

**NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES**

**The Armenian communities of the Arab countries of the Middle East:
current trends and transformations
Proceedings of the international conference**

November 30, 2023

Yerevan

2024

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**Մերձավոր Արևելքի արաբական երկրների հայ համայնքները.
արդի միտումներ և փոխակերպումներ**

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Edited by Lilit Harutyunyan

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Opening speeches

Lilit Harutyunyan

Head of the Department of Arab Studies, IOS NAS RA

On November 30, 2023, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of the RA, with the support of the All-Armenian Foundation Financing Armenian Studies, organized an international conference on the subject of "The Armenian communities of the Arab countries of the Middle East: current trends and transformations."

In the core of modern regional transformations and development trends, the discussion of the normal existence of Armenian communities, preservation of material and spiritual values, identity issues, and problems facing communities in the format of an international conference has scientific, political, and practical relevance and importance. In the context of the current trends of the transforming region, it is very important to correctly assess the realities related to the Armenian communities and develop different vectors of the state policy of Armenia.

In addition to ensuring the connection between the scientific community and diplomatic circles, the conference aims to guide in the context of current realities and give applied scientific importance to the conferences. It also develops some key areas in relations with various Arab countries from the point of view of strengthening the homeland-diaspora ties, as well as it fixes certain provisions.

Under the auspices of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, the conference discusses the development trends of Armenian communities in the currently changing region, the existing problems and challenges, and the possibilities and tools for solving them. For the mentioned aim, it brings academic and diplomatic circles together on the

platform of scientific diplomacy (with the involvement of researchers from abroad).

A number of diplomats participated in the conference: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to the Syrian Arab Republic (2007-2018), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Tunisia to the Republic of Tunisia and the Kingdom of Morocco Mr. Arshak Poladian, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Republic of Armenia Mrs. Nora Arisian, former chargé d'affaires of the Iraqi Embassy; Mr. Suhailan M. Khalil Al-Juburi, diplomats of the Middle East and Africa Department of the RA MFA; Hovhannes Aleksanyan, head of the strategy development department of the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs; representatives of other RA state departments, etc.

Leading researchers from Lebanon, Kuwait, the USA, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, Yerevan State University, Armenian-Russian University, Brusov State University, etc. have also participated in the conference.

Yuri Suvaryan

Full Member (Academician) of NAS RA,

Academician-Secretary of the Division of Armenology and Social Sciences

I warmly welcome the initiative of the Department of Arab Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies to organize this conference. A question emerges: in the context of these geopolitical changes, is this topic relevant? Admittedly, it is very current. Let me clarify. First of all, I should mention that 70 percent of our people do not live in Armenia, but in the Armenian communities of the Diaspora, and the task of protecting Armenians is, of course, our responsibility. We must constantly monitor whether Armenian

communities, especially in Arab countries, where our communities arose directly as a result of genocide, are going, are there cultural centers, Armenian churches, and how is national life organized? Stated differently, what is the status of the Armenian preservation effort?

However, that is not the only problem of today's conference. The point is that, taking into account the positive experience of the world, our communities should also become an extremely important tool to strengthen relations between Armenia and other countries. Ultimately, it is also extremely important that the Armenian communities remain faceless without the Armenian state and will not be positioned as a cultural center. There should be the Republic of Armenia in order to properly organize the work of national protection of communities. In this regard, everything should be done so that the relations of our state with the countries of the world where we have Armenian communities are at a high level and contribute to the development and strengthening of our state. There is also another important issue to which we give less importance. Rather than viewing our Armenian communities as support networks, we ought to establish business partnerships with them. This is also a question that, in my opinion, has to be posed pointedly. Armenian organizations of diaspora should invest in Armenia in order to strengthen Armenia's economy and strengthen the country. Only in this case we can guarantee our safety. We also have examples of the above. Our airport was built with the help of Armenian businessmen. There is also the example of Russian capital in Armenia, which is of Armenian origin, invested by Armenian businessmen in Russia. This list of actions should be expanded, and the development of the economy should be very important. By reaching the solution of these problems through the diaspora, we will gain respect. Let me repeat: diaspora should be involved in our economy and the development of the country. I fully hope that the reports that will be presented today and the issues that will be raised

will promote the strengthening of the relations and cooperation between the Armenian communities of the diaspora and Armenia. I wish the conference a successful course and scientific achievements.

Ruben Melkonyan

Dean of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, YSU

I extend my warmest greetings to my colleagues. As Armenian oriental studies have grown in many eastern and Arab countries, I see continuity and preservation of traditions in this conference. The geographical focus of Armenian studies makes it clear that the analysis of countries with significant Armenian communities has a unique role in our understanding of the East. It is worth mentioning that since the end of the Soviet era, the significance of studying Armenian communities has grown. Through studying the various problems of our compatriots in various Eastern countries, we also see the various social and political realities and developments of those countries. In addition, given the current precarious state of matters, it is imperative that Armenian communities and their significant issues be studied on a national and local level.

Furthermore, I would like to stress that research on Armenian communities demonstrates the respectful and pleasant relationships that exist between Armenians and Muslims. This is a good illustration of religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Religious dialogue can be a fascinating and significant model for establishing peace, particularly in this day and age when hostility and xenophobia are on the rise worldwide.

With love, gratitude, and pride, I would like to greet my colleagues and friends at the National Academy of Sciences. They consistently keep these issues front and center in their work, continuing their studies at the highest level of science that is undoubtedly competitive by global scientific

standards and significant in relation to national and local issues. I wish the conference a successful course.

Hovhannes Aleksanyan

*Head of the Repatriation and Integration Department at the RA
Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs*

I personally appreciate the initiative of the conference and attach great importance to the organization of such a format. The office of the Chief Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs also welcomes and values the implementation of such a conference. Unfortunately, for 10 years and more, the events taking place in the Arab world, particularly in the countries of the Middle East, have led to the fact that the Armenian communities have been significantly transformed. There are positions regarding these processes that the current situation may lead to a continuous deterioration of the situation in those countries. In this sense, a certain study of the communities is done, and the collection of reports resulting from this conference can be very useful both to the scientific circles and to the state bodies in the sense of correctly organizing and outlining their policies.

Arshak Poladyan

*Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of
Tunisia to the Republic of Tunisia and the Kingdom of Morocco*

I highly appreciate the institute's initiative.

First of all, I must say that this region has been and continues to be an important region for study because a large part of our compatriots lives there. When we talk about the communities formed after the genocide, they are not related to the countries of the Middle East to some extent. We have centuries-old ties with the countries of the Middle East. It is known that our relations with this region have a history of about 2000 years. However, after

the genocide, of course, a significant part of us emigrated and found salvation in the countries of the Middle East: Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and elsewhere.

What is happening in the Middle East today? The military and political changes taking place there since the last century had a certain impact on the communities as well. When we talk about the general situation of those countries today, we must say that the local situation affects the number of the Armenian community. If in the last century we had an Armenian community of about 250,000 in Lebanon, today that number has drastically decreased as a result of the civil war and ongoing political crises. The same can be said about the Armenian communities of Egypt and Syria. As a result of the Syrian war, today we have a population of about 30-40,000 from the 100,000-strong Armenian community there. The security issue is certainly the basis of such changes. What should be done? We, as a state, should be able to preserve as much as possible those people who today still continue to connect their lives with the motherland. This is a priority issue for me today to be able to ensure the safety of these people, which, I think, is an important issue for our agenda. Once again, I welcome the organization of the conference. I hope that the results will be reflected in the process of solving our problems.

Nora Arisian

Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to Armenia

I think it should be emphasized that the mentioned Armenian communities are very different from each other in their lifestyle and condition. Thus, these communities cannot be viewed as a whole. In my opinion, they still have several commonalities related to the challenges faced. If it can be listed as an explanation, I place the challenges in the circle of danger. First of all, there is a danger of the communities being diluted and

weakened. Secondly, there is a danger of eliminating the Western Armenian language.

Today, the communities live with their minimal economic resources. The problem of preserving the Armenian identity is also very important. The Armenian communities of the Middle East are facing these challenges. Regarding the Syrian Armenian community, I want to say that the attitude of the Syrian leadership has been supportive for tens of years. Why? Because the government of Syria, based on the constitution, which adopted the principle of multicultural coexistence, supports the Armenian community in Syria, keeping those principles to this day.

A vivid example or proof of this is the Armenian colleges, schools, and seminaries, the teaching of Armenian and religion in Armenian, etc. And what is the position of Syria as a result of the war? The government initiated several steps for the Armenians living in Syria, and they can be adopted as models. They were manifested by supporting the reconstruction of Armenian schools, churches, and institutions, providing material support to civilian families who died as a result of the war. I believe that the Syrian-Armenian community has a full right to survive as a community, and I think that all of this needs pan-Armenian and Armenian support.

I welcome the conference. I would like to mention that the materials of the conference can become very important scientific material for Diaspora Armenians.

Hayk Kocharyan

Head of the chair of Arabic Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, YSU

I welcome the conference. Discussion of these topics is very important now.

Speaking about current issues, let me add that we, the scientific community, ought to insist that such debates and studies have practical

relevance. As a theoretical foundation, we employ the idea of “network governance.” It helps us to comprehend what we require in order to exist. It's important to remember that the networks listed may vary depending on the community they serve. They are essential in providing us with a framework or concept and set of values that will allow us to come together. It's also important to debate whether or not the community should be referred to as a diaspora. We are not referring to the Armenian community in Saudi Arabia. Is it classified as part of the diaspora? The network government should also help to find solutions to problems related to identity issues. Not only the Western Armenian language is under threat, but also the Eastern Armenian language in this digital age. There are many problems; we need to think about solutions. I appreciate Lilit Harutyunyan setting up the conference to search for such solutions.

The Armenian community of Egypt: current realities and challenges

**Address by Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanyan Primate of the
Armenian Orthodox Diocese of Egypt**

Dear conference participants,

Before moving on to the report, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences for organizing this important conference, as well as for providing this opportunity to present insights about our Armenian community in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Of course, when we talk about our traditional Armenian communities established long ago in the Middle East and especially in the countries of the region, the commonalities and particulars are inevitable, and when talking about the current problems, concerns, and challenges of the Egyptian community, I will surely repeat our other honourable speakers who share the same concepts.

Many of you are well aware of the Armenian community in Egypt, so it would be redundant to refer to its history. However, I would like to share some important information with you that is related to the establishment of Armenians in this country and the development and preservation of their national life until the present time.

First of all, I must mention the establishment of prominent Armenians in Egypt during the Fatimid period (969-1117), who were involved in the administration of the country and even managed it for decades.

Particularly, it is worth mentioning the prominent Armenians who worked during the reign of Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successors in the

19th century, who, one can proudly mention, were among the founders of the new administrative system of modern Egypt and also greatly contributed to the formation of the economy, its internal and external relations, and its development.

This has certainly created favourable conditions for the new flow of Armenians to Egypt and their involvement in the country's various economic, trade, craft, and other sectors. This, in turn, contributed to revealing the best qualities of an Armenian person, that is, being wise, reliable, and dedicated, and being a master in the work duties they undertake. I can happily say that this belief is still rooted among the Egyptians.

The most important issue, to which I have referred above, is that our Armenians, who have assumed high positions in the state, have also invested their skills and opportunities in intra-community life and activities. They greatly contributed to the improvement of monetary conditions, administrative organizations, and the establishment of national institutions and structures. And, in order to ensure the uninterrupted activities of the latter, they entrusted the church with large bequests, which laid the future of the community on solid foundations, and at the time, during the difficult and tragic days for our community members, became the driving force for the reorganization of personal and national life, keeping the dignity of the orphans, the needy, and the refugee compatriots.

Over the years, following the example of the mentioned famous philanthropists, many people have also made modest donations in favour of educational, benevolent, and cultural activities, with the conviction that with the annual income of untouchable estates and funds, they can ensure the dignified existence of Armenians in foreign countries.

It is noteworthy to mention the names of our famous Armenian philanthropists: Boghos Bei Yusefian, Garapet Agha Kalousdian, Nubar Pasha Nubarian, Boghos Pasha Nubar, Digran Pasha Abroyan-Bagratunu, and Krikor Yeghyayan. These names are surely familiar to many of us and represent historical wealth; however, for us, Egyptian Armenians, these names always remind us of the present and guide us to the future, because the present life and the future of our community members are more or less shaped as a result of the visionary and patriotic decisions and targeted donations of such people.

It should also be noted that, thanks to the above-mentioned bequests and donations, our Armenian dioceses in Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt are now self-sufficient. They sponsor and care for the spiritual, educational, cultural, welfare, and sports activities of the Armenian community members.

The national structures I have mentioned still exist today and are fully functioning according to the following:

Spiritual structures are the most important and continuously functioning institution of national identity, which is officially registered in Egypt and operates under the direct protection of the state.

Educational institutions: a daily school operating under the patronage of the church, including three grades of kindergarten, where 150-170 students study on average. Although the school is under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministry of Education, it is officially authorized by a special decree to teach the Armenian language, Armenian history, Christian religion in Armenian (history of the Armenian Church), and music.

Cultural and sports clubs: Armenian associations, which are the daily gathering places of members of the Armenian community where, in an Armenian atmosphere, our members have the opportunity to speak Armenian

and carry out various activities. There are dance groups, choirs, mini-football, and basketball teams as well. All of these, I am sure, are present in almost all of our communities established in the Arab countries of the Middle East, but when such associations are managed and function for the sake of the community members, they become more stable and sustained for the long term. When talking about the established and active Armenian communities in the Arab countries of the Near East, their current status quo and conditions are discussed, and we have to be concerned about their future problems, keeping the following always in mind:

Favorable conditions:

The benevolent attitude of the local authorities and the citizens, which provides an opportunity and creates free conditions for the preservation of our national identity and values, takes into consideration the differences in religion, culture, way of thinking, and lifestyle. The latter, in their turn, indirectly contribute to the strengthening of the inner life by uniting and taking advantage of all existing national links for the preservation of our national identity (the church in terms of faith, the national school in terms of Armenian language and education, clubs and cultural associations in terms of culture, etc.).

