberal policies and debt traps. Like many countries in the Global South, they are looking for an alternative economic model. In the MENA region, non-oil-exporting Arab countries are particularly affected by debt problems and will be faced with the obligation to undertake austerity cures with potentially disastrous social effects, unless they consider alternative sources of financing to the neoliberal model. One promising direction is to explore collaborations with the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) to create new economic frameworks that depart from traditional approaches. The creation of an Arab-Hispanic Inter-Regional Bank (AHIRB), backed by funds from the largest financial reserves in both regions, such as Brazil and Saudi Arabia, and those of international institutions such as the NDB and the Inter-American Development Bank, could help finance joint development and infrastructure projects. Such an initiative could be based on the principle that austerity is not always the best response to economic crises, particularly for emerging countries. On the contrary, by stimulating consumption through targeted investment, these countries

could boost their incomes, stimulate economic growth, close budget deficits, and repay debt more efficiently.

The current global economic landscape calls for systemic reform. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) faces challenges such as increasing global demand for liquid assets, record levels of sovereign debt and the emergence of new bilateral official creditors.⁷¹ An Emerging Markets Fund (EMF), managed by the IMF but separate from its balance sheet, could act as an international lender of last resort, providing liquidity to emerging markets in the event of financial market disruption. This approach, inspired by innovations in the European Union, could help mitigate the negative effects of financial contagion. The AHIRB we are proposing should follow this new world trend, emphasizing proactive investment strategies and flexible financial mechanisms. There are many development issues of common interest on which Arab and LATAM countries could cooperate using AHIRB funds. They include funding health infrastructure, improving the suitability of the education system to the job market, facilitating school-to-work transitions and international scholarships, combating climate change, boosting industrial production through technological cooperation, promoting entrepreneurship and managing immigration and brain drain.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ "Urgent: The IMF Must Reform." Latin American Committee on Macroeconomic and Financial Issues, CGD notes, 2023.

Human & Cultural Links Commission

Studying the cultural and human links between Latin America, the Arab world, and the Iberian Peninsula is both fascinating and highly complex. Fascinating due to the significant potential for collaboration, which remains largely untapped. Complex because the documentation on this topic is scarce, presenting a myriad of potential avenues for exploration. We hope to have successfully provided an exploratory overview of this partnership's potential, drawing on the historical connections among the three regions, existing cultural initiatives, and the future prospects for engagement.

Commission Chair: Mokhtar Lasri

Commission Vice-Chair: Jeanne Gounot

Authors: Valeria Martinez Leshukova, Julie Menon, Talia Goux

I. Region Overview

Traces of Arab History Found in Spain

Al-Andalus was conceived in 711 AD after the defeat of the Visigoths and ended in 1492. Muslim groups from the East migrated to the Iberian peninsula alongside Amazigh groups from the Maghreb.⁷² In 756 AD, the Emirate of Córdoba was formed with Abd al-Rahman I as its first emir.⁷³ Although the borders shifted throughout time, the Muslim presence over seven centuries left an indisputable mark on the cultural and social traditions of the Spanish. From more concrete reminders seen in the infrastructure, to the more subtle mentions through literature, languages and culinary traditions, much of Al-Andalus still echoes in present day Spain.

The definitions of culture and heritage are much disputed amongst social scientists, as defining social norms and practices can become quite theoretical. To take a wider definition, this report will define heritage as "the legacy of people, culture, and environments inherited from the past."⁷⁴ This definition encompasses both tangible physical artifacts and intangible elements, such as customs and beliefs.

Starting with the tangible, one need only consider the architectural makeup of Spanish buildings, infrastructure, and design. Many of the biggest monuments that stand in the South of Spain, such as the

⁷² "Moorish Spain." Fletcher, University of California Press, 2006.

⁷³ "The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In." Kennedy, 2007.



Muqarnas or Mocarabes and Islamic architecture

Alhambra in Granada, the Great Mosque in Cordoba (today called the Cordoba Cathedral), were built as places of worship. The Alhambra is decorated with "muqarnas,"⁷⁵ known on the Iberian Peninsula as "mocarabe." This intricate architectural design is a hallmark of many Muslim works and is similarly found in various parts of Southern Spain. The artistic style of Mudéjar shines through much of architecture in the South, a style that can be aligned with many Muslim artistic patterns. Regarding language, it is estimated that around 3000-4000 words in Spanish have direct roots in Arabic; one thousand of those have a directly similar basis and the other 3000 can be understood as derivations from Arabic words. As was written by Lotfi Sayahi from the University at Albany, "Spanish has been in contact with Arabic since the early years of its development and for longer than any other non-Iberian linguistic

⁷⁴ "A Dictionary of Human Geography." Castree, Kitchen, Rogers, Oxford, 2013.

⁷⁵ "Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World." Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016.

variety.”⁷⁶ To take an example, the word "Magrit" is a word derived from the Arabic “magra,” meaning a flow of water—a reference to the Manzanares River that runs through the city of Madrid.⁷⁷ Many of the cities that were given their names during the time period of Al-Andalus, particularly in the South of Spain have retained their names, such as Córdoba, dating back to the first Emirate. There are many shared phonetic sounds that can also be identified as common ground between Spanish and Arabic. Both languages rely on the rolling of the “r” sound as well as having a guttural “kh” sound for words such as “jarra” in Spanish and “khalifa” in Arabic.⁷⁸ Even the Spanish national anthem “Marcha Real” is taken directly from the melody “Nuba Al Istih.lāl” composed by the Andalusian polymath Ibn Bajja.

The influence of Al-Andalus on contemporary Spanish gastronomy has not been the subject of extensive literature. In 2004, Manuela Marín published an article titled “From Al-Andalus to Spain: Arab traces in Spanish cooking,” where she explains that “the main impact of Andalusian cuisine on Spanish cooking was exerted in the realm of sweet.”⁷⁹ It is challenging to determine and generalize the full impact of cultural exchange within the history of food. Nevertheless, it remains a significant aspect of cultural value. To advance knowledge in this area, one might refer to a 2017 article by Vaquerizo,⁸⁰ highlighting the importance of pluridisciplinary studies for a more comprehensive understanding of the past. Vaquerizo's article identifies the necessity of

⁷⁶ "Spanish in Contact with Arabic." Sayahi, 2011.

⁷⁷ "Celebrating Spain's links to the Arab world at Casa Arabe." Talass, Arab News, 2021.

⁷⁸ "Learn About the Arabic Influence on the Spanish Language and the Similarities of Spanish and Arabic." Osoblivaia, PoliLingua, 2023.

⁷⁹ "From Al-Andalus to Spain: Arab Traces In Spanish Cooking." Marín, 2004.

incorporating written sources and archaeological discoveries to piece together a precise picture of the history of food in Al-Andalus.

The Hispanic Heritage in the Arab World

The Hispanic heritage in the Arab World is especially present and studied in North Africa, namely in Morocco, due to its geographical proximity with the Iberian Peninsula as well as an intertwined history. The presence of both Spanish and Portuguese languages in the Maghreb dates back to the XVth and XVIth centuries following the last phases of the *Reconquista* in the Iberian Peninsula, after which the Catholic monarchs decided to conduct a series of military campaigns in North Africa. While Portugal conquered Ceuta (1415), Tangiers (1471), Larache (1473) and Agadir (1505), among other cities in the Moroccan coasts, the Spanish empire settled in Melilla in 1497 before capturing other enclaves such as Mers el-Kébir and Oran, even reaching Tripoli in the far east of the Maghreb.⁸¹

The Iberian heritage dating back to this period reflects through many architectural sites located in the coastal regions of present-day Morocco and Algeria. The Portuguese had also notably built a great number of coastal fortifications which can still be seen in cities such as El-Jadida, Safi, or Essaouira.⁸² The spread of the Spanish language in Morocco shows how important the Hispanic heritage is in the region. During the

⁸⁰ "La Alimentación En Al-Andalus A Partir Del Registro Arqueo Faunístico. Estado de la Cuestión." Vaquerizo Gil, Universidad de Córdoba, 2017.

⁸¹ "A Forgotten Empire: The Spanish-North African Borderlands." Liang, Fuchs, Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, 2011.

⁸² "L'Héritage Portugais Au Maroc." Carabelli, 2018.

colonial period in the XXth century, and due to the low population in the former Spanish Sahara, the colonial authorities were unable to separate Spanish settlers from Sahrawi locals in schools, leading to the language being widely spoken in the region even after the departure of the Spaniards in 1975.⁸³ The Spanish colonization in northern Morocco has also had similar effects on the use of Spanish in the region and in the rest of the country: There are 11 Spanish educational institutions across the country, employing 350 teachers and instructing around 5000 students.⁸⁴ Professor Lotfi Sayahi emphasizes that “In northern Morocco, Spanish continues to be present both as a border language and as a popular foreign language supported by economic investment by Spanish companies and relatively fluid population movement.”⁸⁵ Furthermore, the *LACM Program* (Programa de Enseñanza de Lengua Árabe y Cultura Marroquí—Arabic Language and Moroccan Culture Teaching Program) was first implemented in the 1985–1986 academic year. Schools from roughly 25 provinces (out of the 52 provinces of the Spanish national territory) participate in this program, offering Arabic Language and Moroccan Culture classes either during regular school hours or as a formal after-school enrichment program.⁸⁶ The colonial architecture of certain towns in northern Morocco, such as Tetuan, further bears witness to the rich Hispanic heritage in the Maghreb.⁸⁷ Although Hispanic heritage is more apparent in North Africa, particularly in Morocco, for historic and cultural reasons, Spain has stepped up its cultural initiatives to forge closer ties with the Arab World since the 2000s. Casa Árabe is a Spanish public institution created in 2006 with the goals of “promoting economic relations, spreading knowledge,

⁸³ “España ante el mundo: Spain’s colonial language policies in North Africa.” Lotfi, 2015.

