

Conference

Gulf Arab countries and the Armenian communities: current trends and issues

On July 4, 2022, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA organized an international conference. Leading researchers from the Gulf countries (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar), Institute of Oriental Studies NAS RA, Yerevan State University and V. Brusov State University made presentations during the conference.

Why exactly the Arab Gulf countries?

1. As a result of the transformation processes taking place in the Arab world since 2011, also called «Arab Spring», some leading Arab countries, such as Syria, Iraq, and partly also Egypt, were forced to focus on internal political developments, which led to a rebalancing of power in the Middle East. The Arab States of the Gulf region have taken a more active role in regional developments.
2. In various Arab countries of the Gulf region, there are quite active and viable communities in which the analysis and discussion of existing realities, problems and possible challenges caused by regional events, are important from the point of view of the security environment of the Republic of Armenia and the stable development of the Armenian communities in the Gulf region.
3. In recent years, the visit of various statesmen of the RA to a number of Arab countries of the Gulf region (UAE, Qatar, Kuwait) and the expansion of opportunities for cooperation between Armenia and these countries in a number of spheres: economy, education, science, innovative technology etc., needs more focused discussion and a vision of cooperation for the coming years.

The purpose of the conference was to engage diplomatic and academic circles to discuss, on the platform of scientific diplomacy, the role of the Arab Gulf countries at the international and regional processes at the current stage, the possibilities of cooperation between Armenia and the Arab countries of the Gulf region, as well as the development trends of the Armenian communities in these countries, existing problems and challenges.

The conference was attended by a number of diplomats: Ambassador of Armenia to Tunisia and Morocco, first Ambassador of Armenia to the UAE H.E. Dr. Arshak Poladian, General Consul of Armenia in Erbil Mr. Arshak Manoukian, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Republic of Armenia and Georgia H.E. Mr. Bahaa El Din Bahgat Dessouki, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Syria to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Nora Arisian, Chargé d' Affairs of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Ahlam Rashid al-Salami,

Chargé d'affaires of the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Suhailan M. Khaleel Al-Jubori, as well as representatives of various State agencies of RA.

In his speech “Tolerance and coexistence of ethnic minorities in the UAE”, Ahlam Rashid al-Salami, Chargé d'affaires Chargé d' Affairs of the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates to the Republic of Armenia H.E. Dr. Ahlam Rashid al-Salami spoke about the state policy, cooperation and coexistence of ethnic minorities, including Armenians, in that country.

The topics of the conference reports discussed the features of the formation of Armenian communities in a number of Gulf Arab countries, current trends and existing problems of their development, and presented the activities of the main spiritual, secular and educational community structures. Special attention was paid to the peculiarities of development of relations between Armenia and the Arab countries of the Gulf region and possible vectors of activation. The challenges posed by the transformations in the Middle East, including the Gulf region, have also been addressed since 2011. Such challenges have a negative impact on the Armenian communities of the region.

The tendencies of perception of Armenia and Armenians in Arabic-speaking social networks during the Artsakh war in 2020 were especially noted. It was mentioned that research made in the Arabic language media space shows that the Artsakh conflict is generally presented as a conflict between the two countries, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the Arabic-language press spoke from a more neutral position. It was stressed that the content of user accounts activity in social networks allows to conclude that this conflict is perceived as a struggle between Muslims and Christians.

A separate topic of discussion was the question of identity transformations in the Armenian communities of the Gulf region in the contemporary period. Reference was made to the ongoing efforts to preserve Armenians in Armenian communities resulting from internal migration in Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries. Although they resemble the traditional Middle East diaspora, the diaspora in the Gulf region is somewhat different, influenced by internal and external geopolitical processes. In the Armenian diaspora, along with the difficulties of preserving the Armenians, interest in Armenia has increased to a certain extent in recent decades, which is beneficial from the point of view of preserving the Armenians. Among the many identities in the modern world, Armenian identity continues to dominate among members of the ruling Armenian communities of the Gulf region and the majority of people of Armenian descent. It is a fact that the awakening of the Armenian identity is directly related to the attractiveness of

Armenia.

The reports included in the second session of the conference considered the Gulf region within the framework of international and regional transformations. The conference discussed a number of issues related to the Turkey's penetration and military activism in the Gulf regional security sub-complex, issues related to the development of relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia at the current stage, the peculiarities of relations between China and the Arab countries of the Gulf region, the perceptions of Kurds in the Gulf region, as well as issues related to the Arab States of the Gulf region, problems related to the instruments of the soft power policy and its manifestations.

The Conference concluded with a discussion summarizing the presentations and suggestions. Several thematic topics related to the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, security environment and relations with the diaspora were highlighted, which could become an important basis for the forthcoming academic and applied discussions.

The conference was multidisciplinary. It was organized by the department of Arab countries of Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, in cooperation with the departments of International Relations and Turkish Studies of the same institute. The conference was widely covered in the Arab and Armenian media of the RA and Armenian diaspora.