Worrying Conditions

A. Security and economic problems

Egypt was able to successfully survive the internal turmoil caused by external influences, the "Arab Spring" movement, and the 2011 revolution. Fortunately, the internal security of the country is under strict control today, which unfortunately could not be ensured in Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. It should be noted, however, that in recent years, especially with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it has become a serious concern for all of us.

The economic situation is also the same. Unfortunately, the economy of Egypt has been going through difficulties for years. This leads to a slow but significant decline in the standard of living. Therefore, it is clear that the Middle East, with its current problems, will not return to its glorious past in the coming years. It is also a fact that peace and the improvement of the economic situation are far from our expectations, while the difficulties of providing the minimum living conditions for the children of our nation are increasing day by day.

Under such conditions, the priorities of the issues change. Existential issues become more important than the preservation of national life.

Reaching out for help is important; however, it is not a solution, and if practical solutions are not proposed, then the tendency to leave the country and settle in another one will continue to strengthen, which, unfortunately, is not implemented according to the principle of "turning back to the homeland." Here, it is important to pay attention to the fact that the Armenians established in the countries of the Near and Middle East are the descendants of Armenians who were deprived of their homeland and survived the genocide, who were educated and brought up with patriotic ideas with the vision of having a free and independent motherland. Therefore, the concept of homeland has an ideological basis in their minds, namely, a peaceful, economically prosperous homeland and a state system that preserves national values. With all this, however, not considering individuals guided by individual national-ideological principles, in case of any danger, the motherland is not seen as a place to build a safe and prosperous life. Our members prefer to keep their existence and keep it dignified in those countries where there are possibilities and conditions for it. This refers not only to the countries where one can find a job but also to the countries where one can take advantage of local and international

benevolent structures. Therefore, not only the question of returning to the homeland should be put on a systematic basis, but especially the imperative of the motherland itself to be ready to welcome its citizens at any time, with the awareness and willingness to provide a dignified life for them.

B. Intra-community crisis

Today, it is an inevitable reality that, due to voluntary or forced reasons, the number of Armenians in our traditional communities is decreasing, and the birth rate is decreasing as well, which in turn leads the community to age. In this sense, the comparison of the death rate to the birth rate in Egypt is already alarming. If we look at the situation from a different point of view, we will notice that many young people postpone their marriage due to the difficulties of establishing and maintaining a family.

Mixed marriage, which has already become widespread, is inevitable with its multifaceted consequences. The crucial problems of language acquisition and usage, national identity preservation, and other consequences arising from such issues.

The issues related to Armenian language usage in the region are of particular concern, especially regarding the dire need for Western Armenian language teachers and specialists. We are faced with the problems of training such teachers if we ever consider our community members' readiness for this, while the question relates to knowledge of Armenian, and therefore, perception and thinking in Armenian depend on the preparation of a teacher, which automatically leads to assimilation and a lack of Armenians who carry national values ideologically.

However, I must happily mention that the presence of our national structures in our community has kept our community Armenian-speaking. A

good percentage of the students in our daily national school are children of mixed marriages; even until the third generation, they are of Armenian descent from the mother's side, but they are involved in our national life. And this, again, thanks to the approach of our great Armenians, who saw the future in a present firmly built on national foundations.

I want to conclude my speech with the conviction that we are doing everything possible to prolong the presence of Armenians in Egypt and the Arab world. However, all our efforts should be especially directed towards ensuring his dignified presence, his presence with his deeply rooted Armenian spirit and beliefs, and his conscious and dedicated presence towards his homeland and his compatriots. Once more, I thank you for organizing this conference and wish all the best and success to all participants.

God bless you all!

The 2023 Hamas-Israeli conflict from the Lebanese perspective and the Lebanese Armenian community

Address by Shahan Kandaharian (Director-chief editor of the daily newspaper "Azdak", Beirut)

The sudden attack carried out by Hamas on the Israeli territories must be subjected to the context of cause and logic. One should try to notice the capacity of the relations of the interested parties, the pursued goals, the rules of a manageable war, and especially the centers of conflict between those rules and the general situation.

The results of this controllable war with a geopolitical dimension could be the beginning of a new Middle Eastern political map. The situation suggests that the "military negotiations" will continue with the USA's mediation.

War deterrents

The limited military clashes recorded in October 2023 in South Lebanon are indicative. The fact that they are limited so far suggests certain restraints regarding expanding military operations. What has been recorded in southern Lebanon, at least so far, are targeted rocket attacks that will not turn into a full-scale outbreak. They will go on intermittently. The absence of a message from the leader of Hezbollah for five days after the war holds some significance. The first theory of this reality is that Tel Aviv will not prepare to open a second large-scale front and fight both Hamas and Hezbollah at the same time.

At the same time, however, there is also the presumed approach of Hezbollah, that it does not want to be fully involved in the war, which in this way includes not only the south but different regions of Lebanon as well. Israel will not hesitate to always declare that the Lebanese state bears the responsibility for rockets fired from Lebanon or a probable attack. One can

certainly think that the military clashes between Hamas, Hezbollah, and Israel will not determine the probability of the scale of the war. It is necessary to consider the statements of the states concerned.

Washington's declaration of cooperation has gained a practical appearance by providing military forces and delivering fighter jets and warships to the region. However, one should not forget the official statement according to which the delivery of the American military presence is aimed at curbing the regional war, a threat that the actions do not have a regional capacity. The counter-threat came from Moscow when this time solidarity with the Palestinian people was expressed at the declarative level, adding that in exchange for the American military intervention, Russian military support for the Palestinian struggle would be recorded.

Until now, Ankara has been trying to assume the role of a mediator and has declared on various occasions that it is ready to negotiate a ceasefire between Hamas and Tel Aviv, although the President of Turkey calls what was done in Gaza a massacre. Iran supports Hamas with all its statements. It is silent in front of what is recorded in southern Lebanon. Both resistance environments are zones of Iranian influence. The unprecedentedness, capacity, and success of the attack initiated by Hamas will require long-term preparation. This preparation in terms of both military and human resources will require state support. With all this, Tehran announced that it was not involved in the war.

Riyadh suspended its dialogue process with Tel Aviv. Israel's official spokespeople spread the idea that Hamas essentially unleashed this war to stop the process of establishing diplomatic relations between the Arab countries and Tel Aviv. The moment of ceasefire will come, and negotiations will definitely be undertaken. Until then, Israel has decided to radically change the previous situation in Gaza. As a measure of that radical change, it will implement the leveling of an entire administrative area. At the time

when the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United States was arriving in Tel Aviv, the Iranian ambassador in Lebanon announced that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran would arrive in Lebanon as part of his regional visit. At the same time, these visits, considering the mentioned circumstances, may lead one to think that the two states will contribute to preventing war, or at least to preventing its spread and escalation to a regional level.

Washington, Ankara and Hamas

The disagreement between Washington and Ankara on the issue of Hamas gives the impression of having a theatrical essence. During his visit to Turkey, the Assistant Secretary of State for Terrorism and Eastern Affairs expressed Washington's deep concern about Ankara's relations with Hamas, urging that Turkey may suffer serious consequences if it continues funding Hamas. The triumvirate of Hamas patronage is characterized by Iran in the military direction, Qatar in the financial direction, and Turkey in the ideological direction. That would certainly not mean that Ankara did not finance Hamas. Of course, the United States was aware of all stages of financing. Now Washington is publicly demanding that Ankara recognize Hamas as a terrorist organization. The question arises as to whether the financing of Hamas was permissible before this last war. Are they not authorized from now on and can have serious consequences?

The same demand will not be made for Doha, which is the main financier of Hamas. There would be no reservations about Doha, no reminders of non-permissibility, or official demands to publicly recognize Hamas as a terrorist group and cut ties. The demand has a more propagandistic nature, contains a message addressed to Tel Aviv, and is part of the strategy to strengthen the relationship between Ankara and the Arab world. Or, it includes the goal of strengthening Turkey's influence on the Arab world. The Qatar-Ankara connection will also look stable, and

Washington seems to be the main one strengthening that connection. The answer to the Turkish president is demonstrably bold. Ankara implements a foreign policy aimed at its interests, and Hamas is seen as an organization that won elections in Palestine. The President of Turkey expresses hope that all sides are aware of the folds of Turkey's balanced policy. In this way, Ankara simply states that it will continue to remain firm on its position of not considering Hamas a terrorist unit and stick to its decision to finance Hamas.

After having considered Israel a genocidal state, criticizing it most sharply, and seeing the fate of its prime minister in the international courts of justice, it is interesting that the diplomatic relations between Tel Aviv and Ankara have not been severed so far. The announced Turkey-Israel strategic alliance has not been canceled.

Washington's threat to Turkey is far from objective. This reality is not only related to the general behavior of patronizing Turkey and running the Turkish horse in the Middle East field but also to tangible changes in the American policy towards Israel.

It seems that neither Iranian support, nor Qatari mediations, nor Turkish funding will go against the United States. This behavior is obscured under the smokescreen of such calls to Turkey.

Washington-Tel Aviv conflict over two UN stages

The United Nations once again adopted a cease-fire resolution for the Hamas-Israel war, demanding the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners and the respect of international law by both warring parties, particularly regarding the protection of the townspeople. The resolution maintains an equal distance and opposes Israel's approach, especially the pre-conditional position of establishing a ceasefire. The greeting of the Palestinian authorities on the occasion of the adoption of the resolution is

noteworthy, which means that Ramallah is not dissatisfied with the rule of equal distance. The voting results - 153 in favor, 9 against, and 23 abstentions - speak of international pressure in terms of establishing a ceasefire., and at the same time, not sharing Israel's position. The picture is certainly not the same in the UN Security Council.

A week ago, the UN Security Council, for the second time, failed to adopt a project requiring the approval of a ceasefire in Gaza. The United States used its veto power against the decision, while Britain abstained and all other members voted in favor. This is not the first time that Britain abstains. It is also clear that there will be coordination of positions between the United States and Britain in the face of such a large-scale military-political issue. Abstention is a message and a signal to Israel at this time that the states considered as Israel's allies will not necessarily share the attacks carried out by Israel in Gaza.

The problem will certainly not be explained only by Gaza. In general, it is an understanding of Israel's role that will unfold in the region. The President of the United States stated that Israel has begun to lose the support of the international family because of its irregular bombings, which are killing thousands of Palestinians.

Despite the disaster, Israel's irregular, blind, and mass-killing attacks, the voting picture of the UN General Assembly could have been different if Israel's influential allies like the United States or Britain had wanted to justify Israel and accept the preconditions put forward by Tel Aviv to establish a ceasefire.

The game will be played under different rules on both fields for now. The UN General Assembly unleashes international pressure with appeals and resolutions, while in the Security Council, Washington vetoes decisions bypassing Tel Aviv's conditions.

On these two boards, Washington is basically the one who dictates the rules. The American and Israeli media, with their simultaneous analyses, emphasize that the Israel-United States dispute is essentially an inter-administrative struggle between Biden and Netanyahu and does not affect the strategic partnership of the two states.

It is noteworthy that anti-administration protests and demonstrations are becoming noticeable in various Israeli cities, while an impeachment procedure against President Biden ends in Washington, due to completely different circumstances that have nothing to do with the Gaza war. The start of the procedure itself may be related to the statements of the American administration. The same logic applies to the American veto in the United Nations with the suspension of the impeachment procedure.

The Armenian community and the regional war

In this multi-point, targeted regional war, the Armenian community is considerate of the following phenomena:

- A. Israel-RA relations
- B. Israel-Jerusalem Armenian community problems
- C. Israel-Azerbaijan cooperation
- D. General positions towards Palestinian organizations
- E. Shia community-Armenian community relations
- F. Iran's operation in the direction of RA.

Keeping these circumstances in mind, the Lebanese Armenian community has a balanced position towards Hezbollah, which has taken over the Lebanese resistance. It is emphasized here that it is a stabilizing factor, especially in terms of not getting involved in intra-community provocations. From the point of view of Hamas, the approaches are more focused on the pan-Palestinian case, on the imperative of a just solution. A more general observation brings to light, however, a realistic picture. The Armenian side

fought the Artsakh war essentially against the triad of Turkey-Azerbaijan-Israel. Israel continues to arm Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

The assumption that the conflicts from Gaza will spread to other proxies in the region and become a formally controllable, targeted, outpost war cannot be ruled out; a war that can be managed with the appropriate rules and methodology of the 21st century, the results of which will be paralleled by the conflicts between the main players in the formation of the current world order. Another problem is that the Armenian lens and the Armenian factor should adopt the permanent procedure of subjecting the Middle East and the South Caucasus to regional comparative analysis and accordingly decide their foreign policy toward the hot spots. Here, it is imperative to develop a new concept perspective, in which the inclusion of Lebanese-Armenian political thought will contribute to the accurate perception of the political landscape.

Armenian communities of Arab countries in the context of regional modern transformations: current tendencies¹

Lilit Harutyunyan (IOS NAS RA)

At the current stage, the Middle East is experiencing a complex period of transformation and growing instability, which has its negative consequences for the Armenian communities of Arab countries as well. In the long-term historical overview, there is an outflow of Christians, including Armenians, from the Middle East. The region's increasing instability and the emergence of radical sentiments facilitate this outflow (Yegavian 2021), including Armenians, from the Middle East. The report's framework included discussions of contemporary changes in Armenian communities of Arab countries, the function of various Armenian institutions (church, school, and press), and changes in their relevance.

Keywords: *Armenian communities of Arab countries, “Arab spring”, transformations, Diaspora, Syria, Lebanon, Gulf Arab countries, Egypt.*

Introduction

Today, in the Middle East, Armenian communities exist in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, Palestine, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and other countries. In this regard, Hrach Chilingirian notes that in 1975, the number of Armenians in the Middle East was 625,000, while in 2022, it was 200,000 (Tchilingirian 2023, 13-14). It is obvious, in the historical long term, that the trends of the exodus of Christians, including Armenians, in the region.

¹ This research was supported by the Science Committee RA, in the frame of the project No 21T6A153.