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ “The Politics of Arabic Language Education: Moroccan Immigrant Children’s Socialization into Ethnic and Religious Identities.” García Sánchez, 2010.

channeling intercultural dialogue and analyzing and mediating in the socio-political changes which are affecting Arab and Muslim countries.”⁸⁸ Casa Árabe is an important tool for Spain to promote cultural actions and common heritage with Arabic-speaking countries. The institution has notably signed a partnership in 2021 with the state-owned book publisher Sharjah Book Authority from the UAE to establish a “chart action plan for stronger promotion of Arab culture in Spain and wider Europe.”⁸⁹ Such initiatives have yet to take fruition in Latin American countries, despite their hosting of a considerable Arab diaspora.

⁸⁷ “L’Ensanche de Tétouan, bijou architectural de l’ancien style espagnol.” Aujourd’hui le Maroc, 2011

⁸⁸ “About us.” Casa Árabe.

⁸⁹ “Sharjah Book Authority and Casa Árabe chart action plan for stronger promotion of Arab culture in Spain and wider Europe.” Zawya, 2021.

A History of Arab Immigration to Latin America

Latin America is home to millions of people of Arab descent.⁹⁰ The first traces of Arab presence in the Americas date back to the late XVth century with the first Spanish colonial expeditions in the region. Historian Karoline Cook suggests that, despite being forbidden by the Spanish Catholic crown from crossing the Atlantic, many Moorish-Moriscos, including both Iberian and North African Arabic-speaking Muslims, managed to reach the “New World.”⁹¹ However, the majority of the contemporary Arab diaspora in Latin America comes from the migration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fleeing the Ottoman Empire’s religious persecution. Most of them emigrated from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine to Latin America, after being turned away in the United States, and the overwhelming majority of them belonged to the Christian communities (mostly Maronite and Eastern Orthodox) of their respective countries.⁹² As Historian Akram Khater highlighted, it is estimated that almost a third of the inhabitants of present-day Lebanon left for the Americas by 1914, illustrating the extent of this migration wave.⁹³ Many of the Arab migrants became retailers, particularly in textiles and ready-to-wear clothing, and gradually achieved

⁹⁰ “Los árabes en América Latina. Historia de una emigración.” Akmir, Contribuciones árabes a las identidades latinoamericanas, Casa Árabe, 2009.

⁹¹ “Muslims, Moriscos, and Arabic-Speaking Migrants in the New World.” Henrique Mota, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

⁹² “Arabs and the Americas: A Multilingual and Multigenerational Legacy.” Hassan, Literature and Arts of the Americas, 2019.

⁹³ “Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon.” Khater, 2001.

a degree of financial success.⁹⁴ Syrians and Lebanese emigrated mainly to Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, while Palestinians tended to settle in Chile and the countries of Central America, where many of their descendants still live. This immigration almost came to a complete halt after the Second World War, before picking up again slightly in the 1990s.⁹⁵ Although it is difficult to establish the exact number of Arabs or their descendants in Latin America due to the variety of sources, it is now estimated that there are between 12 and 15 million Latin Americans of Arab origin.⁹⁶ Each Latin American country has its own history of migration, but many immigrant trajectories overlap. This is often a common thread that shows how some Arab migrants moved from trade, particularly in textiles, to other fields, such as the arts and literature. The distribution of the Arab diaspora and the number of people of Arab descent among Latin American countries highlights the numerical significance of this population in the region. It is estimated that the number of people of Lebanese origin living in Brazil outnumbers the current population of the Republic of Lebanon.⁹⁷

At least 11 countries in the region have a population of Arab descent exceeding 100,000 people. These statistics are detailed in the table on the following page:

⁹⁴ “Diasporas arabes en Amérique latine ?” Roussillon, 2007.

⁹⁵ “L’immigration syrienne et libanaise en Argentine 1890-1950.” Bestene, 1998.

⁹⁶ “La diaspora arabe en Amérique Latine : Histoire d’une intégration heureuse.” Khader, ICAM.

⁹⁷ “Global Arab World Migrations and Diasporas.” Cainkhar, Arab Studies Institute, 2013.

Country	Arab Descent Population	% of Total	Notable Personality of Arab Descent
Brazil	5.7 to 12 million	3.5 to 6%	Milton Hatoum (1952): Writer, Lebanese descent
Argentina	≈ 4.5 million	≈ 10%	Carlos Menem (1930-2021): Former President, Syrian descent
Venezuela	≈ 1.6 million	≈ 5%	Mariam Habach (1996): Model, Miss Venezuela 2015, Syrian descent
Colombia	≈ 1.5 million	≈ 3%	Shakira (1977): Singer and songwriter
Mexico	≈ 1.5 million	≈ 1%	Salma Hayek (1966): Actress, Lebanese descent
Chile	≈ 800,000	≈ 4%	Arturo Salah (1949): Former footballer, Palestinian descent
Honduras	≈ 250,000	≈ 2.5%	Fredy Nassar (1956): Businessman, Palestinian descent
Ecuador	≈ 250,000	≈ 1.5%	Soledad Diab (1973): National Assembly member, Lebanese descent
Paraguay	≈ 200,000	≈ 3%	Oscar Safuán (1943-2007): Musician, Lebanese descent

Country	Arab Descent Population	% of Total	Notable Personality of Arab Descent
El Salvador	≈ 100,000	≈ 1.5%	Nayib Bukele (1981): Current President, Palestinian descent

Although the overwhelming majority of Arab communities in Latin America find their origins in the Levant, each of them has its own history and cultural specificities, whether related to the country of origin or the host country. For instance, many Venezuelan Arabs have deep-rooted ties with Syria due to the fact that the Arab community in the country are primarily of Syrian descent, whereas other origins (Lebanese, Palestinian, Jordanian, etc.) are predominant in other countries.

Arab Success Stories in Latin America

Arab immigration to Latin America has been associated with many examples of some "Arab success stories," particularly in the political sphere. The descendants of Arab immigrants have succeeded in carving out a place for themselves on the political scene in many countries. Their significant breakthrough in the economy has opened the door to politics.

Among them is Carlos Menem, former Argentine president from 1989 to 1999, who came from a Syrian family. In Ecuador, Abdala Bucaram, whose family was of Lebanese origin and had emigrated in the 1920s, became the country's head of state between 1996 and 1997. Jamil Mahuad Witt, also of Lebanese origin, was Mayor of Quito for 6 years, before becoming President of the Republic from 1998 to 2000. In El Salvador, Elias Antonio Saca, a businessman and journalist of Palestinian origin, became Head of State in 2004, a position he held until 2009. Carlos Flores Facussé, of Palestinian origin, is also a presidential candidate in Honduras, while Julio César Turbay in Colombia comes from a family of Lebanese emigrant retailers. In addition to politics, immigrants of Arab origin have also made a name for themselves in other fields, such as literature. Examples include Raduan Nassar and Milton

Hatoum, both Brazilian writers of Lebanese origin. Although these success stories represent only specific examples, the fact remains that minorities of Arab origin in Latin America have succeeded in creating a place for themselves in society, particularly through commerce. The first generations set up their own shops, which gradually grew in importance. For example, "in São Paulo, there were no fewer than 320 'Arab shops' in 1907," and in 1916, it is estimated that "there were 3,701 shops run by Argentine Arabs."⁹⁸ These small shops were soon transformed into department stores, and small industrial workshops into large companies, especially in the textile sector. Although inter-state relations between Latin America and the Arab world are driven by economic and political imperatives rather than by the presence of 12 to 15 million Latin Americans of Arab origin, this diaspora has nonetheless significantly influenced the dynamics of "new forms of South-South partnership," particularly since the first South America-Arab World Summit (ASPA) held in Brasília in 2005.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ "La diaspora arabe en Amérique Latine : Histoire d'une intégration heureuse", Khader, ICAM.

⁹⁹ Ibid



Figure 6: Origins of Arab Communities in the Americas

¹⁰⁰ "Temas islámicos: América árabe, África, revista de tropas coloniales." Gil Benumeya, Spanish National Library, 1927.

¹⁰¹ "Discours, identité et relations interrégionales : la « construction culturelle » du rapprochement entre le monde arabe et l'Amérique latine." Vagni, Cahiers des Amériques Latines, 2015.