The "Arab Spring" of 2011 and the increase in regional instability, as well as the escalation of contradictions in a number of Arab countries, which in some cases escalated into armed clashes, all contributed to the outflow of Armenians from a number of Arab countries, including Syria, Lebanon and etc.

In 2011, the internal transformation processes and regional changes taking place in various Arab countries brought about instability and security problems, which had serious consequences for the Armenian communities of individual Arab countries as well. The accumulated problems greatly contributed to the outflow of Armenians from Arab countries, particularly from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, etc., which had a negative impact on the number of communities as well as ensuring the normal work of community spiritual and secular structures.

Political parties and organizations

In the Armenian communities of the Middle East, including the Arab countries, the church plays an important role: the Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic and Protestant churches; traditional Armenian parties: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF); the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar Party); the Social Democratic Hunchakian Party (SDHP), cultural and sports associations, etc.

Concerns are raised about political parties and traditional community leadership's inability to communicate with the youth of Armenian communities in the Diaspora.

According to the results of the 2019 survey, 22% of respondents are affiliated with a political party. For example, 19% of respondents in the Armenian community of Lebanon are actively involved in various structures of the ARF, 1.7% in the Ramgavar Party, and 1.6% in the SDHP (Kasbarian 2019, 35). Party activism is more apparent in Lebanon, as parties have a

stronger systemic and political presence. Cooperation with political parties is more prevalent among the 55+ age group, whilst among the 16-24 age group; involvement in Lebanese, Egyptian, and other organizations and movements surpasses community involvement (ibid). It is evident that the younger generation of Armenian communities in Arab countries is increasingly apolitical.

In the communities of the Armenian Diaspora, including Arab countries, Armenian youth are not very involved in community life. In this regard, Sosi Gasparian notes that the desire and attempts to actively involve the young generation in the life of the Armenian community are perhaps one of the main concerns of the Diaspora. 34% of those polled in different communities state that the lack of events that interest the younger generation is a big problem. In communities, there is a lack of connection or significant differences in mindset between the older generation and the youth (Kasbarian 2019, 30).

The next major worry for young people is the topic of intermarriage. In his research, Sosi Gasparian states that, for example, 48% of respondents in Lebanon consider mixed marriages a challenge in the connection between generations in the diaspora and in preserving Armenianness (ibid, 31).

Educational institutions and the press

In Arab countries, Armenian educational institutions also play an important role in the education of the community's youth. However, regarding educational institutions, particularly schools, due to the decrease in the number of Armenian students, we have a decrease in the number of schools. According to Hrach Chilingiryan, particularly in the 1980s, 38 Armenian schools operated in Syria, 24 of which were located in Aleppo and neighboring regions (Tchilingirian 2023, 20). On the eve of the second civil war that broke out in Lebanon in 1975, 21.000 students were studying in the

Armenian schools in the country (ibid). Between 1991 and 2001, the number of Armenian schools in Lebanon decreased from 45 to 33, and by 2022, it was down to 16. In the 1990s, there were 12,000 students, and 5,000 by 2022 (ibid). In Aleppo, in 2011–2022, the number of students decreased by 75%. In 2011, the only Armenian school in Jordan, which had 88 students, was closed (ibid, 21).

The percentage of fluent Armenian speakers in the Armenian communities of Arab countries is quite high. For example, in Lebanon, it is 77% (Sahakyan 2019, 23). As Vahe Sahakyan notes in his research, the overwhelming majority of those who participated in the survey among Lebanese Armenians speak Armenian and emphasize the importance of the knowledge of Armenian. Not speaking Armenian in Lebanon often means being excluded from wider community life (ibid, 24).

In Arab countries, there is also a reduction in the number of periodicals printed in Armenian. First of all, the number of Armenian printed periodicals readers has decreased as electronic media and social networks have grown in popularity around the world.

Existential issues

Since 2011, the Middle East has been experiencing a rather complex period of transformation, which brings with it problems related to security, increasing Islamic radicalism, and growing instability. The problems related to the Armenian communities of the Arab countries were greatly manifested back in 2003 with the US invasion of Iraq, which had a significant impact on the dilution of the Armenian community in Iraq. The dilution of the Armenian community continued with the "Arab Spring" processes in Egypt, Syria, and other Arab countries, with the activation of the activities of the Islamic State terrorist organization since 2014, and with the long-lasting internal political crisis in Lebanon, which is also combined with the

aggravation of serious economic problems. Added to the above developments were the COVID-19 epidemic and the doubling of existing socio-economic problems in a number of Arab countries due to it.

In June 2014, Islamic State militants attacked the Armenian church of Etchmiadzin in Mosul, Iraq, which had been attacked in 2005 and was under reconstruction. This attack was combined with an assault against other Christian churches (Tchilingirian 2023, 33).

According to the data from the US Department of State, 1000 Christians lived in the Syrian city of Homs, while 160,000 Christians lived there before the Syrian conflict (ibid).

At the core of the "Arab Spring," when more problems appeared in the "traditional Arab" countries: Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, etc., the Arab countries of the Gulf region, especially the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, etc., began to occupy a leading position. There are also established Armenian communities in these countries. They were mostly formed as a result of the transfer of Armenians from different Arab countries—Syria, Lebanon, etc.—to the Gulf region, which was the result of intra-diaspora movements. For example, during the Syrian crisis, a large number of Syrian-Armenians settled in Armenia and re-settled in the Gulf countries with their Armenian passports because it was easier to enter and obtain work permits with Armenian passports. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Armenians in the Arab countries of the Gulf, like all foreigners, are considered non-citizens and have the right of residence. This fact raises concerns about the future among Armenians living in the Arab countries of the Gulf.

Conclusion

It is a fact that since the beginning of the 21st century, the developments in a number of Arab countries, the growth of instability,

terrorism and radicalism, the aggravation of socio-economic problems have contributed greatly to the dilution of Armenian communities and the outflow of Armenians from Arab countries. In these realities, it is very important for the Republic of Armenia to be able to develop a clear concept and integration programs aimed at integrating Armenians from the Middle East into Armenia and using their potential in our country. Regrettably, the 2020 Artsakh war and regional transformations have revealed serious challenges in terms of the security issues of the Republic of Armenia. From this point of view, it is very important to bring together the pan-Armenian potential and the efforts of Armenia-Diaspora (including the Armenian communities of Arab countries) in developing a joint vision for the further development of Armenia.

Current geopolitical challenges show that only by combining nationwide efforts is it possible to pave the way to building a peaceful and safe homeland. It is very important that the Armenian-speaking communities of Arab countries with close ties to Armenia can be preserved in one way or another, both in terms of human potential and material heritage. In the conditions of the outflow of Armenians from Arab countries, the potential of our compatriots should be used to a great extent in Armenia itself, and by implementing various integration and support programs, it is necessary to promote that they do not leave Armenia and settle in third countries.

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Armenian Communities in the Middle East: Challenges, Resilience, and Ties with Armenia

Hrayr Jebejian (The Bible Society of Gulf Arab countries, Kuwait)

This paper explores the vital connections between Armenia and the diaspora communities in the Near East: Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. To understand the current state of these relationships, the author conducted in-depth interviews with 35–67-year-old Armenians living in these diaspora communities. The research reveals a strong desire from these communities to maintain close and active ties with their homeland, Armenia. The interviews also highlight the unique economic, political, and social challenges faced by each diaspora group. Significantly, the interviewees emphasized the importance of collaboration with the Armenian Diaspora Commissioner's office. The study further suggests that Armenia and the Diaspora stand to gain significant educational, economic, and political benefits by fostering stronger and more productive relationships. This analysis paves the way for future research, particularly exploring methods to solidify Armenia-Diaspora ties. By working together, these communities can achieve greater mutual understanding, partnership, and collective action for a brighter future.

Keywords: *Middle East, Near East, Diaspora, Republic of Armenia, High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs, Armenian Communities.*

Ancient Roots, Modern Struggles: The Armenian Experience in the Middle East

While large-scale displacement due to the Hamidian massacres in 1894 and the Armenian Genocide in 1915 significantly shaped the Armenian diaspora in the Middle East, their presence goes much further back (Bournoutian 2006). Historical accounts mention Armenians trading in

Mesopotamia and settling in the region since ancient times (Adalian 1991). These Armenian communities thrived thanks to their social, religious, and educational institutions built over centuries (Hovannisian 1997). They established themselves in countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine during Tigran the Great's reign in the 1st century BC and even earlier in Iraq (Sargsyan 2003). Egypt also hosted a significant Armenian population, around 300,000, as far back as the 11th century (Ibid.).

The Armenian presence in the Gulf region is more recent, with migration starting in the mid-20th century to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. While smaller communities exist in other Gulf countries, like Bahrain, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, they have not yet formed established structures.

Political instability and economic challenges have unfortunately caused many Armenians to migrate from all these countries further west—to the US, Europe, Australia, or Armenia itself—especially after its independence in 1991 (Sanjian 2003). Despite these difficulties, the Armenian experience in the Middle East reflects deep historical roots and a strong cultural identity. These communities remain active and contribute to ongoing interactions with Armenia.

This study will first provide a brief overview of the current situation in each Middle Eastern country with Armenian populations. Then, it will delve into the interview data and use the findings to suggest recommendations for the future.

Small but Active: The Armenian Community in Egypt

Despite their limited numbers—around 2,000 Armenians concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria—the Armenian community in Egypt

remains vibrant. They leverage their existing social, economic, and religious structures to actively preserve their Armenian heritage.

Recent political tensions between Turkey and Egypt have created an opportunity for Armenia. The Armenian community seized this moment by distributing reports to the media about Armenia and Artsakh to raise awareness in Egypt about the recent political developments in their homeland. The interviewees pointed out that Egypt's strong position in the Arab League is important for Armenia. Building a better relationship with Egypt could be beneficial for Armenia's complicated ties with its Muslim neighbors. They added that Egypt is a gateway to Africa, a continent brimming with economic potential, particularly in the IT sector, where Armenia excels. The interviewees also mentioned that Egypt remains a favorite tourist destination for Armenians, a positive development.

While the Armenian Embassy is seen as active and the community has good relations with them, there is a desire for even deeper collaboration. Interestingly, the Center for Armenian Studies, originally established by the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Armenian Church, is now managed by the Embassy. However, like other Middle Eastern Armenian communities, there appears to be a lack of communication or cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs. Interviewees expressed reservations about some of their pronouncements and activities.

Iraqi Armenians: Security Concerns, Exodus, Resilience, and a Plea for Improvement

The Iraqi-Armenian community has faced a lot of hardship due to the country's volatile political and security situation. A 2009 church bombing in Baghdad triggered a Christian exodus, with many Armenians fleeing to

Kurdistan or seeking asylum abroad. The community's population has shrunk to an estimated 250,000 Christians, with around 1500-1800 Armenians concentrated in Baghdad, Zakho (1200), Kirkuk (100), and Basra (200). Notably, some are Kurdish-speaking or have Arabic names.

Despite the challenges, Armenia-Iraq relations are positive. Commercial partnerships are flourishing, and tourism is increasing, with two weekly summer flights to Yerevan. Armenia actively welcomes Iraqi-Armenians, granting citizenship to many. Some have already settled or invested in property back in Armenia. The Armenian Embassy and Consulate in Baghdad and Kurdistan support the community's educational, social, and religious institutions.

With Iraq's vast natural resources and population of 44 million, trade holds immense potential for economic growth between the two states. The interviewee emphasizes the need to replace Turkish products flooding the market with Armenian alternatives. “The Iraqi market is saturated with Turkish goods,” observed the interviewee from Iraq. “This presents a significant challenge for Armenian products to gain a foothold in this country.”

The Iraqi-Armenian community is determined to maintain strong ties with Armenia. However, a recent disappointment emerged. The Pan-Armenian Games, where 30 Iraqi Armenians, sponsored by the Church, competed, were marred by alleged favoritism towards the Armenian team. This left the Iraqi-Armenian youth disillusioned. The interviewee stressed the importance of eliminating such issues to strengthen relations.

The interviewee believes the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs can play a more significant role in fostering closer ties. They advocate for increased funding and active engagement from the High

Commissioner's team. Furthermore, they propose appointing a diaspora Armenian familiar with the community's unique circumstances to this position. "Someone of Armenian diaspora background should be appointed to this position, as that would be highly beneficial," suggested the interviewee. "Their firsthand understanding of the diaspora's unique challenges and opportunities would be invaluable. Moreover, Armenia and Armenian institutions should show greater care and respect for preserving Western Armenian, a vital aspect of the diaspora's cultural heritage."

Armenians in Jordan: Challenges and Opportunities

The Armenian community in Jordan faces the challenge of preserving its identity, especially after the closure of the Armenian school in Amman. The interviewee noted a rise in mixed marriages but expressed optimism that community events could help unite younger generations. However, recent tensions surrounding the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem have strained relations with the Jordanian government, leading to the exclusion of the Armenian spiritual leader from official events.

Despite these challenges, Jordan and Armenia have good diplomatic ties, especially after Armenia's independence in 1991, and even solidified a sister city relationship between Yerevan and Amman in 2014. The interviewee described Jordan's government as cautious in regional politics, particularly regarding the recent conflict in Artsakh. This cautiousness likely stems from a desire to prevent outside influences, especially extremist movements, from gaining a foothold in Jordan.

Currently, the Armenian Embassy responsible for Jordan is in Damascus, with the Syrian ambassador handling diplomatic duties in Jordan. While the ambassador visits Jordan periodically, the interviewee expressed a lack of strong connection with the community. However, there have been

positive developments in the Ministry of Diaspora. Over the past decade, around 40 Armenian families from Jordan have relocated to Armenia, highlighting the strong bond the Armenian community in Jordan maintains with the homeland. The interviewee also identified a potential area of collaboration: Jordan's well-developed medical and pharmaceutical industries. Efforts to leverage Armenian expertise in Jordan for Armenia's benefit have not yet yielded results, but the interviewee believes this sector holds significant promise for Armenian growth.

Internal Dynamics and Economic Potential: Armenians in Kuwait

Like other Armenian communities in the Middle East, Kuwaiti Armenians grapple with emigration. The Armenian school enrollment has dropped significantly, from 350 in 2019 to 270 in 2024, reflecting economic pressures and strict residence permit regulations that make it difficult for families to reunite. The inability to obtain citizenship further discourages some from settling here permanently. Young Armenians often come from Syria, Lebanon, and Iran for work, but limited family opportunities lead to declining marriage and birth rates, impacting the community's future. "The future depends on Kuwait's situation, residence permit laws, and the overall social and economic climate," said an interviewee.

Armenia-Kuwait relations are indirectly affected by Kuwait's strong relationship with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This complex geopolitical landscape hinders closer Armenian-Kuwaiti relations. "Kuwait seeks foreign workers," one interviewee remarked, "but Armenia isn't seen as a source of skilled professionals. Armenia has much to offer and establishing connections with Kuwait in this area could be beneficial."

The Armenian community in Kuwait maintains a positive relationship with the Armenian Embassy, with occasional disagreements overcome through mutual respect. However, communication with the Office of the High Commissioner for Diaspora Affairs is lacking due to concerns about their approach to certain issues and the absence of collaboration efforts.

Kuwait's reliance on imports and dominance of Turkish products create challenges for Armenian goods. However, interviewees see potential in Armenia's IT sector, suggesting computer and internet technology exports as a promising avenue. Despite limited political engagement, interviewees believe opportunities exist in cultural exchange, tourism, and education.

Despite the challenges, the Armenian community remains active in preserving its identity through its religious, social, cultural, and educational institutions. While emigration continues, a countertrend sees Armenians returning to Armenia for investment and business opportunities.

Lebanese Armenians: A Valuable Resource Facing Challenges

Lebanese Armenians have long contributed significantly to Lebanon. Despite overcoming past hardships, they now face a gradual decline in population and uncertain prospects. This community, despite its shrinking size, remains a vital part of the Armenian diaspora.

The interviewees highlighted a disconnect between the High Commissioner's office and the community since 2018. They emphasize the importance of rebuilding positive relations with political, religious, and social entities to ensure future collaboration. Interviewees stressed the importance of leveraging the diaspora for Armenia's development. They argued that the High Commissioner's office should actively cultivate this awareness. Lebanon's Armenian community possesses a wealth of

resources—political, social, and educational structures and organizations - that could significantly benefit Armenia. The interviewees urged Armenia to better utilize these capabilities for mutual growth.

The interviewees criticized the Armenian Embassy's handling of the recent Armenian-Artsakh events. They urge the Embassy to adopt a more proactive diplomatic strategy while engaging with Lebanon's diverse political landscape and Francophone circles, a valuable opportunity for Armenia. Despite signed agreements between Armenia and Lebanon, a lack of implementation hinders progress. However, Lebanon remains a friend, consistently supporting Armenia in international forums. The interviewees underscore the unique bond between the two nations, forged through shared experiences of war. They believe Lebanon and the Armenian community can learn from each other and collaborate for mutual development.

Lebanon's complex political system, with external forces influencing religious communities, presents challenges. The interviewees see an opportunity for Armenia to navigate this landscape by cultivating strong pan-Lebanese relations and leveraging the Armenian community's role as a "balancing factor" to secure political and economic gains.

Armenian Communities in Syria: Resilience Amidst Challenges

This research focuses on the intertwined Armenian communities of Damascus and Aleppo, historically significant centers for Armenian identity and Diaspora relations.

Damascus: State Relations, Respected Role, and Diaspora Engagement

Today, Damascus has a modest Armenian community of around 3,000. Despite functioning organizations and educational institutions, intermarriage is prevalent. “In one of the classes at the Armenian school in

Damascus, only three out of nine students are Armenian on either their father's or mother's side. As a community, we are also facing a crucial need for Western Armenian language resources to preserve heritage for future generations, said one of the interviewees.

Syrian Arabs value Armenians' skills and entrust them with essential tasks. However, the wars in Syria and economic hardship have cast a shadow of uncertainty on everyone. The community grapples with youth emigration, particularly towards the West, unemployment, and economic and political instability.

The Armenian Embassy's continued presence throughout the war is highly commended. It provided crucial assistance to Armenians seeking to leave Syria and even aided local Syrians during the earthquake. "Syrian Armenians viewed Armenian passports as a lifeline," explained one interviewee, "granting them much-needed travel freedom." Armenia and Syria enjoy good state relations, but stronger economic ties are needed. The interviewees lament the lack of connection with the High Commissioner's office compared to the active engagement during the Ministry of Diaspora era.

Aleppo: Enduring Spirit and Syria-Armenia Relations

The war and economic crisis have severely impacted Aleppo's Armenian community. Its historical significance contrasts with the daily struggle for survival amidst ongoing political instability. The once-thriving Karen Jeppe School exemplifies the decline, with student enrollment dropping from 1300 to 300. "The crippling economic downturn has had a devastating impact on the community. A significant labor shortage and a stark decline in Armenian school enrollment are just some of the harsh consequences," said one of the interviewees. Schools are forced to accept

non-Armenian students to remain viable. Despite these hardships, the community maintains a vibrant religious and cultural life.

State relations are positive, and the Armenian Consulate in Aleppo plays a vital role. A de-mining Armenian team is rendering great services to Syria, and these efforts by Armenians are much appreciated. “Also, Armenia's relief efforts following the recent earthquake in Aleppo were warmly welcomed by both Syrian authorities and the local population,” stated one of the interviewees. The interviewees believe Syria and Armenia can strengthen economic ties, highlighting past missed opportunities for Syrian businesses in Armenia. Concerns are raised about visa disparity, where Armenians can enter Syria freely, but Syrians need visas for Armenia.

While large-scale emigration has subsided, it continues, with many opting for Armenia. The interviewees see potential for revitalizing Armenia-Diaspora relations, particularly in education, by reviving past collaborations between Armenian Studies Departments in Syrian and Armenian universities. They envision similar partnerships in science, medicine, and other fields.

Overall, the Armenian communities of Damascus and Aleppo face significant challenges but demonstrate remarkable resilience. Renewed engagement with the High Commissioner's office and fostering stronger economic ties between Syria and Armenia are seen as crucial steps for a brighter future.

The Armenian Community in the UAE: Growth, Challenges, and Potential

The Armenian population in the United Arab Emirates is on the rise. Two churches, one each in Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, serve the growing community. Sharjah even boasts a Saturday school with a significant student

body of 270, compared to Abu Dhabi's 50, likely due to a more transient worker population. There are around 1500 Armenian citizens, primarily focused on trade and with temporary residency status. They often maintain a distance from community activities.

Armenia enjoys positive relations with the UAE, which generally takes a balanced approach to its diverse population (over 160 nationalities). Interviewees see potential for increased tourism between the two countries. The UAE's support for the rebuilding of Armenian churches is seen as a positive step. "Exemplifying interfaith tolerance, the governor of Sharjah funded Armenian church restorations in Armenia. This act of generosity," as one interviewee noted, "could pave the way for stronger relations between the two countries."

The Armenian community desires better communication and collaboration with the High Commissioner of Diaspora Affairs. They believe the recent appointment of a representative without community input was a missed opportunity. Open communication is seen as crucial for addressing issues of mutual interest.

The UAE's lack of granting citizenship to long-term residents creates uncertainty for Armenians, many of whom dream of eventually settling back in Armenia. Many are already taking steps toward this goal by investing in property or careers back home.

Conclusion: Building Bridges and Empowering the Diaspora

The Middle East's proximity to Armenia, its historical Christian communities like Lebanon, and the established Armenian diaspora there present a strong foundation for closer ties. This stable subsoil can benefit Armenia and its diaspora communities.

The historical resilience and fighting spirit of the Armenian diaspora are valuable assets in navigating the current challenges faced by Middle Eastern countries. These qualities contribute to the support and development of Armenian communities and structures throughout the region.

The traditionally positive relationship between the Arab world and Armenians, along with the respect Armenian communities have earned from their hosts, can be a bridge for Armenia to engage with the broader Arab-Islamic world. This is particularly important considering Armenia's Muslim neighbors and the potential for non-religious conflict resolution.

Strengthening Armenian communities in the Middle East, particularly considering current political, security, and economic hurdles, should be a strategic priority for Armenia. A stronger diaspora strengthens Armenia itself. Re-establishing a dedicated Ministry of Diaspora could significantly contribute to the well-being of Armenian communities across the globe, including those in the Middle East.

Existing initiatives, like Armenian students learning Arabic in Kuwait and university collaborations between Armenia and Lebanon, such as between Haigazian University and the University of Armenia, are positive steps. Expanding such academic partnerships with other Middle Eastern institutions can foster stronger ties and prepare future diplomats.

The Middle East's diverse landscape, with each nation offering unique characteristics, presents opportunities for Armenia. From political to economic to social benefits, Armenia can leverage this diversity for its own growth. Similarly, the Armenian communities within the region, while having distinct compositions, possess a collective strength that can be harnessed for mutual benefit.

Appendix A: Characteristics of the interviewees

Interviewee	Country	Gender	Age	Profession
1	UAE	Male	63	Employee
2	UAE	Male	36	Clergy
3	Egypt	Male	62	Medical doctor
4	Egypt	Male	50	Clergy
5	Iraq	Male	67	Clergy
6	Lebanon	Female	62	Journalist
7	Lebanon	Female	50	Journalist
8	Lebanon	Male	55	Journalist
9	Lebanon	Male	67	Journalist
10	Lebanon	Male	53	Journalist
11	Lebanon	Male	55	Administrator
12	Jordan	Female	45	Consultant
13	Damascus	Male	51	Clergy
14	Damascus	Female	52	Teacher
15	Aleppo	Male	61	Clergy
16	Aleppo	Male	57	Teacher
17	Aleppo	Female	53	Journalist
18	Kuwait	Male	55	Dentist
19	Kuwait	Male	35	Clergy

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Challenges and survival: Armenian communities in rural areas of Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq¹

Tatevik Manukyan (IOS NAS RA)

Araks Pashayan (IOS NAS RA)

The Armenian communities of the Arab countries of the Middle East live in the capitals, in some cases in big cities and rare in rural towns and villages. Ainjar in Lebanon and Kessab in Syria are rural towns, while Havzrek and Avzruk in Iraqi Kurdistan are villages. We have referred to the current trends in preserving Armenian identity in the mentioned settlements. Many Armenian communities in the Middle East, including rural settlements, have lost their former significance. As a rule, the Armenian communities of the region have weakened, thinned out, and "aged" during recent decades. In parallel, some Armenian settlements, including rural ones, are in recent new rearrangements, such as in Iraq. Armenian Middle Eastern communities have seen internal and external migration processes and economic problems because of non-stop wars and instability in the region. The study aims to analyze the impact of internal and external factors on national life and the prospects of Armenian rural settlements.

Keywords: *Ainjar, Kessab, Havzrek, Avzruk, Iraqi Kurdistan, Armenian Middle Eastern communities.*

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, the Armenian communities in the Arab countries of the Middle East began to transform. The number of Armenians began to decrease regularly, which was related to the geopolitical

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realities of the region, in particular the Arab-Israeli wars (1948-1973), the Lebanese civil wars (1958, 1975-1990), the Islamic revolution in Iran (1978-1979), the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq (1990), the invasion of Iraq by the USA (2003), the "Arab Spring" processes (since 2010-2011), as well as the changes in the social and political perceptions of national minorities in these countries.

After ISIS attacked Mosul in 2014, the Armenian community in Mosul ceased to exist. Armenian communities of Baghdad and Basra also suffered greatly (Pashayan 2010). Later, the Iraqi-Armenian community weakened significantly due to the emigration that began. The community was turned upside down, but the other found itself again ("Voice of the Diaspora" 2024).

The Syrian Armenian community also suffered as a result of the Syrian crisis, and the mother community of Aleppo lost its former importance. To seek a more comfortable life regarding internal emigration, socio-economics, and security, the Armenian communities of the Gulf were replenished due to internal migration. Armenian communities in the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia became active. The emigration of Armenians who lived in the Middle East after the Armenian Genocide took place due to several factors, including wars and social, economic, and security problems. One of the most dramatic developments related to the Armenian communities in the Middle East was associated with the invasion of Iraq by the USA.

The invasion of Iraq by the USA laid the foundation for the start of deep new processes in the region; within the Armenian communities of the Middle East, including the Arab countries, difficulties related to the preservation of Armenians were intensified, which were connected with the growing influence of globalization, the increasing rates of emigration of Christians preserving Armenian identity, mixed marriages, the decline of

interest in preserving Armenian identity, and the weakening of national activity. With the decline of interest in Armenian, the weakening of national activity, many mistakes made in the organization of national life, socio-economic difficulties, and other reasons.

Armenian rural towns of Syria and Lebanon. Current challenges

The Armenian communities of Syria and Lebanon have a religious character. The church has a significant role in community life: apostolic, catholic, and evangelical. As a rule, schools and various educational institutions support the preservation of Armenian identity. In Syria and Lebanon, traditional Armenian parties' sports, cultural, and charity branches, including women's unions and community councils, organize community life. The Kessabians and the Ainjarians are descended from the same region, coinciding with the geographical boundaries of historical Cilicia. The Armenian population of the area stands out for its hard work, devotion to Armenian roots, similar customs, a dialect that is very different from literary Armenian, the implementation of the harissa ritual, etc.

It can be said that no internal problems threaten the Armenian identity in Kessab and Ainjar. The ethnic population speaks Armenian, the education is in Armenian, and there are few mixed marriages. Kessab and Ainjar are located in picturesque areas of Syria and Lebanon. Kessab is situated on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, while Ainjar is in the Bekaa Valley. Both rural towns have always been essential hubs for tourism and entertainment, as well as strongholds of scout movement and summer vacations. Armenian education, culture, and urban development have grown significantly in Kessab and Ainjar for decades. The ontological security and socio-economic problems have become more acute in recent years. The Armenian national structures made maximum efforts to organize the

Armenian national life properly. Both in Ainjar during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1989) and in Kessab during the Syrian War (2011 to date), the security of rural towns was also protected by local forces, including Armenian youth.