II. Current Situation

Rodolfo Gil Benumeya, a historian, writer and journalist specializing in Arabic culture and language, wrote in 1927 that "the Arab and Hispano-American worlds are made up of many sister nations."¹⁰⁰ According to him, the European (especially Spanish), Eastern Arab, and Hispano-American worlds are strongly linked "because of the singular experience of Al-Andalus and the Arab immigrant communities in America."¹⁰¹

Influences In the Artistic and Literary Worlds

Arab immigration has also influenced literature, with the *Mahyar movement* in South America, which grew out of Syrian-Lebanese immigration to Brazil, the United States, and Argentina. According to Rosa Isabel Martinez Lillo, from the University of Madrid, "Arabs in the New World, in America, feel identified with the reality of Al-Andalus, a link, as a shared experience, between Bilad el-Sham, Greater Syria, and the American reality, embodied in the Brazilian city of Sao Paulo."¹⁰² Arab influences permeated many corners of the Hispanic literary world. Another notable example that could be pointed out is Miguel de Cervantes' "Don Quixote", which is widely regarded as a canonical piece of Spanish literature. This book was framed by the author as a fictional story translated from a recovered Arabic manuscript. Some authors have

¹⁰² "El mahyar del ayer al hoy: dimensión literaria y cultural." Rosa Isabel, Contribuciones árabes a las identidades latinoamericanas, Casa Árabe, 2009.

called for research into a "possible (in)direct influence of the Arabic “Maqâmât” literary genre on Don Quixote.”¹⁰³ A more recent example is given by Juan Goytisolo, a notable 21st-century writer known for his novels. In 1992, he published a short essay titled “The Andalusian Legacy,” in which he remarked: “The great creations of the Umayyads, Almoravids, Almohedas and Nasrids—the result of transfers and migratory currents between the Peninsula and the current kingdom of Morocco—as well as their Maghrebi, South Saharan, and Mudejar branches, must be seen today as a paradigm of an ecumenical vision that includes the notions of difference, anomaly, mixture and fertilization.”¹⁰⁴

From an artistic and architectural point of view, the *Mudéjar style*,¹⁰⁵ developed in Al-Andalus between the 13th and 16th centuries, is a symbol of Arab influence in Spain, blending Islamic and Christian architectural styles, and resulting from the coexistence of Muslim and Christian cultures. This post-Moorish style of decoration in Christian Iberia was later exported to Latin America, as in Coro, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Venezuela. Other examples include the monastery of San Francisco in Lima, Peru, and the Iglesia del Espíritu Santo in Havana, Cuba. Within Spain, the traces of this style can be found most noticeably in Zaragoza. The Territorio Mudéjar¹⁰⁶ is an association of city councils that aims to preserve and create awareness about the Mudéjar heritage that is found in 85% of the territory of the province.¹⁰⁷ The cultural exchange lives within the architectural integrity of many Spanish cities. The Mezquita de Córdoba, located in the South of Spain in Al-

¹⁰³ "Why You Can't Believe the Arabian Historian Cide Hamete Benengeli: Islam and the Arabian Cultural Heritage in Don Quixote." Hermes, University of Virginia, 2014.

¹⁰⁴ “Momentos Cumbres de Las Literaturas Hispánicas: Introducción al Análisis Literario.” Rodríguez, Prentice Hall, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ “Artistic Dialogue in the Middle Ages: Islamic Art.” Mudéjar Art, Casa Árabe, 2020.

¹⁰⁶ “Territorio Mudéjar – Gestión, estudio y difusión Mudéjar Patrimonio Mundial”.

Andalus, proves to be one of the oldest standing buildings and a reminder of Al-Andalus and the coexistence that existed between religions.

An Overview of Current Cooperation

The political, economic and cultural links between Latin America and the Arab world are based on two essential principles: The claim to a common past between Arabs and Latin Americans (1) and the affirmation of opportunities to create a common future (2).¹⁰⁸ This Hispano-Arab heritage is the subject of numerous initiatives aimed at promoting it. These include the "Meeting for Arab-Ibero-American Intercultural Dialogue" project, set up in Tunis in 2002 by the Arab League's Organisation for Education, Science and Culture (Alesco). The "Alliance of Civilisations of the United Nations" project, promoted by Spain and Turkey, was set up in 2007 to pursue the same dynamic.¹⁰⁹ The government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, President of the Spanish government from 2004 to 2011, has emphasized Spain's role as a cultural and political link between Arab and Latin American countries. As a result, three Spanish institutions specializing in cultural diplomacy have begun to work actively in this field: Casa Árabe, the Foundation of Three Cultures, and the Toledo International Centre for Peace.¹¹⁰ Other initiatives have also been launched, such as the "Andalusia: History and Civilization Initiative,” by the United Arab Emirates at the end of June

¹⁰⁷ "The Mudéjar style of Zaragoza has been a World Heritage Site for 20 years." Go Aragon, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Op.cit.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Ibid

2023, during the Arab-American National Heritage Month in Latin America. Organized by the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Centre, the Abu Dhabi Library, and the Abu Dhabi Municipal Archives and in partnership with Spain, this initiative aims to foster dialogue and cultural exchange by celebrating the legacy of Arab civilization in Al-Andalus, offering a variety of cultural and artistic activities.¹¹¹ These projects are in line with the development of research on Al-Andalus. Indeed, from the mid-1970s onwards, interest in the culture of Al-Andalus increased significantly. Following the death of General Franco, some autonomous regions have stressed the importance of reconnecting with their distinct past, and in the case of Andalusia, with its Arab-Islamic roots. The *El Legado Andalusi* (The Andalusian Heritage) project, supported by the regional government, has set itself the task of publicizing and disseminating the richness of this cultural heritage. This is a cultural itinerary that retraces part of the history of Spain and Moorish Andalusia over several centuries, highlighting the variety of the historical landscape and intangible heritage of Al-Andalus.¹¹²

Overcoming the Limits

Despite these links between the Hispanic and Arab worlds, there are still a number of difficulties to be overcome. The Arab diaspora suffers from a degree of discrimination, particularly in Latin America, where they are still sometimes called "Turcos" (Turks), or, more rarely, "Moros," from the time of their immigration when they fled Ottoman persecution.¹¹³ This theme of discrimination is often addressed by researchers studying the Arab diaspora in Latin America.

¹¹¹ "Andalusia: History and Civilization initiative." UAE, 2024.

¹¹² "Rapport d'expertise de l'Itinéraire culturel El Legado Andalusi." Brianso, Conseil de l'Europe, 2024.

Political ideologies that foster anti-Arab sentiments in Latin America often assert a clash between their own civilization and Islamic values, mirroring rhetoric found in European and American far-right discourse. They gain traction through significant electoral support and potent populist rhetoric that capitalizes on fears of immigration and terrorism. This has led to an increase in racist violence, including hate crimes against Arab individuals and communities, such as physical assaults and vandalism targeting businesses and places of worship. Discriminatory practices against Arab migrants pose particular challenges for diasporas in South America, where revisionist narratives frequently downplay or erase the contributions of Arab culture to global civilization and depict the Arab world solely as a source of conflict. These ideas are influenced by anti-Muslim and anti-Arab figures from the United States, such as Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, who are known for their Islamophobic writings and advocacy. Their ideologies, aligned with far-right politics, emphasize nativism and cultural superiority.

It should also be noted that there is currently a debate on Christian identity in Spain, as opposed to Islamic identity. While some, like Edward Said, view Al-Andalus as an essential part of Spain's historical construction as a nation, others see Islam as a foreign element of invaders, against which the Spanish identity was forged.¹¹⁴ After Spain's participation in the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, then-President José María Aznar declared at Georgetown University in September 2004: "The problem Spain has with Al Qaeda and Islamic terrorism did not begin with the Iraq Crisis. In fact, it has nothing to do with government decisions. You must go back no less than 1,300 years, to the early 8th century, when a Spain recently invaded by the Moors refused to become

¹¹³ Op.cit.

¹¹⁴ "Al-Andalus et l'Espagne : La Trajectoire d'Un Débat." García Arenal, Institut de Recherche sur le Maghreb Contemporain, 2007.

just another piece in the Islamic world and began a long battle to recover its identity.”¹¹⁵ While Aznar's vision aligns with Samuel Huntington's “clash of civilizations” theory, assuming a radical opposition between an exclusively Catholic Spanish nation and a foreign Islam, other scholars offer a more nuanced view. They emphasize the porous boundaries between the Christian world and Al-Andalus and note their significant human, cultural, and scientific exchanges, as well as occasional military alliances, situating Al-Andalus as an integral part of Spain’s identity rather than an adversarial entity.¹¹⁶ Some isolated historians, such as Ignacio Olagüe and González Ferrín, go even further by challenging the notion of an Arab conquest, attributing the emergence of Al-Andalus to internal dynamics within the Visigothic kingdoms driven by the popularity of Arianism, and framing Al-Andalus as a distinctly Iberian evolution.¹¹⁷

From the point of view of inter-state relations between Latin American and Arab countries, there are also differences in priorities, preventing optimum cooperation. The Latin American countries “expect above all economic benefits,” while the Arab countries “give priority to political declarations.”¹¹⁸ It should also be added that trade relations remain fairly limited for the time being, since “trade between them hardly exceeds 3% of their respective totals.”¹¹⁹ The ASPA faces a number of limitations: “Due to the internal disparities and divergent interests of the Arab League and UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), these two players have not managed to implement a unified action plan and obtain the unanimous support of their members.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ “Reconquista.” Retopea, 2004.

¹¹⁶ Op.cit.

¹¹⁷ “Les Arabes n'ont jamais envahi l'Espagne.” Olague, Flammarion, 1969.

III. Cooperation Avenues

Historical Approach and Production of Knowledge

An interdisciplinary approach to the study of Al-Andalus, combining linguistic, historical, and archaeological perspectives would enable a better understanding of the relation between Hispanic countries and the Arab world. More importantly, intercultural dialogue and cooperation between specialists from both regions would foster a richer comprehension of their intricate ties. Knowledge of Andalusian specificities (its populations, its economy, its territory, etc.) has been increasingly nourished by archaeology in Spain. As scholars are interested in placing the Iberian Peninsula in a broader regional and historical framework, cooperation with Arab countries by Hispanic countries is necessary to achieve a more nuanced historical narrative. Archaeology should be thoughtfully considered in the perspective of promoting the knowledge of Arab-Hispanic heritage. Multiple initiatives for that very purpose already exist and must be mentioned.

Cooperating with UNESCO on their “Arab Latinos!” project could be an important step towards increased production of knowledge. Hispanic countries could invest in a digital library of articles on the imprint of Arabic influence on Latin America. We can also consider

¹¹⁸ “L’Amérique latine et le Monde Arabe, des relations anciennes et en plein essor mais au potentiel encore largement inexploité.” Barraud, IHEDN, 2020.

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ “Amérique du Sud-Pays Arabes : Bilan d’une décennie de relations politiques.” Mounjid, 2015.

promoting digital archives of the Arab diaspora in Latin America, where attention could be brought on their integration within Latin American societies and their involvement in building bridges between cultures.¹²¹ Insisting on the positive features of cultural diversity could strengthen the links between the two regions. It is also very important to emphasize Spain's role as a producer of knowledge for the Hispanic and Arab world, but also as a bridge linking the two regions. The arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and settlers indirectly brought many Andalusian agricultural, architectural, and gastronomic techniques to Latin American countries. The potential for academic research in this field is immense, as the subject is to date far less documented than the Arab heritage in Spanish culture.

Education

The Summit of ASPA gathers members of the League of Arab States and of the Union of South American Nations. In its 2005 Declaration, ASPA asserted the stakes of cultural exchange programmes, for professors and for students, as well as the benefits of cooperation between cultural promoters. Moreover, it supported numerous initiatives such as the publication of books translated from Arabic into Portuguese. Additionally, a partnership has been established with UNESCO, Qatari institutions (including the National Library and Qatar Foundation International (QFI)), and Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters to develop an Arabic Language and Culture Program for South American students. This program encompasses spelling, literacy, grammar, and Arabic calligraphy, serving as a bridge between Latin American communities and Arab culture. Such initiatives are crucial for helping the Arab diaspora in South America preserve aspects of Arab culture, such as language, while fostering a dual cultural identity. They also enhance the potential for long-term collaborative ties between the

¹²¹ "Arab Latinos! Initiative." UNESCO, 216th Executive Council, 2023.

new Hispanic and Arab generations, reflecting a strong commitment to deepening intraregional cultural dialogue.

Education is the basis for training new generations and arousing their interest in the benefits of effective cooperation between Hispanic and Arab countries, of a bi-regional mechanism. In this perspective, the Ministries of Education of Latin American and Arab countries could set up exchange programs starting from middle school to allow in-depth cultural exchanges among students from a very young age. The establishment of optional courses in Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic in Latin American, Spanish and Arab school programs would also drive cultural discovery. Finally, language exchanges and summer school programs could be offered as part of a correspondence between cultural centers in Latin American and Arab countries.

Diplomacy and Economy

Overall, the involvement in cultural and academic initiatives creates a strong basis for secure diplomatic ties. This could lead to collaborative efforts on ripe issues. Building on the legacy of Al-Andalus, Hispanic countries could shape their foreign policy with an emphasis on cultural diplomacy. The "El Legado Andalusi"¹²² initiative is an institution that aims to raise public awareness of this period of history and its implications for the modern world by organizing exhibitions, conferences, concerts, educational workshops and programs of research on topics related to Al-Andalus. The center has also created a documentation center and a library specializing in Andalusian studies, providing resources for researchers and students interested in this period. This initiative can be considered as an example of common

¹²² Fundación Pública Andaluza: El legado andalusí.

cultural diplomatic projects that can be supported by Latin American and Arab countries, with diasporas playing a key role.

Renewing links between the Arab diasporas in Latin America and their home regions represents also a significant opportunity for fostering economic, cultural ties. The Arab diaspora could play a crucial role as potential economic ambassadors for Latin American nations in the Arab world, and vice-versa. Thanks to their understanding of both cultures, they can bridge cultural gaps and facilitate smoother business negotiations and partnerships. This is fundamental to developing bottom-up cooperation. Today, Spain's economic policy in Arab countries is already nourished by their common Andalusian heritage. Arab diasporas' involvement would be an engine of economic growth for Latin American and Arab countries and help promote beneficial South-South collaboration.

IV. Recommendations

Cultural cooperation between the Arabic-speaking and Spanish-speaking worlds is a key element of this report. Strengthening it is thus a sine qua non condition for greater synergy between the two regions. This report's recommendations, based on the information and analysis provided above, advocate for enhanced educational and cultural collaboration and highlight the essential role of states and diplomatic services in this effort.

¹²³ "Nouvel accord de partenariat entre l'Université Nationale Autonome du Mexique (UNAM) et l'Université Euromed de Fès." Université Euro Méditerranéenne de Fès, 2022.

Education and Research

Education must be a priority if countries of both regions are keen to strengthen their ties. Establishing educational cooperation could be extremely beneficial on two levels: strengthening the cultural links between both cultures (1) and encouraging further research on common history and heritage (2). The academic sector should lead these efforts. Existing exchange partnerships, primarily between Spanish universities and institutions in countries like Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, already demonstrate this potential. There is also a positive dynamic of emerging academic partnerships between Latin America and the MENA region, as exemplified by the 2022 cross-cultural research and dialogue partnership signed by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Euromed University of Fès.¹²³ Ministries of Higher Education should enhance this momentum by creating state-level agreements to encourage broader university engagement in exchange programs. Such collaborations should be pursued regionally, rather than bilaterally, to maximize effectiveness. These initiatives could also be a key topic for discussion at a future ASPA edition.

Furthermore, this report emphasizes the need to encourage further research on the common history between the Arab and Hispanic worlds. Whilst research into the Moorish heritage in the Iberian Peninsula and the Hispanic heritage in Morocco are very rich and the focus of a great deal of scientific effort, the same cannot be said for the Arab world and Latin America. It would be highly beneficial to organize academic conferences focused on researching Andalusian heritage in Latin America. As noted in Section III, the Spanish and Portuguese unintentionally transmitted elements of Arab-Muslim civilization to the

American continent due to the legacy of Al-Andalus. Fields as diverse as agriculture, gastronomy, architecture, as well as language expressions and popular beliefs, may have been significantly influenced by Al-Andalus, often without our full awareness. A comprehensive research initiative should be launched with the support of governments from the Arab, Iberian, and Latin American regions. This would aim to enrich and develop documentation in this area, which remains underexplored. It is crucial to recognize that fostering cooperation between Arab and Latin American countries requires a deeper understanding of their mutual heritage and that revealing a shared past is often the starting point of a common future.

Linguistic Cooperation

Mutual linguistic understanding offers benefits across various domains, including academic mobility, tourism, knowledge sharing, and business investment. However, there is an imbalance in linguistic promotion between the two regions. On one hand, the promotion of the Spanish language in the Arab world appears to be an advanced process, mainly through the efforts of Spain. Numerous Spanish schools and Cervantes Institutes exist in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. To address growing demand, there is a need to further expand Spanish language promotion by opening additional centers in countries such as the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia.

On the other hand, the promotion of Arabic does not appear to be a priority for Arab countries, unlike the Spanish efforts through the Instituto Cervantes. No institution from Arab countries is dedicated to promoting the Arabic language and its teaching in non-Arabic-speaking countries. However, cultural cooperation between the two regions would

¹²⁴ “¡Viva los Árabes!: Underreported stories of the Arabs of the Americas.” Pelayo, Atlantic Council, 2021.

greatly benefit from increased familiarity with Arabic in the Spanish-speaking world. This would help people of Arab descent reconnect with their roots, as studies show their knowledge of Arabic is generally limited.¹²⁴ Therefore, it is necessary for Arab countries to mutualise their efforts into encouraging the promotion of Arabic language in the region, notably through institutions and centers dedicated to this mission.

The Arab Diaspora in Latin America

The presence of a large Arab diaspora in Latin American countries can play a role in the strengthening of cultural relations between both regions. Arab states, in particular those that have been most affected by waves of emigration to Latin America such as Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan, can work to establish cultural connection with their communities as an important dimension of their foreign policy. A comparable dynamic can be observed in how Maghreb countries maintain bridging ties with their diasporas present in Western European countries such as France, Spain, the Netherlands, and Belgium. The Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, African Cooperation and Moroccan Expatriates explicitly mentions “strengthening solidarity and promoting social action for Moroccans around the world” and “preserving and consolidating Moroccan identity”¹²⁵ as being among its main missions. The Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad, on the other hand, explicit that “The Ministry works to strengthen the ties between the Algerian community living abroad with Algeria and organizing its contribution to achieving

¹²⁵ “À Propos du Ministère.” Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, de la Coopération Africaine et des Marocains Résidant à l’Étranger.

national and international objectives.”¹²⁶ Many initiatives have been taken by those countries to enhance integration of their diaspora to their national community. Morocco has notably created the Hassan II Foundation for Moroccan Expatriates, which aims to assist Moroccan nationals and people of Moroccan descent living abroad, as well as organizing cultural events promoting Moroccan identity to their host countries.¹²⁷ Arab states could take this model as an inspiration for their eventual policies towards Latin Americans of Arab descent. It could be relevant, for instance, to create a foundation or support the establishment of NGOs and associations for the Arab diaspora in the region. These efforts can also take the form of cultural events such as exhibitions, round tables with leading figures from the Arab and Hispanic worlds, and Arabic language programs for diaspora communities.

Sports Cooperation

The historic announcement of the attribution to the organization of the centenary edition of the World Cup in 2030 by Morocco, Spain and Portugal, with opening games expected to take place in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, bears witness of the strong ability of countries from Arab and Hispanic countries to sports cooperation. Countries can seize this opportunity to extend collaboration beyond football and encourage the establishment of a permanent dialogue between all relevant federations. An ambitious initiative would be to submit a joint bid to host the Olympic Games, a competition that symbolizes peace and unity among nations, made possible by the 2020 reform of its rules. In this context, the Olympic flame ceremony could carry powerful symbolism, with a route traversing numerous Arab countries, passing

through the Iberian Peninsula, and culminating in Latin America, representing the shared history among the organizer nations.

Establishing an International Organisation

Achieving this level of cooperation across a wide range of areas would require greater coordination between all the states involved. With this in mind, it is essential to relaunch the ASPAs with the medium- to long-term aim of founding an international cultural organization that brings together all the Arab, Iberian, and Latin American countries. This organization could be called the Union for the Promotion of Arab-Latin Heritage (UPALH). The proposed structure of the UPALH would feature a three-headed rotating presidency, representing each of the regions concerned (Latin America, the Arab world, and the Iberian Peninsula), symbolizing their alliance and commitment to a common destiny. The UPALH could also be divided into a general assembly and specialized commissions, working on issues such as research, preservation of common heritage, academic cooperation, languages, and sports. This framework would enable the concerned states to coordinate their efforts within a multilateral framework and present concrete proposals for dynamic cultural cooperation. The UPALH could also lay the foundation for a cultural inter-regional diplomacy, facilitating broader collaboration with other international organizations, such as UNESCO.