Although the rural Armenian cities have received support from the state and the Armenian national organizations of the Diaspora and Armenia, that is not enough for a stable and continuous national life because the perspective of the communities is directly related to the stability of the given country.

Both Ainjar and Kessab are tourist hubs and can be greatly developed if the wars stop. Still, there is no reason for such optimism shortly, considering the current tense situation in the Middle East.

The problems of Armenian identity in Kessab: current trends

It is a fact that the events of the "Arab Spring" that started in 2011 radically changed Syria, contributing to the mass emigration of a large number of Syrian citizens, including Armenians. The Armenian community of Aleppo suffered the most from the events of the "Arab Spring"; the Armenian communities of Damascus, Latakia, Qamishli, and Kessab were significantly sustained in 2014. On September 21, 2014, the "Islamic State" blew up the Armenian Church of the Martyrs of Deir El Zor (Musayelyan 2014), which was built in memory of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide. Armenian pilgrimages to Deir El Zor stopped. Before the events of the "Arab Spring," there were already security and other concerns in Kessab due to the increasing number of Muslims. In addition, Muslims also bought plots in Kessab. In 1972, Hafez Asad built a Sunni mosque in the town, which led to the development of a specific religious environment around it. In a conversation with us, historian Gevorg Yazichyan mentioned that in 2005, during his work in Kessab, he got acquainted with several points of view that

Armenians should leave Syria, including Kessab. According to those views, Armenians already have an independent homeland, the Republic of Armenia. Kessab's peaceful life in Syria continued until 2011. On March 21, 2014, radical militant groups "Jabhat al-Nusra" and "Jaish al-Islam" attacked Kessab from eight points on the Turkish border (Lucas 2014).

Kessab comprises 12 villages, including Kessab township. In the past, Kessab had a more significant number of churches. However, only three churches are operational: the Armenian Apostolic S. Astvatsatsin Church, Kesapi Armenian Evangelical St. Trinity Church, and the Armenian Catholic St. Michael Church (Horizon Weekly 2014).

The Armenians of Kessab left and settled in Latakia for about three months. Armenian homes and national institutions were looted without exception, and almost all churches were damaged. There were also victims, including young people who were unable to leave. The Syrian army liberated Kessab on June 15, 2014. Most of the population returned, but emigration has increased since then.

Shogher Ashegryan, an intellectual from Kessab and a researcher of Armenian communities in Arab countries, mentioned that 1,000 people are currently living in Kessab. Their strong Armenian identity distinguishes those who live in Kessab and have no desire to leave Kessab.

In a conversation with us, Saply Saghdejian, a former resident of Kessab, mentioned that young people have been staying in Kessab for up to eighteen years. They then leave for Gulf countries, Canada, the USA, Europe, etc., to receive education and find a job.

Challenges facing the Armenian identity in Ainjar: current Trends

Ainjar was established in 1939 as a result of the forced resettlement of the population of six villages from Musa Dağ (Mount Musa) in the Sanjak

of Alexandrette to Lebanon under harsh conditions by the French Mandate authorities.

Nowadays, Ainjar has a municipal council, and the current mayor is Armenian Vardges Khoshyan. The ARF "Red Mountain" committee also handles internal issues. Ainjar is considered Armenian; it is one of the most prosperous villages in Lebanon. It is the only rural town in Bekaa that was built with a straightforward architectural design, with districts named after the six villages of Musa Dağ. The Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, and Evangelical communities cooperate and hold annual joint events, such as Vardanants, May 28 Independence Day, April 24, Musa Dağ celebration, etc. (Chanpazian 2023). The Armenian Catholic community celebrates the Holy Mother of God, while the Armenian Apostolic Church organizes the Khachverats festival. Most of the community members are followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The majority of the population are sympathizers or members of the ARF.

There is an Armenian Catholic community in Ainjar. The community has its lycee and organizations, including the People's Council, the Union of Church-loving Ladies, the Armenian Catholic Youth Union, and the Heboyan Choir. The Catholic community has 90 families (approximately 350 individuals) (Vatican News 2014).

The Armenian Evangelical Church of Ainjar was established in 1939. Adjacent to the church are the operational Women's Union, Christian "Janit" youth, and youth associations. The Armenian Evangelical Secondary School of Ainjar has achieved national national and international recognition.

In conversation with us, intellectual Hovhannes Khoshyan discussed the Armenian population in Ainjar. He stated that in the summer, when Ainjar residents in Beirut come to Ainjar, the population reaches 5000-5500. In winter, the number decreases to 2600-2700. Several Sunni groups exist in

the Bekaa Valley, but no significant security issues exist. The village is capable of defending itself. More concerning is the ongoing trend of young people leaving the village and the "aging" of Ainjar.

Armenian villages in Iraqi Kurdistan: current trends

In 2003, the Iraqi-Armenian community encountered significant challenges due to the American invasion and security issues in the country. Before this, Armenians mainly lived in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Bakuba, Erbil, Kirkuk, and other areas, which held significant historical importance (Aghpashian 2021). However, individual Armenian settlements lost their significance or weakened considerably. Some sub-groups were revitalized in response, especially in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In 2014, after the capture of Mosul by the "Islamic State," the violence that took place there, the destruction of churches, or their conversion into mosques, the local Armenians left the city or had gone before that. Some of them moved to Iraqi Kurdistan or emigrated from the country.

Sargis Aghajan, a member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, was an Assyrian politician who served as the deputy prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan from 2004 to 2006. He built small settlements for about two dozen families from different settlements in Al-Koush settlement, located 45 km from Mosul and named Aghajan (Pashayan 2010).

In 2014, when ISIS occupied the village, the Armenian population had already left. Later, the Iraqi army occupied the town, but the Armenians did not return. The army uses the houses, but the Armenian leadership of Baghdad owns the village.

In a conversation, the Consul of the General Consulate of RA in Iraqi Kurdistan, Andranik Harutyunyan, mentioned that around 3000 Armenians live there. The community consists of two parts. The first part consists of Armenians who escaped the Armenian Genocide in the 1920s and settled in

the northwestern areas of Iraqi Kurdistan: Zakho region (about 1,200) and Dohuk province (about 600). In Dohuk province, there are two Armenian villages, Havrezk and Avzruk, with a population of about 300-350 (Manukyan 2023).

Avzruk was established in 1932 by the Armenians of Zakho. It is situated in the province of Dohuk, explicitly bridging the connection between Zakho and Dohuk. Before 1975, the village consisted of two parts: Armenian (Avzruk Miri) and Assyrian (Avzruk Shno). It was inhabited by Kurdish-speaking Armenians and Assyrians, who had a mutually beneficial relationship. Saddam Hussein's government displaced the population of Avzruk and Hawrezk, and Arabs were resettled in their place. The Armenian population returned to Avzruk in 1996. In 2001, St. Vardan Church was constructed and renovated ten years later. Avzruk also houses a Sunday school and a district council. The Armenians in Avzruk share a similar way of life with the Kurds; they speak Kurdish but maintain an Armenian identity (Pashayan 2010). Young people from here seek employment in Zakho and neighboring towns, as agriculture is not their primary occupation.

Havrezk was re-established in 2005 and is home to urban-dwelling, Armenian-speaking Iraqi-Armenians. The village has a Sunday school and a Community Council. Notably, Havrezk was founded in 1928 by Levon Pasha Shaghoyan, a participant in the heroic battle of Vaspurakan, to provide a settlement for Armenians who were survivors of the Armenian Genocide (Pashayan 2010). In the late 1970s, during Saddam Hussein's rule, the Armenian population was forced out of the village due to clashes between the state and Kurdish military units. Many settlements in the northern border region were also depopulated during this time. Sargis Aghajan later reestablished Havrezk, and through his efforts, 115 houses were constructed in the village. (Kotchikian 2016).

In Havrezk, there is the Saint Sargis Armenian Church, which underwent renovations in 2012 by the non-governmental organization Gapn. Havrezk does not have private land because, in 1975, after being displaced, the majority of the population sold their land to local Kurds. The Consul A. Harutyunyan informed us that the road to the village was in poor condition until recently, and repair works are underway. The village's population is decreasing due to the socioeconomic situation. In contrast, the situation in Avzruk seems more promising, considering its land ownership. International and local organizations and the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia in Erbil occasionally provide humanitarian aid to needy Armenians in the villages. (Manukyan 2023).

Conclusion

Following the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian communities in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq thrived and contributed significantly to the social and economic life of these countries. However, they faced challenges due to political and economic crises at different times. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the "Arab Spring" events had significant impacts on the transformation of Armenian communities in rural areas.

Emigration revitalized Armenian sub-centers in Iraqi Kurdistan, while others like Ainjar and Kesab have been weakened.

Unstable political and socio-economic situations and wars in the Middle East, the awakening of radical Islamic movements and groups, the growth of the Turkish factor in the region, and the continuous emigration of Christians from the Middle East blur the perspective of Armenian communities in the Middle East. The most pessimistic reality is the further departure of Armenian youth from Armenian rural settlements, including Kessab and Ainjar. Especially young people do not see any prospects for themselves. In particular, the communities in Kessab and Ainjar are "aging."

Many domestic difficulties have also arisen in recent years (lack of electricity, gas, fuel, water, high prices of necessary goods, and related issues).

The rural settlements in Iraqi Kurdistan are not promising due to concerns about Kurdization, security, and political and social issues.

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The Armenian Communities of the Middle East in the First Quarter of the 21st Century

Antranik Dakessian (Haigazian University, Beirut)

The disappearance of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the enhanced process of globalization, the internet, and other global developments caused the world order to shift from bipolar to a unipolar system. This stage of world remodeling coincided with the end of the war in Lebanon. It led the leading Middle East Armenian community¹ to rid itself of the constraints of war. My paper will view various aspects of the condition of the Armenian community of Lebanon and its neighboring communities during the 1990-2020 period. It will draw a broad comparison between the pre-Genocide and current conditions of these communities and recommend a draft strategy for the next two decades.

***Keywords:** Armenian communities, identity, ethnic preservation, integration, transnationalism, leadership, Middle East turmoil, Pre-Genocide Armenian Communities.*

The Armenian Community of Lebanon in 1990-2020

One cannot deny the fact that the Armenian community of Lebanon gave impetus and a unique model to the Armenians of the Middle East. It inspired the neighboring Armenian communities in their efforts for survival and identity preservation. But the community came out of the 15-year-long war of Lebanon at a time when a) Soviet Armenia leaped towards independence and full sovereignty, b) the indigenous Armenian population

¹ Among the said communities, perhaps the Armenian community of Iran was the least affected by the developments in Lebanon.

of the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region launched its self-determination struggle¹, c) the Armenian Diaspora had undergone a demographic reshuffling, d) the Armenian communities of the Middle East had lost their numerical weight, were financially and economically impoverished, and other Diaspora Armenian communities were contesting the national-cultural leadership of the region (Dakessian 2024).

The 1990-2020 period was a time of political, economic, and security instability and fluctuations in the Middle East and Lebanon (Messerlian 2014). Short periods of recovery and growth could not compensate for the losses caused during the instability, insecurity, and economic decline that raged through Lebanon during that same period. The Lebanese Armenian community had limited means to reset and reconstruct itself (Messerlian 2014). It could not take basic, deep steps to reorganize and reshape itself. It could not adequately situate, fit, and accommodate itself in the Armenian Diaspora space. It could not connect effectively with the republics of Armenia and Artsakh and barely succeeded in locating itself in the newly shaped Lebanese political scene.

The community shortcomings and failures of the 1960-75 period resurfaced. It became obvious that: a) The leadership had not thought sufficiently about the likelihood of dark days and had neither contingency plans nor ways of addressing such cases. b) They had not made any long-term and far-reaching plans for Armenian preservation. c) On the contrary, the leadership had continued in educating the younger generations with conventional, primordial, but not contemporary Armenianism. d) The partisan identity inculcated in the 1930s to 1950s was not transformed into

¹ Both the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh were to become the new resource and inspiration for the Armenian Diaspora.

an overarching Diaspora Armenian identity. These were to have heavy consequences for the community when new generations appeared on stage.

The Lebanese Armenian community succeeded in taking partial reconstructive steps. It could not, however, contain and incorporate the Kuwaiti-Iraqi-Syrian Armenian refugee inflows. Currently, notwithstanding the fact that it still is the mainstream Armenian community in the Middle East, it is profoundly weak, not self-sufficient in its Armenian sphere, and continues to contract.

Parallels with Pre-Genocide Armenian Communities of the Middle East

How do the current Armenians of the Middle East differ from those living in the same area during the pre-Genocide period?

- a) The pre-Genocide Armenians of the region lived in a single state, the Ottoman Empire. Currently, the Armenians live in separate independent states. Accordingly, they have become a transnational community in the Middle East.
- b) During those days the Church was the basic institution and authority, unlike the current phase where parties, organizations, societies, etc. constitute other institutions of authority. Thus, there is a plurality within the current regional Armenian civil society 'membership' (Suleiman 1967; El-Khazen 2000).
- c) In contrast to the pre-Genocide relative stability, since 1948 the Middle East has been a witness of interstate wars, domestic coup d'états, short-lived socio-economic state projects, failed socio-political reform programs, unfortunate "Arab Springs", etc. (Fawaz 2024)

d) The number of Armenians in these states has increased compared to their pre-Genocide numbers. However, their percentage vis-à-vis the indigenous population has dwindled immensely¹.

e) The Pre-Genocide Armenian was a conservative Ottoman citizen, barely influenced by foreign internationalizing factors. Being an Ottoman limited his Armenian identity and restricted his national vision. Religion separated him from non-Christians but not from other Christian millets. His worries revolved around his daily life and security. The factors of Armenian preservation were his dreams, and his conservatism came from whatever the millet system and lifestyle offered. He had a limited world and lived in a unique ghetto like all the other citizens of the Ottoman Empire. The exception was his workplace, where he used to be in contact - due to economic reasons - with others.

f) As the fourth post-Genocide generation, the current Middle East Armenians are facing uncertainty. They swing between localism, Armenianism, and internationalism. As for identity (Kandaharian and Babikian 2018), they are the virtual and unconscious heirs of their own communities' legacy (added to their conventional/historical Armenian heritage). This legacy has reflected a process of exemplary, competitive, and extensive growth, yet a steep falling off too. They were confidently proud of witnessing the growth of two Armenian republics but were disappointed in the fate of the Artsakh Republic. The factors that preserved their Armenianism were superficial and conservative. The Church was not the critical factor that connected them firmly to the nation any more. Their daily lives, and 90 percent of their active time, had nothing to do with Armenian issues. Both the Diaspora leadership and scholars did not offer them a

¹ Currently not a single Armenian community of the Middle East has maintained its population numbers of the 1960s.

practical modern roadmap for Armenian preservation. Their efforts for preserving Armenian identity did not have the lion's share of their commitment vis-à-vis existential imperatives. They monitored any part of the globe that attracted their attention or interested them and focused on non-Armenian topics more than on Armenian issues. Currently they live in the bubble of their hobbies and follow the trends, which may not necessarily contain Armenian elements or have Armenian connections.