¹²⁶ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et de la Communauté Nationale à l'Étranger de l'Algérie.

¹²⁷ Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger, Opération Marhaba.

Diplomacy & Multilateralism Commission

The analysis of diplomatic relations between Latin America and the Arab world should be viewed within the broader context of South-South cooperation and the emergence of a multipolar world. Rather than framing it as a "Global South versus the West" scenario, we aim to offer a more nuanced perspective that considers both the aspirations of emerging countries and the need to avoid a return to block-based conflicts. This report presents an alternative to "clash of civilizations" theories and seeks to highlight the substantial benefits of a collaborative approach.

Commission Chair: Ines Jabri

Commission Vice-Chair: Martina de Pablo

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I. Region Overview

Middle East & North Africa

The notion of Arab unity has long been a subject of debate within the Arab world. While the aspiration for a political union of Arab states as a single entity has faded, a sense of belonging to a shared community of destiny remains, particularly among civil societies in the MENA region. Similar to the Pan-American Union envisioned by Simón Bolívar, pan-Arab ambitions emerged following independence. Arab nationalism posited that division was the reason that enabled European colonization and that only a united Arab front could effectively challenge new colonial powers. The setbacks, including the failure of the United Arab Republic of 1958, Arab defeats against Israel, Sadat's policy shifts, Iran's rise as a regional hegemonic threat to Gulf countries' interests, and the Abraham Accords of 2020, have further weakened Arab consensus on the Palestinian cause and ended aspirations for political union.¹²⁸ Arab nationalism, which was initially regional and pan-Arab, has gradually moved to a local level. Today, despite occasional rhetoric reminiscent of pan-Arabism, Arab leaders tend to emphasize their distinct national identities and historical legacies—such as Pharaonic Egypt, Phoenician Lebanon, or ancient Carthage in Tunisia—over regional unity. Yet, a sense of shared Arab cultural identity persists through civil societies,

¹²⁸ "Foreign Policies of Arab States." Korany, Hillaal Dessouki, 2008.

¹²⁹ "Everyday Arab Identity: The Daily Reproduction of the Arab World." Philipps, Routledge, 2012.

¹³⁰ "Foreign Policy in the Middle East." Hinnebusch, 2014.

media, and the arts, reflecting a region caught between cultural belonging and geopolitical divisions.¹²⁹

Foreign policy decisions among Arab states are closely tied to internal dynamics.¹³⁰ States navigate between external and internal threats (a concept known as Omni-Balancing) by aligning with stronger states for protection ("Bandwagoning"), joining larger alliances to counter regional threats ("Balancing"), or maintaining a neutral stance to leverage their position. Two primary approaches emerge: those maintaining an anti-Israel, pan-Arab stance (e.g., Algeria, Syria) and those adopting a more flexible approach due to shifting regional and internal priorities (e.g., Bahrain, UAE).¹³¹

Recent trends highlight a shift in this balance. The historical protective role of the United States in the Middle East, particularly regarding Saudi Arabia through the Quincy agreements, has been questioned following their withdrawal from Syria and Iraq. President Biden's criticism of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has further fueled doubts about Western reliability. This context may partially explain the region's pursuit of new partnerships for greater flexibility, as evidenced by the lack of sanctions against Russia despite U.S. pressure, the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement mediated by China, and the BRICS expansion to include Egypt and the UAE (with Saudi Arabia's initial acceptance later declined).¹³² Given this backdrop, Latin America presents a promising opportunity for the Arab world to diversify its foreign relations and enhance its flexibility.

¹³¹ "Explaining Third World Alignment." David, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

¹³² "US-MENA Relations in the Russia-Ukraine War Era." Katz, ISPI, 2023.

Latin America

The contradictions regarding Latin American unity mirror those seen in the Arab world. Although there is a genuine aspiration to present a unified front, this often conflicts with the realities of national interests and regional rivalries that dominate on the ground. While the figure of Simón Bolívar continues to inspire much of the region's political imagination, it has to be said that his project for a Pan-American union is at least as unlikely as Gamal Abd-Nasser's pan-Arab dream.

Geopolitical divisions between Latin American countries are deeply politically charged, often conditioned by the ideological orientations of their governments. For example, attitudes towards anti-American countries like Cuba and Venezuela vary significantly. Democratic left-wing and center-left movements tend to include these countries in discussions and oppose the marginalization efforts led by the USA. Conversely, right-wing political groups align more closely with American positions. For example, in 2019, when Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó proclaimed himself President with US support, he was recognized by right-wing governments in the region, such as President Bolsonaro's Brazil, President Iván Duque's Colombia, and President Martín Vizcarra's Peru, exacerbating the tensions with left-wing governments. This lack of unity is also apparent in some major international conferences, such as the Copenhagen Conference on the Environment in 2009 and Rio+20 in 2012, where Latin American countries have failed to present a unified stance.¹³³ Although Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico are members of the G20, they do not systematically coordinate their positions before meetings. Similarly, Brazil and Mexico are both seeking a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, but independently and without a unified Latin American strategy. Some scholars, such as Abraham Lowenthal, argue that the idea of a unified

¹³³ "L'émergence de l'Amérique latine dans un monde multipolaire." Couffignal, 2013.

"Latin America" may be outdated,¹³⁴ suggesting instead an analysis of the region based on countries' divergent trajectories. However, there are widely shared consensus that tend to unite Latin America in international bodies, including the region's commitment to being denuclearized and peaceful, its full engagement in globalization, and its strong support for multilateralism.

Despite their divisions, Latin American countries exhibit greater regional unity compared to the MENA region. The Arab League often struggles to resolve regional issues, functioning more as a forum for registering disagreements rather than achieving convergence. In contrast, Latin American countries' acceptance of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has facilitated significant progress in resolving conflicts, particularly border disputes. Notable examples include the ICJ's 2013 verdict on the Peruvian-Chilean maritime border and the 2018 Nicaragua-Costa Rica border dispute, which resolved issues without resorting to war. Furthermore, regional integration in Latin America is evidenced by numerous structures like CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), MERCOSUR (Common Market of the South), the Bolivarian Alliance, SICA (Central American Integration System), the Andean Community of Nations, and the Pacific Alliance. The challenge now lies not in the number of initiatives but in their capacity to unify the region into a coherent diplomatic front.

While the political position of a country's leader can significantly influence its diplomatic stance, sometimes resulting in radical shifts, the general trend in Latin America is towards an aspiration to diversify partners. In recent years, Latin America has been strongly shaken by various factors: financial crises linked to the fall in commodity prices since 2014, deepening social fractures, the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Russo-Ukrainian war affecting the agri-food chain.

¹³⁴ "Latin America In A New World." Lowenthal, Westview Press, 1994.

These challenges have led to numerous social and political movements seeking change, whether in a constitutional or social rupture, with repercussions in countries such as Chile, El Salvador, and Ecuador in 2019 and 2020.¹³⁵ Much like the MENA region, more and more Latin American countries are expressing a desire for international reform and advocate a redefined notion of “liberation.”¹³⁶ This shift is notably reflected in their refusal to impose sanctions on Russia and their critical stance towards the West following Israel's war on Gaza. Strategically, the region is aiming to diversify its partnerships, seeking to engage not only with the United States and Europe but also with the BRICS members.¹³⁷ China, in particular, has emerged as an important partner, as well as the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), led by former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff since March 2023.

Given that similar aspirations for change and diversification of partnerships are gaining momentum simultaneously in both regions, Arab-Latin American cooperation seems both logical and necessary.

Spain

Spain's foreign policy has undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Emerging from the Franco dictatorship, Spain focused from 1980 to 2000 on modernization and integration into Western structures. In 1982, Spain joined NATO, marking its entry into Western security frameworks by committing to collective defense. On January 1, 1986, Spain became a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), which later became the European Union (EU). These moves

¹³⁵ "Amérique latine : La tentation du Sud global." Drouhaud, 2023.

¹³⁶ Ibid

¹³⁷ Ibid

were crucial for Spain's normalization on the international scene and laid the foundations for its influence in world affairs.

The José María Aznar era saw a significant change in Spain's international ambitions. Aznar's foreign policy was marked by a strong desire to see Spain play a leading global role by committing to an ultra-Atlanticist and pro-US policy. Spain gained confidence on the international scene, allowing itself more aggressive positions, strengthened by the American support. This era has been described by the specialist Benoît Pellistrand as *the vertigo of Spanish power*.¹³⁸ This was seen in particular during the Persil Island crisis that opposed Spain to Morocco in 2002 when the Americans supported the sending of submarines and ground troops to put pressure on the Moroccan neighbor. Aznar also distinguished himself by his support for and participation in the invasion of Iraq by the United States in 2003. On the other hand, the two mandates of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero were defined by a different approach. President Zapatero presented the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative at the United Nations, aimed at countering Samuel Huntington's “clash of civilizations” thesis and positioning Spain as a leader among the countries critical of US foreign policy under President George W. Bush. This initiative was based on Spain's historical legacy, Al-Andalus, as a model of peaceful coexistence between the three main Mediterranean monotheistic religions. As explained by many scholars, such as Cristina Civantos, Moorish Spain insinuated itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century into contemporary political agendas, promoting *Convivencia* at a time when Islamic and Western worlds were locked in a complex and multifaceted confrontation with religious, cultural and political dimensions.”¹³⁹ President Zapatero's foreign policy exemplifies this principle on the

¹³⁸ "L'Espagne et la Méditerranée : les défis d'une politique étrangère pour une démocratie." Pellistrand, 2019.

¹³⁹ "The Afterlife of Al-Andalus: Muslim Iberia in Contemporary Arab and Hispanic Narratives." Civantos, SUNY, 2017.

ground. Rather than countering extremism with military force and violence, he proposes eradicating it through economic prosperity, cultural exchange, and scientific cooperation. He has worked to improve relations with the Arab world, particularly Morocco, which had deteriorated under his predecessor Aznar. President Zapatero also sought to lead the North-South dialogue, as evidenced by his strong involvement in Latin America, even extending diplomatic efforts towards the Cuban and Venezuelan governments despite their strained relations with the United States. However, the economic crisis of 2008 reduced these ambitions and President Zapatero has had to concentrate his efforts on internal rather than geopolitical issues during his second term.

Between 2011 and 2018, Spain's influence on the international scene declined compared to that enjoyed under leaders such as Felipe González, José María Aznar, and Zapatero. Spain's voice in European affairs became less pronounced, as Rajoy's government focused primarily on the country's internal economic recovery after the very serious crisis of 2008.¹⁴⁰ Since 2018, under the leadership of Pedro Sánchez, Spain has sought to reassert its role in European and global discussions, reviving Zapatero's legacy. It seems that Sanchez's ambition for Spain is to embody a more humanist alternative to the Atlanticist Western orthodoxy, as demonstrated during the Aquarius crises when he offered the port of Valencia to migrants or, more recently, with the recognition of Palestine in 2024.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

II. Current Situation

A Historical Summary

Arab-Latin American relations have deep historical roots dating back to the 19th century thanks to the immigration of Lebanese and Syrian communities to South America. In the mid-20th century, the two regions began to formalize their interactions. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) played a particularly important role in strengthening these relations, with many Latin American countries supporting Arab positions, particularly regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, within this multilateral forum. During the Cold War, Arab revolutionary regimes provided substantial support to their Latin American counterparts in their struggle against US-backed governments, particularly in Central America. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Arab-Latin American relations experienced a temporary decline. However, the rise of left-wing governments in Latin America has led to renewed interest in these relations.¹⁴¹ In recent years, some Latin American leaders have turned to the Middle East, where they have found a platform to express their values and visions for a new world order. This shift became particularly evident after the Iraq invasion, which triggered a major rethinking of U.S. foreign policy. Leaders such as Presidents Ortega and Chávez have shown a strong alignment with anti-American positions, including supporting Palestine, opposing the negative portrayal of Iran, and resisting military interventions in Syria. These stances were shared by many Arab countries, including Algeria, Syria, and pre-Gaddafi Libya. Even moderate countries, such as Brazil, Mexico, Egypt, and Qatar,

¹⁴¹ "Rethinking Arab-Latin American Relations: A Theoretical Framework." Al Atrash, 2007.

exhibit a convergence of views on reforming the world order. Diplomatic similarities are evident, such as respecting nations' sovereignty, criticizing neoliberal orthodoxy and debt traps, advocating for the right to development, rejecting Western double standards, and integrating more emerging countries into the international decision-making system, such as within the International Monetary Fund or among the permanent members of the UN Security Council.¹⁴²

Spain has a long and varied history of relations with the Arab world. Although representing an era of religious tolerance, the period of Al-Andalus was also marked by episodes of extremism and conflicts between Muslims and the Christian kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. The end of the Reconquista in 1492 imbued the Catholic Monarchs with a profound religious zeal, culminating in the Inquisition's purges and the expulsion of Muslims and Jews. Catholic Monarchs, particularly Charles V and Philip II, had positioned themselves as "champions of Christianity," fighting Moorish and Turkish Muslims, opposing the Anglican schism, and spreading Catholicism in Latin America. The Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 ended the country's prominent role on the European and global stage, leading to political instability and the Carlist civil wars between liberals and absolutists.

During a period when Spain was severely weakened economically and increasingly exhausted by civil wars and colonial expeditions, anti-Muslim rhetoric was still employed by the Spanish army in Morocco to restore its image. For instance, in 1884, one of the first cities renamed by the Spanish military in the former Spanish Sahara was "Villa Cisneros"

¹⁴² "The Role of the Middle East in the New International Relations of Latin America." Baeza, 2013.

¹⁴³ "Les Espagnols au Maroc, 1859-1975 De la guerre d'Afrique à l'indépendance du Sahara Espagnol." Crespo, 2016.

¹⁴⁴ "La época del Liberalismo." Fontana, Barcelona Editorial, 2007.

(now Dakhla), in honor of Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, a Grand Inquisitor under Isabella the Catholic, reflecting their identification with the Christian-Muslim wars.¹⁴³ During the Spanish-Moroccan war of 1860, the Catholic Church encouraged Spanish soldiers "not to return without destroying Islam, destroying mosques and nailing the cross to all fortresses."¹⁴⁴ In this way, conservatives secured easy victories against a Morocco mired in debt, reinforcing their image as defenders of Christianity while diverting attention from Spain's domestic economic difficulties.

However, the rise of leftist and anarchist movements in Spain during the 19th century shifted the focus of Spanish conservatives to new enemies. While Muslims were once considered adversaries, they now became "allies" in the fight against "red atheism."¹⁴⁵ Moroccan soldiers, or "regulares", enlisted in the Spanish army of Africa, were quickly exploited by general Franco's propaganda at the start of his uprising, portrayed as a union of faith against communism. After World War II, Franco's Spain sought to establish closer ties with Arab countries in order to overcome its international isolation.¹⁴⁶ Historian Mustapha El Quadéry explains that Franco's diplomacy towards the Arab world was based on the memory of Al-Andalus, on which the dictator sought to develop a capital of sympathy.¹⁴⁷ His radical opposition to communism and Western liberalism, his promotion of a Spanish Arabness, his criticism of Israel, as well as his defense of the faith against atheists, were instruments he used to promote his propaganda among Arabs. The end of the dictatorship and Spain's renewed alignment with the Western world distanced it somewhat from the Arab world, leading to very tense

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

¹⁴⁶ "In pursuit of votes and economic treaties: Francoist Spain and the Arab world, 1945–56." Rein, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ "Nationalisme du mépris de soi." Mustapha El Qadéry, 2020.

relations during the Aznar period. The arrival of President Zapatero, and today of President Sánchez, has revitalized the possibility of an “Al-Andalus Diplomacy,” this time in a democratic context, aiming to give Spanish foreign policy a genuine Arab and Southern dimension, drawing strength from its diverse past.

The Creation of ASPA and President Lula’s Leadership

The geopolitical movement at the turn of the 21st century allowed for the beginning of international cooperation between the Latin American and Arab Worlds. This was mainly seen through the entities and specific committees of the United Nations, expanded through the Group of 77, UNCTAD and the form for South-South Cooperation for Development (SSC).¹⁴⁸

However, Celso Amorim, writing in “Reflections on Lula’s South-South Cooperation,” commented that prior to Lula’s presidency, the two region’s relations had been “good and cordial though somewhat distant.”¹⁴⁹ The bi-regional cooperation promised in the 1995 Bandung Conference was thus not fulfilled until later, in the last 10 to 15 years, where there has been a rediscovery of the cultural bonds that hold these global regions together.¹⁵⁰ This cooperation cultivated in the 2005 Arab-

Latin Summit, held in Brazil and proposed by President Lula, with the principal objective of unifying Arab states with the small cooperation that had begun for enlarging these relations with more Latin American countries.¹⁵¹ Lula’s tenure marks a commitment to Brazilian-Arab multilateral cooperation, setting a precedent which expanded to incorporate larger portions of both regional groups. When Brazilian President Lula visited Syria, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Libya in 2003, he was the first Brazilian state leader to officially visit the region since Emperor Dom Pedro II (1825-1891). Following the 2003 visit, plans were made in Marrakech the following year for an inaugural diplomatic initiative uniting the two regions, which would emerge as the “first exercise in multilateral diplomacy between Latin American and Arab countries.”¹⁵²

In May 2005 Lula’s proposal took effect, as representatives from Latin American and Arab states joined in Brasilia “with the purpose of strengthening bi-regional relations, increasing cooperation, and establishing a partnership to pursue development, justice, and international peace.”¹⁵³ The resulting Brasilia Declaration outlines diplomatic ambitions for the bi-regional partnership, which include recognising that terror and violence in the Middle East “put regional and world peace at risk.”¹⁵⁴ Notably, the Brasilia Declaration launched the Summit for South American-Arab Countries (ASPA), which subsequently met in Doha (2009), Lima (2012), and Riyadh (2015). The Summit for South American-Arab Countries members consist of 22

¹⁴⁸ “The Arab World and Latin America : Economic and Political Relations in the Twenty-First Century.” Saddy, Tauris, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ “Brazil and the Middle East: Reflections on Lula’s South–South Cooperation.” Amorim, Cairo Review, 2011.

¹⁵⁰ “Asia-Africa speaks from Bandung.” Asian-African Conference, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, 1955.

¹⁵¹ “Rethinking Arab-Latin American Relations: A Theoretical Framework.” Al Atrash, 2007.

¹⁵² “The Arab World and Latin America: Long-Standing Migration, an Expanding South-South Partnership.” Khader, Blesa, IEMed, 2020.