Some Draft Recommendations

Notwithstanding this conflicting and difficult situation, there are a number of factors that the Armenians may capitalize on and leverage the transformation of the Middle East Armenian communities. These factors may enhance their preservation, growth, and community reproduction. I will highlight only three such factors.

- 1) In the above comparison, we mentioned the existence of organizations next to the church. One may disagree on defining the status, functionality, and effectiveness of the Church and the Diaspora organizations. Surely, however, by and large there is a consensus that these organizations/institutions need essential reshaping, revising, and redefining of their *raison d'être*. Such a transformation (with newly defined agendas and strategies) may revitalize them to claim a pivotal role in the Diaspora communities (Der-Karabetian 2018).
- 2) It is absolutely unrealistic to expect full Armenian commitment in the Diaspora. It seems, similar to the cosmopolitan world, a significant portion of the Diaspora Armenians basically live with a virtual commitment. These Armenians have been shaped by the 30-year-long socializing mechanisms of social media and fit into current life trends and cultural vogues.

The modern call is basically in the hands of social media, where one can shape professional and interest networks. Such media may orient Armenians who do not have Armenian interests into the networks of diverse hobbies and apolitical interests, like arts, ecotourism, hiking, biking, rugs, antiques, nature, etc.¹ It is surprising that Armenians were instrumental in launching a number of newspapers in the Diaspora. Strangely, however, these same Armenians are slow in launching social media networks! (Sayegh and Mangassarian-Grogan 2024)

- 3) In the above comparison, there has been no mention of an extremely important factor: the very existence of the Republic of Armenia. For decades and during the Iron Curtain years, the Lebanese Armenian community was the inspiration and the rainbow - for the Middle East Armenian communities and beyond. Currently, however, the Republic of Armenia may become the inspiration and hope of the Armenian space. This is further underpinned by the fact that there are no more mediators in the current Armenia-Diaspora relations. One needs to make the best use of the very existence of this republic and use its positive soft power to leverage and further energize both the Diaspora and the citizens of the Armenian Republic. During the first decades of the post-Genocide period, larger numbers of individuals were committed and involved in survival and preservation efforts than today. The Republic of Armenia and all those in the Armenian space who are committed to Armenian affairs have a better understanding of the unique role the Republic can play and should make good use of its strategic soft power.

¹ One may remind the reader that the Armenians were quick, for instance, to see the advantages of technology. Indeed, not more than six decades after the invention of the printing press, the first Armenian printed book came to life in 1512.

Conclusion

To conclude, one needs to behave strategically using the available Armenian soft power in order to survive with the least losses in the current crises of the world order and maintain the human message of the Armenian nation to humankind.

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The Syrian crisis and its implications for the Armenian community

Grigor Vardanyan (IOS NAS RA)

The Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, has severely impacted the Armenian community, once numbering around 90,000 in cities like Aleppo and Damascus. The conflict has triggered significant emigration to countries such as the USA, Canada, and various European nations, highlighting the crisis's human and geopolitical ramifications. Despite these challenges, Armenia and Syria maintain a complex political relationship focused on mutual interests and cooperation across various sectors. The Armenian community in Syria continues to serve as a vital cultural and diplomatic link between the two nations. This introduction outlines the community's struggles during the crisis, the dynamics of Armenia-Syria relations, and ongoing humanitarian efforts, emphasizing the historical importance of Aleppo to Armenian identity and the future challenges ahead.

Keywords: *Syrian crisis, Syrian Armenian community, Bashar Al-Assad, Armenia's Humanitarian Demining and Medical Service Mission, Auschwitz of the Armenian genocide.*

Introduction

The Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, has profoundly affected the Armenian community in Syria, and since the eruption of the conflict, thousands have emigrated. This paper examines the complex relationship between Armenia and Syria, emphasizing Armenia's diplomatic and humanitarian support for the Syrian Armenian community amidst ongoing turmoil. It highlights the political collaboration between the two nations, rooted in mutual interests and cooperation in international organizations, as well as the crucial role played by the Armenian community in fostering these ties. Despite recent improvements in security conditions in cities like

Damascus and Aleppo, socio-economic challenges persist, exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 and continued emigration. The paper details Armenia's humanitarian initiatives, including aid deliveries and a demining mission in Aleppo, which have benefited both Armenians and other communities. Additionally, it reflects on the historical significance of Aleppo for Armenians and the community's integration into Syrian society. Ultimately, the narrative underscores the importance of Aleppo in the Armenian collective consciousness and the broader implications of the Syrian conflict on Armenian identity and diaspora. The conclusion calls for enhanced collaboration among Armenian organizations to preserve this cultural heritage and ensure the community's future in a post-conflict Syria.

The Armenian Community Pre-Crisis

The Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, has significantly disrupted the daily lives of the Armenian community in Syria. Prior to the conflict, the Armenian population was approximately 90,000, predominantly located in Aleppo, Damascus, Qamishli, and Latakia. The ongoing crisis has led to the emigration of thousands of Armenians to countries such as the USA, Canada, various European nations, Armenia, and the Gulf Arab states. In this complex regional context, Syria remains a battleground for competing international interests, prompting Armenia to adopt flexible political strategies to sustain its bilateral relations within the CIS and pursue potential advancements.

Political Relations between Armenia and Syria: The Role of the Armenian Community

The political relationship between Armenia and the Syrian Arab Republic is anchored in the promotion of Armenia's national interests. In recent years, a broad array of bilateral cooperation has been discussed, encompassing political, inter-parliamentary, economic, cultural, scientific,

and educational matters. Armenia and Syria collaborate within international organizations, with Syria providing unconditional support to Armenia. In return, Syria seeks Armenia's backing in these organizations to counter any anti-Syrian resolutions, particularly concerning human rights and allegations of chemical weapon usage. It is worth noting that Armenia consistently supports Syria's stance, maintaining a balanced and impartial position. The Armenian community in Syria has played a vital and constructive role in strengthening Armenian-Syrian relations and continues to do so despite its diminished numbers. This community serves as a unique bridge between the two nations. On September 24, 2023, during the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan met with Faisal Al-Mikdad, Syria's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora. The ministers discussed the enhancement of bilateral relations, grounded in their longstanding friendship, and explored future cooperation in mutually beneficial areas. They highlighted the significant role of the Syrian Armenian community in fostering ties between Armenia and Syria, acknowledging its resilience amidst the hardships of the Syrian crisis.

On November 15, President Bashar Al-Assad welcomed a delegation led by Hakob Arshakyan, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia. In his remarks, President Assad affirmed that Syria regards Armenians as integral to its state and societal fabric, expressing solidarity with Armenia regarding its challenges. The Republic of Armenia has consistently collaborated with various structures and organizations representing the Syrian Armenian community. Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, Armenia has provided substantial humanitarian assistance, much of which has been directed towards the Armenian community. It is important to highlight that throughout the crisis, Armenia maintained its two diplomatic missions in Syria, particularly the Consulate General in Aleppo, to offer

maximum support to compatriots in distress—both through consular services and, more importantly, through psychological and moral support.

Overall, an assessment of the Syrian Armenian community's situation over recent years reveals an extremely challenging socio-economic and morale-psychological landscape. While active hostilities have subsided in Damascus and Aleppo and terrorist threats have diminished, community engagement has not recovered. This stagnation can be attributed to the widespread impact of COVID-19 and insufficient basic sanitation. Consequently, community events and gatherings have significantly declined compared to previous years, with only a few modest workshops taking place.

Year on year, the conditions in Damascus and the broader Syrian Armenian community appear increasingly concerning. Systematic emigration from Syria is ongoing, with many young people, especially those of military age, having already left the country. This trend has coincided with a rise in mixed marriages and a decreasing number of Armenian students and teachers in Armenian schools.

Humanitarian Aid Initiative and Demining Mission in Syria

Since the onset of the Syrian crisis, Armenia has actively engaged with humanitarian and international organizations to provide assistance. Beginning in 2014, Armenia has consistently delivered humanitarian aid to the Syrian populace affected by the conflict, especially to those displaced from their homes. The peak of this humanitarian response occurred between 2016 and 2018, during which Armenia dispatched over 300 tons of aid—including food, medical supplies, and warm winter clothing—to regions impacted by military operations, benefiting not only Armenians but other communities as well.

Since 2019, the Republic of Armenia's Humanitarian Demining and Medical Service Mission, known as the "Humanitarian Demining and Expert

Center," has been operational in Syria (Danielyan 2019). To date, the mission has conducted nine rotations, with personnel stationed in a repurposed former school building in Aleppo's relatively secure Maysaloun district. Demining operations are undertaken in the suburbs of Aleppo in areas free from military activity and are coordinated with Russian military forces. Thus far, the humanitarian mission has cleared over 1,200,000 square meters of mined land in Aleppo province, neutralizing approximately 580 improvised and factory-made explosives, while the medical team has provided care to more than 50,000 residents in five hospitals across Aleppo.

It is important to highlight an initial ambivalence regarding the Armenian humanitarian mission among the local population of Aleppo. Some members of the non-Armenian community viewed the mission as a military presence meant to protect Armenians. However, through sustained outreach and explanation, the perception has improved significantly. The high-quality professional services rendered by Armenian doctors have garnered positive responses from both the residents of Aleppo city and the wider province.

In conclusion, it is vital to enhance collaboration with all spiritual and secular organizations within the Syrian Armenian community, not only at the embassy level but also across various Armenian state bodies (Gevorgyan).

This perspective, articulated by Khachig Mouradian (Mouradian 2017), highlights the significant impact of the Syrian war on Armenian communities and underscores the importance of Aleppo in the broader Armenian narrative. "I hesitate to draw a clear distinction between the experiences of Syrian Armenians and those of Syrians more broadly. Such a separation would not only be historically inaccurate but also unjust to the Armenian community itself. Following the Armenian genocide, the Syrian

Armenian community became deeply integrated into the social, cultural, and political life of Syria. The devastation wrought by the ongoing war has profoundly disrupted this community fabric, making it difficult to envision a return to the pre-war state of Syria. Regardless of when the conflict concludes or the extent of future reconstruction efforts, it is hard to imagine that the Armenian community in Syria will ever resemble its former size or vitality.

Before the war, Aleppo served as a vital center for Armenian community life, not only before and during the genocide but also in its aftermath. It significantly contributed to the broader cultural and political landscape of Syria through its writers, musicians, and cultural productions. A century ago, Armenians in Syria, particularly in Aleppo, played a crucial role in rescuing thousands of Armenian children and deportees, helping to establish the modern Armenian diaspora. Many Armenians were forced to flee from places like Deir El Zor, which is infamously known as the “Auschwitz of the Armenian Genocide,” where countless Armenians lost their lives. Today, this area has no remaining Armenians, and the memorial dedicated to the genocide has been destroyed.

In Aleppo, a considerable proportion of the Armenian community has departed, with many relocating to Armenia, several thousand to Lebanon, and others migrating to Europe and Canada. In Kessab, the Armenian community has been compelled to evacuate, a situation that has repercussions extending beyond Syria's borders. Historically, Aleppo has been regarded as a “mother community,” nurturing intellectuals, educators, writers, and leaders who have shaped the Armenian diaspora across the Middle East and beyond. The war's impact on this community will inevitably reverberate throughout Armenian communities worldwide.

It is crucial to consider the future, acknowledging that a life without Aleppo would be profoundly detrimental—indeed, nearly impossible. The lessons of the genocide underscore that certain geographical locations are intricately linked to the Armenian collective psyche and their determination to rebuild. It is difficult to envision an Armenian diaspora that does not look to Aleppo for cultural sustenance and as a symbol of resilience. If Syria is to recover, it must do so through the collective efforts of all its children, with Armenians being an integral part of that process.

Conclusion

The Syrian crisis has fundamentally reshaped the landscape for the Armenian community, which has seen its population shrink and its cultural vibrancy diminish. Despite these challenges, the political and humanitarian relationship between Armenia and Syria remains crucial, with Armenia providing ongoing support and assistance to its compatriots in Syria. The Armenian community acts as a crucial link between the two nations, fostering diplomatic ties and cultural exchange. Armenia's humanitarian initiatives, including aid efforts and demining missions, reflect a commitment to addressing the community's needs amid ongoing instability. Aleppo's historical significance as a cultural heart for Armenians underscores the challenges of envisioning a future without it. The city's legacy as a center of Armenian life must be preserved, as it is integral to the community's identity. Moving forward, it is essential for Armenian organizations to unite in efforts to safeguard this heritage and support the community's resilience. Ultimately, the recovery of Syria will hinge on the contributions of all its communities, with Armenians playing a vital role in rebuilding a shared future. Protecting and revitalizing the Armenian presence in Syria is not only essential for their survival but also for the broader

Armenian diaspora, ensuring that their cultural narrative endures in the face of adversity.

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The Features of Armenia-Egypt Relations during the Presidency of Abdel Fattah Al- Sisi

Gor Gevorgyan (IOS NAS RA)

The current geopolitical developments have expanded the boundaries of the Middle Eastern region, creating a platform for global political and economic interests. It is no coincidence that the area stretching from Morocco to Pakistan is often viewed through a single, unified lens. In this regard, Egypt's interests in the region and the Egyptian-Armenian relations, ranging from the Armenian community life of Egypt to the establishment of interstate relations, are of particular interest.

Keywords: *Diplomatic relations, Armenian community of Egypt, Armenia, Egypt, Abdel Fattah Al- Sisi.*

Introduction

The South Caucasus has historically been integrated into the Middle East. Recent geopolitical developments often present similar strategic challenges for both the Middle East and the South Caucasus. In this context, the evolving relationship between Armenia and Egypt is particularly noteworthy. The bilateral ties between these two nations encompass various sectors, with significant emphasis on scientific and educational collaboration, economic partnerships, and health initiatives. Additionally, their cooperation in public service experience-sharing is of great importance. The presence and influence of the Armenian community in Egypt—within social, educational, cultural, and occasionally political spheres—further exemplify the trust and mutual support that characterize the relationship between Armenia and Egypt.

The Egyptian-Armenian Community and the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Armenia and Egypt

The Armenian community in Egypt is divided into Apostolic and Catholic sections, each with its own governance structures. The Apostolic community is overseen by the diocesan and political congregations of Cairo and Alexandria, led by the bishop of the Diocese of Egypt. It operates three churches in Cairo and two in Alexandria, as well as two schools in Cairo and one in Alexandria, serving approximately 250 students. The Catholic Armenian community, numbering around 300, is managed by the leader of the Armenian Catholic Diocese of Egypt and Sudan. Most members of this community do not speak Armenian and have two churches in Cairo and one in Alexandria. Notably, the Armenian Catholic community also runs the prestigious School of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Cairo, which enrolls about 2,500 students, primarily Egyptians, though Armenian language instruction is not offered.

Armenian-Egyptian relations are integral to the broader context of developments in the Middle East and the South Caucasus. Both Armenia and Egypt are positioned within the geographic and political framework of the "Greater Middle East." Among the Arab nations that maintain friendly ties with Armenia, Egypt is particularly notable due to its significant regional influence, long-standing role in the Arab world, and a rich historical legacy of friendship between the Armenian and Egyptian peoples (Vardanyan 2021, 239).

The Armenian community in Egypt, though numerically small, has historically been one of the largest and most prominent Diasporas, serving as a stable conduit for Armenia-Egypt relations (Hovyan 2015, 87-89). Diplomatic relations between Armenia and Egypt were formally established in March 1992, with the Armenian Embassy in Cairo opening in September

of the same year and Egypt establishing its embassy in Yerevan in April 1993 (sis.gov.eg 2012).

Strengthening Armenia-Egypt Interstate Relations

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, numerous high-level visits have occurred, including several visits by Armenian presidents to Egypt and a visit by the Egyptian Prime Minister to Armenia in 1992. Over four dozen agreements, protocols, and memoranda of understanding have been signed, laying a robust legal foundation for cooperation across multiple sectors (Koloyan-Keuhnelian 2022). In 1993, Egypt established a fund for technical cooperation with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), aimed at enhancing relations with newly independent countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From 1993 to 2010, over 1,500 Armenian specialists in fields such as diplomacy, security, and internal affairs participated in training programs organized by this fund in Egypt (mfa.am; Egypt - Bilateral Relations).

Noteworthy progress in Armenian-Egyptian relations was observed between 2005 and 2010, marked by the first visit of an Armenian Prime Minister to Egypt in 2005 and the subsequent official visit of the Armenian President in 2007 after a 15-year hiatus (mfa.am 2020). Egypt's neutral and impartial stance on the Artsakh issue has also been significant in shaping Armenian-Egyptian relations. This position has afforded Armenia a more reliable political backing in its dealings with other Arab nations, allowing it to reference Egypt's official neutrality as a form of support. Efforts to fortify bilateral relations continued in 2005, marked by the signing of a memorandum between the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Arab states. Furthermore, in 2008, the Armenian Ambassador to Egypt was also appointed as the Plenipotentiary Representative to the League of Arab States, underscoring Armenia's engagement with this vital Arab organization. To

enhance trade and economic cooperation, an "Agreement on the Avoidance of Double Taxation" was signed during the official visit of Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Margaryan to Egypt in 2005 (Armenpress.am 2005). In 2007, a partnership agreement was established between the Union of Industrialists and Businessmen of Armenia and the Association of Egyptian Businessmen. The initiation of charter flights between the two countries in 2008 further facilitated tourism and bolstered economic ties.

The Center for Armenian Studies at Cairo University: A Pillar of Bilateral Relations

In 2007, efforts to strengthen relations between Armenia and Egypt culminated in the establishment of the Armenian Studies Center at the Faculty of Philology, Cairo University. This initiative holds particular significance as Cairo University is the largest educational institution in the Middle East, with approximately 250,000 students. By 2008, the center began offering courses in the Armenian language and the history of the Armenian people, fulfilling a crucial role in fostering cooperation between the two nations and promoting Armenian-Arab friendship (Karapetyan, 5).

Notably, the Armenian government allocated funding for the Armenian Studies Center for the first time in its state budget, highlighting its commitment to this initiative. Since its inception, the center has received both material and moral support from the Armenian Prefects of Cairo and Alexandria, as well as from the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU).

The year 2011 posed significant challenges for Egypt's international relations with the onset of the "Arab Spring," which severely impacted the stability of the Egyptian government. However, following the rise of President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in 2013, there was a gradual effort to restore

Egypt's influence in the region. Sisi emphasized the importance of all nations with which Egypt maintains diplomatic relations, underscoring the relevance of its relationship with Armenia.

Current Realities of Bilateral Relations

On January 28, 2023, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi made a historic two-day visit to Armenia, arriving from Azerbaijan. This marked the first occasion on which an influential leader from the Arab world visited Armenia. The timing of this visit was particularly critical, occurring amidst the complex post-war realities following the 44-day Artsakh war, which included Azerbaijani threats to Armenia, the encirclement of Artsakh, and ongoing humanitarian crises, such as the detention of Armenian prisoners in Azerbaijan.

During his discussions in both Azerbaijan and Armenia, President Al-Sisi maintained a balanced position regarding the Artsakh conflict. While Azerbaijan promoted the notion of Islamic solidarity, the Egyptian leader emphasized the importance of resolving conflicts through peaceful means and negotiations, advocating for dialogue over confrontation. This evolving relationship reflects a commitment to mutual understanding and cooperation, underscoring the significance of cultural and diplomatic exchanges between Armenia and Egypt in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

Conclusion

From 1991 to 2023, Armenian-Egyptian political relations have shown positive dynamics. However, the same cannot be said for the development of economic ties between the two nations. The lack of adequate logistical transportation options has hindered the realization of expected commercial and economic potential.

Armenia and Egypt should explore opportunities for cooperation within a broader regional framework, emphasizing the concept of a "dialogue of civilizations," which can serve as a powerful instrument of soft power.

It is noteworthy that few Islamic countries have seen Armenians occupy significant political positions throughout history while simultaneously earning the respect and trust of the local society. The historical and cultural contributions of Armenians in Egypt are substantial and form an integral part of the nation's history.

Once logistical challenges between Armenia and Egypt are addressed, bilateral trade volumes are likely to increase, enabling Armenia to access the African market through Egypt.

Armenia should adopt a proactive foreign policy in the Middle East, recognizing both the challenges and opportunities present, particularly in light of the recent establishment of diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Overall, strengthening ties with Arab nations should be a priority in Armenia's foreign policy, where existing friendly relations with Egypt can significantly advance Armenian national interests.

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Analysis of the economic relations between the Gulf countries and Armenia: the role of diaspora

Vilen Mnatsakanian (Russian-Armenian University)

The development of multilateral economic relations for small, open countries is one of the priorities for long-term economic growth. Taking into account the geographical and economic characteristics of the Republic of Armenia, it is important to consider the possibilities of developing such relations with Arab countries. In this study, the author conducted a comprehensive analysis of the indicators of foreign economic relations between Armenia and the Gulf countries. The main directions of export and import are identified, and the features of the commodity structure of trade turnover are taken into account. The role of the diaspora in these relations is also considered. As a result of the analysis, the author concludes that there is significant potential for the development of relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Gulf countries, and the role and capabilities of the diaspora in this matter have not been fully realized.

Keywords: *GCC, export, investment, trade turnover, Diaspora.*

Introduction

For many centuries, Armenia and Armenians have been connected to the Arab world, both historically and, for the most part, economically. But after the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia and the presence of the "Iron Curtain," Armenia became cut off from the Middle East, despite the fact that it directly borders this region. Thus, the Arab world, and especially the Gulf countries, should be considered by Armenia as a priority direction of foreign economic activity. Based on this, the topic of this study is extremely relevant.

GCC: its role and scale in world economy

Based on the above, in order to fully understand the economic interaction of Armenia, it is worth starting the analysis with a general understanding of the potential and opportunity of the countries of the Gulf Union of Countries (GCC). This organization includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. The importance of this economic association comes from three factors: firstly, the share of GCC GDP in the total GDP of the Middle East is 43.5%, and in the Arab world, it is 61.7% (World Bank Open Data), and secondly, the growth of the economies of the GCC countries ranged from 1.1% in world GDP in 2000 to 2.2% in 2022. Thirdly, the GDP of the GCC countries since 1966 has consistently exceeded the average growth of world GDP (Figure 1), and the average growth of GDP per capita of the countries of the region in 2022, compared to 1980, increased 2.24 times, amounting to \$45,113.8.

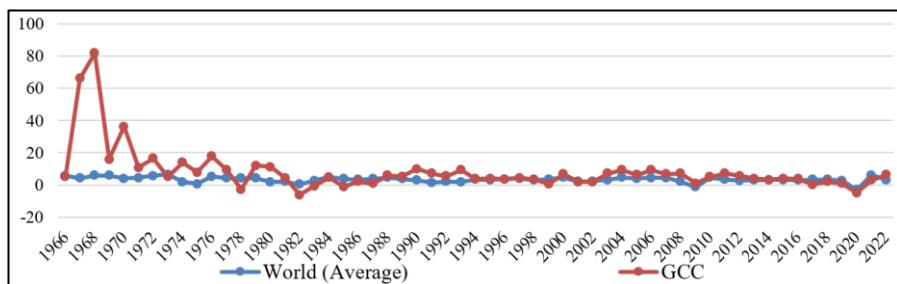


Figure 1. Average growth of world GDP and GCC GDP, 1966-2022 (World Bank Open Data)

At the same time, it is important to note that the growth of the region's population in 2022 compared to 1980 was 4.1 times, amounting to 58.9 million people, and in 2015, on average, the share of migrants was 60.3% (the highest figure in the UAE: 88.4%). The economies of these countries are developing not only in quantitative but also in qualitative terms: added

value in medium- and high-tech production (% of added value in manufacturing) in 2020 amounted to 38.2% compared to 16.2% in 2000, and fuel exports (% of merchandise exports) fell by 9.7 percentage points over the period 2000-2021 (World Bank Open Data). These economic indicators indicate an increase in the economic potential of the region: an increase in the population and its well-being leads to an increase in consumption and, therefore, a new sales market. The opportunity to attract foreign direct investment and use the logistics initiatives and infrastructure of the region opens up for Armenia.

Armenia and GCC: analysis of current relations

It is also important to consider the export-import relations of Armenia and the countries of the region. In terms of exports from 1995 to 2022, Armenia's main partner in the GCC is the UAE (Figure 2).

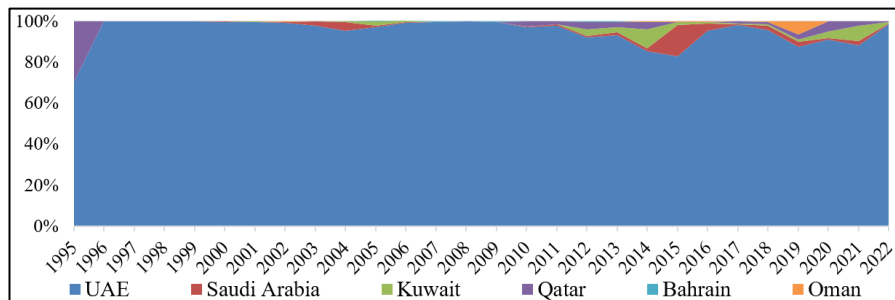


Figure 2. Export of Armenia to GCC countries, 1995-2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia)

In terms of imports by country of origin, there is an insignificant share of the rest of the Gulf countries besides the UAE (Figure 3), but in terms of imports by trading country (Figure 4), one can observe a similar situation as with exports: almost complete cooperation with the UAE, which may indicate that goods from the GCC countries enter Armenia through the UAE.

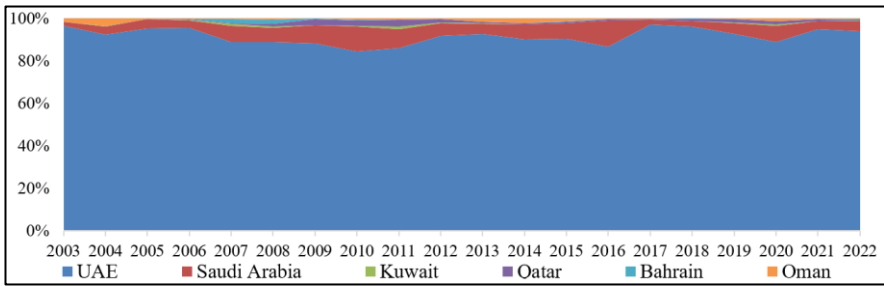


Figure 3. Imports by country of origin from GCC countries to Armenia, 2003-2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia)

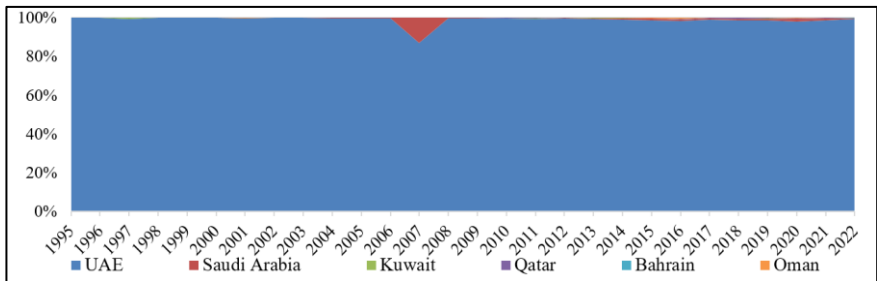


Figure 4. Imports by trading country from GCC countries to Armenia, 1995-2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia)

This circumstance indicates the weak development of bilateral relations between Armenia and the rest of the Union countries. It is also worth noting that in terms of intermediary trade ratios, the UAE's rate was 689% in 2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2022), meaning more products manufactured in the UAE were imported from the UAE, which means the country plays a significant role as a trade intermediary for Armenia.