¹⁵³ “Middle East Situation/Palestine Question - Brasilia Declaration - South American and Arab Countries Summit - Question of Palestine.” United Nations, 2005.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid

members of the League of Arab States and 12 countries of South America, and aims to strengthen cooperation and dialogue between the regions through strengthening cultural, economic, and diplomatic ties.¹⁵⁵

Simultaneously to the creation of ASPA, various bi-regional diplomatic initiatives were launched, including the granting of observer status to several Latin American states in the Arab League, and Arab states in the Organisation of American States (OAS). Fittingly, Brazil was the first nation to be granted observer status in the Arab League in 2003, with Venezuela following suit in 2006. The regional collaboration has continued since its early-2000s inception, through the continuation of summits and speeches from observer nations in regional instruments. Most recently, Brazil addressed the Arab League in February 2024 on the topic of furthering UNRWA support for Palestinians in the West Bank: “We are reclaiming the universalist vocation of our foreign policy. We aim to revive and deepen our partnerships with the Global South, with whom we share numerous perspectives, values, challenges, and expectations.”¹⁵⁶ The recent address indicates that the regional cooperation catalyzed by ASPA continues to manifest in solidarity and diplomatic presence between the two regions.

Multilateral Initiatives

The current diplomatic environment, in which non-traditional diplomatic actors such as non-governmental organizations, multinational

¹⁵⁵ “The summit of South America-Arab states: Historical contexts of south-south solidarity and exchange.” Farah, Costa-Santos, 2014.

¹⁵⁶ “President Lula’s Speech during the Extraordinary Session of the Arab League, in Cairo (Egypt).” Planalto, 2024.

¹⁵⁷ “Mapping the Relationship between International Sport and Diplomacy.” Murray, Allen Pigman, *Sport in Society*, 2014.

corporations and intergovernmental organizations thrive has set the ideal conditions for two multilateral models of cooperation to develop. First, in recent years, both Global South and Global North governments have put sports diplomacy at the center of their agenda.¹⁵⁷ This practice consists in using “the unique power of sport to bring people, nations, and communities closer together” to advance foreign policy goals.¹⁵⁸ In that respect, the organization of the 2022 World Cup was a way for Qatar to advance its economic diversification goal by investing massively in sports infrastructures. The fact that the 2030 FIFA World Cup will be hosted by Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay is also highly interesting.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the shared organization of this high-grossing event under a unilateral—a multilateral cooperation initiative with a carefully chosen number of members—format is not only innovative by its form but also by its repercussions for its organizing states’ cooperation potential. Another model of multilateral cooperation developed in the current diplomatic environment is large-scale cultural events. Most of them being carried out outside of the UNESCO framework, these projects have had different levels of success across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this context, the creation of “International Jazz Day” by UNESCO in 2011 symbolized a renewal in the way such events were conceived and perfectly embodied the integration of non-state actors in the previously state-led international order. Indeed, this initiative associates UNESCO, a state-led UN organization with Herbie Hancock, a renowned jazz musician who had become a goodwill ambassador. The importance of Arab and Latin American states in this context started to grow in 2017 when the sixth

¹⁵⁸ “Sports Diplomacy: History, Theory, and Practice.” Murray, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2020.

¹⁵⁹ “FIFA Council Takes Key Decisions on FIFA World Cup™ Editions in 2030 and 2034,” FIFA, 2023.

edition of this event was held in the Cuban capital Havana. Not only was this initiative unseen before and significant in US-Cuba-Latin America relations, it also allowed artists from Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Lebanon and Tunisia to perform together during the All-Star Global Concert closing this event. The twelfth edition, held in 2023, went even further and featured concerts from Beirut, Rio de Janeiro and Casablanca. Finally, this year's edition of International Jazz Day was held in the Moroccan city of Tangier and invited musicians from Chile, Brazil and Lebanon. This initiative is strategically significant for relations between Latin America and the Arab countries as it allows them to both connect in more informal settings and augment their soft power by showcasing their own music genres on a global scene, as was the case in Morocco in 2024 with Gnawa and the fusion style Gnawa-jazz.

Cooperation Limits

1.1 The Reticence of the US

The first ASPA summit was greeted with considerable reluctance by the United States and Israel. The United States feared the emergence of an Arab-Latin American bloc that might oppose its interests, while Israel saw the summit as an attempt by Arab countries to rally Latin America to the Palestinian cause. It is worth noting that the participation of Arab leaders at the summit was low: of the twenty-two Arab states, only six sent their leaders, none of whom were key figures in the Arab world. Many observers believe that this low participation was due to pressure from the American administration. It is assumed that the American

¹⁶⁰ "Rethinking Arab-Latin American Relations: A Theoretical Framework." Al Atrash, 2007.

¹⁶¹ "Latin American Relations with the Middle East: Foreign Policy in Times of Crisis." Kurti, Brun, Middle East Monitor, 2024.

request to participate in the summit as an observer was rejected by several Latin American countries, including the host country, Brazil, suggesting that the US could follow the proceedings on television.¹⁶⁰

Although Brazil's mediation efforts are innovative, they also often encounter resistance from major powers that refuse to accept new actors in areas they consider their own. The United States, in particular, is reluctant to open up international security issues to emerging countries. Without US support, Brazil, which does not have a permanent seat on the Security Council, struggles to make its diplomatic initiatives in the Middle East more effective.¹⁶¹ Thus, Latin American and Arab nations' dependence on the US can still serve as a limitation to biregional diplomatic cooperation. Writing for the Middle East Research and Information Project, Paulo Farah recalls for example Qatar's diplomatic efforts to sponsor educational programs, including Arabic language classes, in Brazil and Argentina. The Qatari government called upon North American institutions to supervise the initiative, ultimately invoking discomfort in Brazilian and Argentinian officials as the representatives did not speak Portuguese and were deemed culturally unequipped to work on the project.¹⁶² This event underlined the influence the US continues to exert on South-South cooperation.¹⁶³

1.2 Superficial, Pragmatic Links

In many cases, Latin American relations with the Arab world are driven more by economic pragmatism than by sincere and deep diplomatic ties. Diplomatic concessions to Arab causes are often seen as

¹⁶² "South-South Solidarity and the Summit of South American-Arab Countries." Farah, MERIP, 2018.

¹⁶³ "The Role of the Middle East in the New International Relations of Latin America." Baeza, 2013.

necessary compromises to deepen economic partnerships.¹⁶⁴ This pragmatic approach has historical precedents, particularly during the military dictatorships of Brazil and Chile. The lack of sincerity in diplomatic engagements can partly explain the inconsistency of some Latin American countries towards their Arab partners. Indeed, the frequent shifts between left-wing and right-wing governments in Latin America, each altering or reversing the previous administration's policies towards the Arab world, have somewhat undermined the reliability of Latin American diplomacy.

Spain's recent pro-Moroccan diplomatic stance could raise questions of this nature. One wonders whether this change of direction is not simply a pragmatic maneuver aimed at boosting its economic interests in Morocco, Spain having become the country's leading trading partner, ahead of France, shortly after recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the most credible option for Western Sahara. Similarly, the joint announcement of Spain and Morocco's bid to host the Football World Cup may be seen as an impressive gesture, but needs to be followed up by a comprehensive cooperation plan, putting the Moroccan-Spanish friendship on a long-term footing. The question of the status of the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and of the “Plazas de Soberanía,” for example, needs to be definitively settled in a mutually acceptable way, in order to truly inaugurate a new and lasting era of cooperation between the two countries and avoid “boom and bust” relations.

In addition, the organization of the 2030 World Cup across three different continents generated environmental concerns from different influential actors including the lobby group Football Supporters Europe, which described FIFA's decision as “disregard[ing] the environment.”¹⁶⁵ The limits of cultural initiatives such as the International Jazz Day lie in the intrinsic characteristics of such projects. Even though they are of symbolic importance for each country involved, they lack profound

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

impulses for change. Indeed, without other means of diplomacy, these “track 1.5”—involving both state and non-state actors—initiatives are not efficient enough. This is partly due to the double nature of these projects, as initiatives in the field of culture and/or mostly involving civil society often carry less diplomatic weight than economy or defense centered, state-led forums. On the other hand, decision-making has never been the purpose of projects like the International Jazz Day. Their interest partly lies in the way they allow to maintain links between States even when their relations are deeply troubled, as was the case with the US and Cuba.

1.3 Lack of Arab Unity

It is virtually always Latin America, and at its head Brazil, that is at the forefront of promoting closer ties with the Arab world. This raises the question of why Arab countries are not playing a leading role in building a strong multilateral partnership with Latin America. Internal divisions within the MENA region, which hamper their collective action, could be a major factor. The Arab League, conceived as a unifying organization capable of speaking with a single voice to its partners, is struggling to achieve this unity and to settle disputes between member countries. Moreover, the persistent rivalry between Morocco and Algeria is exacerbating fragmentation not only in the Maghreb but throughout the Arab world, while tensions between Syria and the Gulf States are further complicating the political landscape. Unlike in Latin America, where Brazil's leadership is clear, no Arab country—or even organization—seems capable of driving positive trends in the region and asserting itself as a possible representative of Arab interests on the international stage.

¹⁶⁵ “Europe, Africa and South America All to Host Games in 2030 FIFA World Cup,” *Le Monde*, 2023.

These internal rivalries and lack of leadership within the Arab world not only prevent the region from presenting a coherent front, but also limit its ability to engage in sustainable partnerships with external regions such as Latin America. Consequently, while Latin American countries have asserted their desire to build a lasting relationship, the division of the Arab world currently poses obstacles to the emergence of a willingness and capacity for truly reciprocal cooperation.

III. Recommendations

As outlined in Section II, the inaugural ASPA summit in 2005 was largely a product of Brazilian diplomatic efforts. Yet, by 2025, a decade will have passed since the last ASPA summit, reflecting a lack of coherent diplomatic ties between the two regions, which have relied largely on individual nations or political leaders. President Lula's initiative in the early 2000s was visionary, though perhaps ahead of its time. With the shift towards a more multilateral world, the recently re-elected Brazilian President should reignite his ambitions with Arab countries, as this collaboration is now more necessary than ever. Having learned from the challenges of the ASPA, we propose the following recommendations:

Create New Links

The lack of knowledge, links and networks between the Arab and Latin American worlds complicates cooperation and can partially explain the superficial diplomatic relations described in section II.

In countries where the executive is very strong and foreign affairs remain the exclusive responsibility of the head of state, it is imperative to encourage meetings and interactions between the leaders of the two regions. The Doha Declaration of the 2009 ASPA Summit called for a Summit of the Heads of State of the 34 member countries every three years, a Council of Foreign Ministers every two years, and a Council of

Senior Officials every six months and on the sidelines of the UN General Assemblies. As ASPA has not succeeded in keeping to this schedule, it is imperative to rethink the framework within which these meetings could take place, to make them more attractive to governments of both regions. The introduction of an economic agenda, including negotiations on investment plans, free-trade treaties and visa exemptions, for example, would give political leaders a concrete interest in the summit and encourage them to participate more. The convergence of diplomatic viewpoints, described in section II, and economic plans could be expressed publicly and mediatized via television and social networks, so as to involve public opinion in both regions and inspire people (especially the youth) to discover each other. A more modern and connected form of communication for the summits would be most welcome. The popularity of the project among the public would be the best guarantee of political leaders' sustainable interest in the summits, as it would transform these international collaborations into domestic electoral issues. In addition, the large Arab diasporas in Latin America could play an unprecedented intermediary role in government, economic, business, cultural, and media circles and promote the participation of both sides. It is crucial to understand that fostering diplomatic rapprochement between the two regions will only be lasting if it reflects a real convergence between Arab and Latin American civil societies, government actors, business leaders, artists, and intellectuals.

While the convergence of diplomatic viewpoints is evident, as mentioned in section II, it is surprising to find no Arab-Latin American inter-working group within UN bodies. Emulating the G77, which has drawn the majority of Asian, African, and American countries into its project to "collectively strengthen the role and weight of developing

countries,"¹⁶⁶ would be very wise. Although there is an Arab Group and a Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) at the UN, the union of the two could significantly capitalize on common aspirations, lend weight to demands for reform of the international system, and create a space for diplomats from both regions to meet and discuss, paving the way for future collaborations. We should also aim to strengthen cross-party ties by supporting parliamentary diplomacy in both regions and mitigating drastic policy shifts tied to the political leanings of governments. Diplomatic relations should focus on collaborative projects that align with countries' national interests, transcending ideological differences. For example, relations between Morocco and Brazil illustrate stable and friendly cooperation that transcends partisan affiliations, notably built on the solid complementarity between Brazilian agriculture and Moroccan fertilizers.

New links could also be developed through tourism and traveling mechanisms. The influx of visitors on both sides of the Atlantic would be an effective way of building bridges. For instance, around the 2000s, Brazil had no direct flights to any of the Arab countries, despite efforts by the administration as well as other Latin American countries to foster relations between them. Currently, Qatar Airlines, Etihad Airways and Emirates Airlines fly directly to Sao Paulo, while Emirates Airlines also flies directly to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. However, there is still room for improvement in this area, which would bring the peoples of the two regions closer together.

¹⁶⁶ "Le groupe des 77 cinquante ans d'existence." Ahmia, UN Chronicle.

A Multilateral Approach Including the West

As noted in Section II, interference from Europe and North America has been an obstacle to achieving regional diplomatic cooperation, and undermines the goal of creating South-South diplomatic partnerships. However, it would be a huge mistake to see Arab-Latin American collaboration as fundamentally opposed to the West and its interests. Brazil should undoubtedly not have denied observer status to the United States at the first ASPA summit. Given the context of the early 2000s, such an act could have been interpreted as a desire to challenge the Western order head-on, preferring shock to negotiation. This approach is irretrievably doomed to failure in the context of inter-regional cooperation, as it forces all the countries in both regions to arbitrate between their relations with the West, which are sometimes vital, and hypothetical cooperation with a distant region.

Things are moving in the West too. The end of American post-Cold War hyperpower, coupled with the disastrous consequences of military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, have made Westerners realize that the Big Stick policy can no longer be the preferred option. In addition, new players have emerged, with at their head China, offering alternatives in both Latin America and the MENA region. As a result, the West's interest in discussion and compromise has never been more favorable to new developing countries. The inclusion of the West in Arab-Latin American cooperation may be proof that the new multilateral world promoted by emerging countries is not a trojan horse for Russian or Chinese influence on Western interests, but a real aspiration for greater justice and equity, rejecting any logic of bloc.

Spain and Morocco: Key Bridge-Builders

Spain can play a decisive role in fostering Arab-Latin American cooperation. Firstly, through its history, Spain has developed deep relations with and extensive knowledge of both the Arab world and Latin America. Given the lack of familiarity between leaders of the two regions, Spain is ideally positioned to facilitate dialogue and mediate in the event of disagreements. Furthermore, because of its Western nature, Spain can assure the Americans that this association will not evolve into an anti-Western bloc. At the same time, it remains sufficiently independent of Atlanticist orthodoxy (at least under President Sánchez's presidency) to be credible in the eyes of countries rejecting alignment, such as Lula's Brazil or Qatar. We could envision a Madrid summit resulting in an Arab-Latin American declaration under Spanish mediation. Negotiations could lead to the revitalization of ASPA or the creation of a new permanent Arab-Ibero-American organization.

Morocco, recognized as the Arab country closest to the Hispanic world due to its unique geographical position and history, can address the issue of the lack of Arab leadership and position itself as the group's primary spokesperson with Latin American countries. However, Algeria, which also has historical relations with left-leaning Latin American movements and governments, might oppose this due to existing tensions with its neighbor. Therefore, the role of facilitator for the Arab group could be entrusted to the Arab Maghreb Union, leveraging both Moroccan and Algerian expertise. This would also provide an opportunity for this dormant organization to prove its worth and potential.

An Al-Andalus Diplomacy

As discussed in Section II, the use of Al-Andalus in Spanish diplomacy has often been employed for propaganda purposes, either to identify external adversaries or to curry favor with the Muslim world. Now that Spain is a democracy, it would be highly advantageous for it to develop a genuine Al-Andalus Diplomacy. This new approach would not merely aim to foster good relations with the Arab world but would aspire to address global issues more broadly. It would be based on two main pillars: (1) the promotion of Spanish exceptionalism and (2) the endorsement of *Convivencia* as a universal model.

Spain stands to benefit greatly from asserting its exceptionalism within the Global South. Along with Portugal, Spain is the only Western European nation that experienced such a prolonged Muslim rule, leading to substantial influences from Arab-Muslim civilization on its own culture. The kingdom is thus a unique country with a history that bridges two civilizations, a crossroads of humanity where tolerance has fostered centuries of cultural and scientific advancement. This rich and diverse heritage should prompt Spain to adopt a broader perspective on global issues, moving beyond simplistic dichotomies and spearheading a North-South rapprochement. This Spanish exception can help the country gain sympathy not only from the Arab world but also from the entire Global South. In fact, Spain has no interest in being considered as a "Western country among others" but should instead capitalize on its history to distinguish itself from the rest of the European continent and respond to the new aspirations of emerging countries. President Sánchez's positive stance on the Palestinian cause is a promising step in this direction, but the concept of Spanish exceptionalism needs further development and promotion.

If Spanish exceptionalism signifies a distinctive difference, it is precisely this uniqueness that enables Spain to deliver a universal

message. The history of Al-Andalus demonstrates that religious tolerance is both possible and fruitful. It serves as a testament to the rejection of racism, religious fanaticism, and insularity as fundamental threats to humanity. This is the message Spain must project globally, a concept that President Zapatero aptly embodied through his Alliance of Civilizations initiative. In the face of rising extreme right movements in Europe and Latin America, and the increasing polarization of religious conflicts, Spain must position itself as a voice for peace and intercultural dialogue, drawing on the legacy of Al-Andalus which it shares with Morocco. Strengthening ties with Morocco, particularly given the positive momentum following Spain's recognition of the Moroccan autonomy plan as the most credible option for Western Sahara, would also be a strategic move. A Spanish-Moroccan Al-Andalus diplomacy, promoting coexistence among civilizations, represents an invaluable opportunity for both countries to enhance their international standing and contribute meaningfully to global prosperity.

It must be noted that the principles of this Al-Andalus Diplomacy—namely North-South rapprochement, promotion of coexistence, and diplomatic cooperation with Morocco—were effectively pursued by President Zapatero starting in 2004. However, the financial crisis of 2008 limited his ability to sustain his ambitious policy. The Sánchez government would benefit from reviving this legacy, further developing, theorizing, and fully embracing it.

Conclusion

The reason the three Commissions did not draft separate conclusions at the end of their respective works is that they recognized their studies converged on the same general observation, making it more logical to present their conclusion collectively.

From economic, cultural, and geopolitical perspectives, the partnership between the Arab and Hispanic worlds harbors immense and often underappreciated potential. The connection between these regions is evident through their economic and commercial interests, undeniable human links, shared historical experiences, and common aspirations for the future. There may be no other example globally of two regions that are so closely related yet so minimally connected. Although numerous obstacles to cooperation have been identified, we believe that indifference, lack of curiosity, and the perceived non-necessity of pursuing new partnerships are the primary barriers. Thus, raising awareness of the benefits of this cooperation remains the most effective strategy.

Our sincere ambition, as young scholars, is to advocate for this partnership within our capacity. Through the recommendations presented, we aim to demonstrate our commitment to advancing this cause with positive and actionable solutions. We call upon world leaders, business executives, academic researchers, artists, and, most importantly, young people—who represent the future of both regions—to support this initiative. By contributing this modest effort, we seek to inscribe our vision into history, confident that future developments will validate our perspective.

The Andalus Committee

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