RA and UAE: potential of trade

Taking into account the abovementioned circumstances, when considering the economic relations between Armenia and the GCC, it is worth considering the relationship between Armenia and the UAE. Thus, the

trade turnover between the two countries in absolute terms increased 10 times for the period 2012-2022, amounting to 4.2% of the total trade turnover of Armenia (Figure 5).

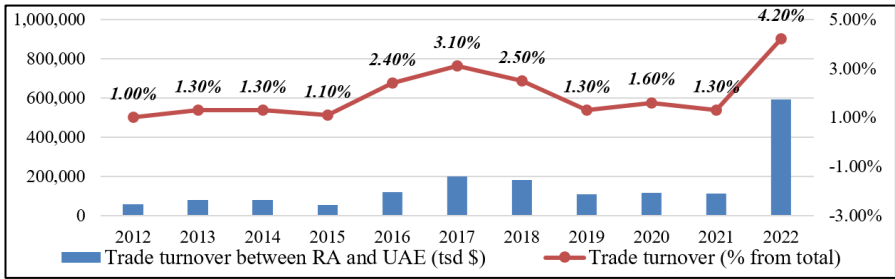


Figure 5. The trade turnover between Armenia and UAE, 2012-2022 (OEC)

The main driver of the increase in trade turnover is the increase in exports from Armenia. Over the same period, exports in absolute terms increased 56.7 times, amounting to 9.86% of all exports from Armenia in 2022, while imports from the UAE increased by 21%, amounting to 0.7% of Armenia’s total imports (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2022).

It is also necessary to consider the commodity structures of export and import from 2016 to 2022. Thus, in terms of exports, the main product group became 71 product groups (natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, metals clad with precious metals, and products made from them; costume jewelry; coins) with 93.4% of total export, although for the period 2016-2021, another product group of 16–24 (ready-made food products; alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and vinegar; tobacco and its substitutes) was dominant (Figure 6).

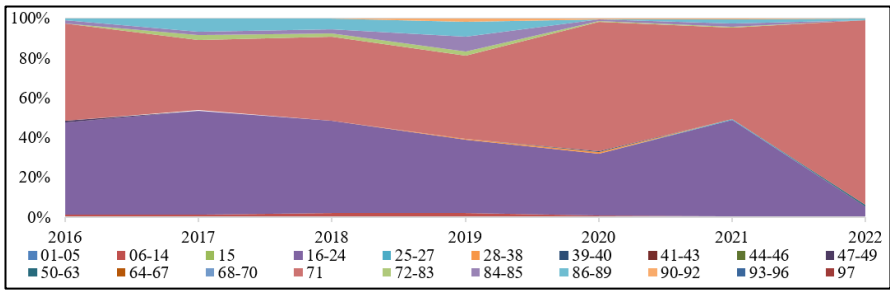


Figure 6. The commodity structures of export from Armenia to UAE, 2016-2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2022)

These realities tell us that in 2022 we are observing a picture of re-export, which in turn has greatly shifted the position of exports of finished products from Armenia. It is the 16-24 groups that is of strategic importance for the development of both the Armenian economy and foreign economic relations. Thus, along the line of the commodity structure of export, there is a concentration not only of one product group but also of the negative consequences of re-export. In terms of the commodity structure of imports, we can notice a more differentiated picture (Figure 7): here again, there is predominance of product group 71, but not to the same extent as in the case of exports.

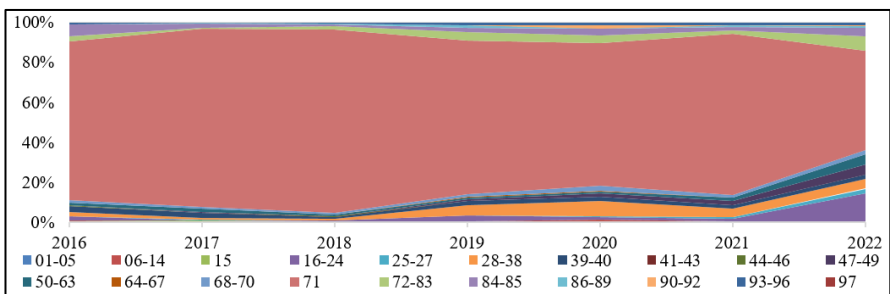


Figure 7. The commodity structures of import from UAE to Armenia, 2016-2022 (Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2022)

Role of Diaspora

In the context of economic interaction, it is worth considering the role of the diaspora. It is important to note that the Armenian diaspora in this region is being formed mainly from two components. The first component is the traditional diaspora of Armenians in the Middle East. The transformation of the influx of Armenians to the Gulf countries can be divided into two types: the first is the first is formed by Armenians who moved to the Gulf countries through labor migration long before the independence of many Gulf countries; the second is the flow of Armenians from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, associated with poor socio-economic realities as well as military operations in many countries. The second component is the newly formed diaspora of Armenian citizens (after 1991), mainly those who came to the UAE (more specifically to Dubai). This reality is connected with the fact that the UAE, and in particular the emirate of Dubai, was one of the first in the region to have a more open business environment and open opportunities for foreigners. Armenians living in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries make up 0.207% of the total diaspora (14,860 people in 2019 with this distribution: UAE 9000 people (60.57%), Bahrain 200 people (1.3%), Qatar 600 people (4%), Saudi Arabia 1000 people (6.7%), Oman 60 people (0.4%), Kuwait 4000 people (26.9%)). The impact of the diaspora on economic interaction, as well as the question of which type of diaspora contributes to this cooperation, if it does, is a topic for separate consideration.

Conclusion

In the economic interaction between Armenia and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), there is a noticeable lack of diversification, both in terms of partner countries and the structure of products traded between them. This lack of diversification poses significant

risks to the sustainable and balanced development of these economic relations. In particular, the dominance of re-export in recent years has undermined the small but steady growth trend observed in direct exports of Armenian goods to GCC countries. Moreover, the role of the Armenian diaspora in shaping economic interactions between Armenia and the GCC countries has not been thoroughly assessed. Although one of the GCC countries, namely the United Arab Emirates, has a significant Armenian expatriate community, the economic impact of this diaspora remains largely unexplored. Considering that this diaspora is the most significant economic partner of Armenia within the GCC, its impact on economic relations requires a more detailed study.

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The Armenian Language in Damascus: War, Migration, Schools, and Social Media

Setrag Hovsepian (Arizona State University, American University of Armenia)

The present study explores the current situation of Western Armenians in the Syrian Armenian community of Damascus. Western Armenian has been recognized as an at-risk language since 2010 (UNESCO) and is being further challenged by the Syrian conflict that has brought migration and uprooting to the community. For this work, a survey was conducted anonymously via social media with 114 Damascene Armenian respondents. Many respondents still use Armenian daily in their homes or outside. Furthermore, due to the ongoing conflict, the migration and movement out of Syria are raising questions about the future existence of Armenian schools in Damascus. Nevertheless, members of this community are committed to saving their language and investing in Armenian education and culture. The findings highlight the resilience of the Damascus Armenian community in maintaining their linguistic and cultural heritage amidst ongoing adversity.

Keywords: *Western Armenian, Diaspora, Syrian Armenian, Cultural Heritage, Language Migration, War.*

Introduction

On one hand, Western Armenian, the language spoken by most of the Damascus Armenians, has been classified as an endangered language since 2010 (UNESCO 2010). On the other hand, the ongoing war in Syria resulted in the migration and forced displacement of millions of Syrians

(Reid 2023). Those millions included Damascus Armenians, whose migration affected the community's activities and the chances of using their language compared to the pre-war era. This study seeks to explore the status of Western Armenians in Damascus according to its people. The study tries to find out how much they use the language nowadays.

Armenians in Damascus: A General Overview

The Syrian capital, Damascus, has recorded an Armenian presence since the 7th century. During the Armenian Genocide (1915 - 1918), the number of Armenian emigrants in Damascus reached 30,000. However, after the armistice of 1919, some returned to their historical lands while others moved to cities like Beirut and Aleppo, and the number of Armenians in Damascus summed up to 17,500 in 1927. Arriving in Damascus, the Armenians found refuge in three refugee camps in the regions of Bab Sharqi, Qadam, and Zablalani (Adachi 2020; Bourounsouzian 2016; Dadrian 1999; Katerjian 2016).

Between 1921 and 1945, Armenians had a relatively stable life under the French mandate in Damascus, where the center of France's presence was located, and there were no large numbers of emigrations from the Armenian community. This stability allowed the Damascus Armenians to organize themselves as a community. According to oral sources, their number reached 30,000 in the 1940s. After the independence of Syria, Armenians in Damascus were an established community with schools, cultural centers, and churches.

The Syrian Armenian community in general, including Damascus Armenians, was not left out of the Islamic extremist attacks of the last decade in Syria (Khen 2020). The armed groups targeted schools, including Armenian schools, and this unrest led to an accelerated migration of the Damascus Armenians from their homeland. The community had tens of

victims who were civil citizens, in addition to hostages whose destinies remained unknown.

Thus, dozens of families left Damascus. A significant part of the youth has migrated to other countries. There are no exact statistics, but as of 2023, the number is estimated to be around 2,500, and 3,500 individuals live in Damascus (Bourounsouzian 2016; Personal Communications 2023).

Methodology

This report is part of a more extensive study. The study uses a survey to collect the data needed to answer the study's question. The data collection tools included a survey and document verification.

The survey was collected anonymously through social media platforms shared by the researcher and other members of the Damascus Armenian community during the summer of 2023. The survey was available in both Western Armenian and English, and respondents had the chance to read the questions and answers in both languages, which were displayed concurrently on the survey.

Limitations

There is no precise data or information on the Damascus Armenians; whatever was found was through short newspaper articles or personal communication. Another limitation might be the small sample of data collected that can't be generalized.

The Survey Results

114 responses were collected. The survey contained 15 questions. 99.1% use Armenian daily. 95.6% of the 114 respondents use Armenian when they speak to their family members, while the rest use it with some family members.

Respondents were asked about the language they use when they write posts or comments on social media platforms (multiple responses were possible). 51.3% reported using Armenian in Latin letters (transliteration), and 46.9% said they use the Armenian alphabet to post or comment on social media. On the other hand, 30% said that they use Arabic, and 41.6% said that they use English, French, or German.

And whether Damascus Armenians read news in Armenian, 36.3% said they do, while 21.2% said they don't. The remaining 42.5% said they "sometimes" read news in Armenian.

Regarding Armenian schools and education, 77% of the 114 respondents prefer to go to or send their children to Armenian schools. In comparison, 11.5% said they would do so if their location had an Armenian school. Additionally, 10.6% said they don't necessarily need to send their children to an Armenian school.

When the survey takers were asked if the Armenian, they learned from school helped them maintain and preserve their language skills until today, 60.2% strongly agreed, and 16.8% agreed. In comparison, 7.1% disagreed that they maintained their language skills thanks to the Armenian they learned at/from school. The rest were neutral toward the statement.

Regarding their education level, 76.1% of the survey respondents are university graduates (either bachelor's or master's). Finally, it is worth mentioning that 40.7% of the respondents live in Damascus, while the rest live elsewhere.

Findings

For decades, Damascus Armenians had a stable and established life in Damascus until 2011. Due to the large number of immigrants, schools are also affected.

60% of the survey participants permanently live outside Damascus, which directly impacts the Armenian schools, raising the question of how long those schools can survive and in what ways.

Conclusion

Due to the abovementioned, the Armenian language was similarly affected, and although 99% of the participants in the survey speak Armenian every day, 36% of them read news in Armenian, and 47% write in Armenian. Like many Armenian communities in the Middle East and the Arab world, the Damascus Armenian community faces numerous challenges to survive and preserve its cultural heritage.

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Notes on Contributors

Bishop Ashot Mnatsakanian was born on November 4, 1972, in the village of Tatev, in the Syunik region of Armenia. He received his primary education in the secondary school of Tatev.

In 1989, he entered the Gevorkian Theological Seminary at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. He graduated from the seminary in 1995 after the successful defense of his thesis entitled "Life and Religious Views of Hovnan of Vorotnetsi." He was ordained to the diaconate in 1995 by His Grace Bishop Ananaia Arabajian.

He was ordained a celibate priest in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin on June 2, 1996, by His Eminence Archbishop Shahe Ajemian and given the priestly name of Ashot.

From 1996 until the end of 2001, he served at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin as director for the office of the Committee for the 1700th Anniversary Celebrations, formed on the occasion of the 1700th anniversary of Armenia's adoption of Christianity as the state religion.

Father Ashot received the rank of Archimandrite (Vartabet) in March 2002, after he successfully presented and defended his doctoral thesis entitled "The Prodigal Son's Embodiment in Armenian Literature."

In 2002, he departed Armenia and was assigned on October 14 to serve as Vicar of the Armenian Diocese of Egypt. While in Egypt, Father Ashot continued his education, studying the Arabic language and other topics. On February 21, 2004, he was appointed to serve as Locum Tenens, and in 2005, he was elected Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Egypt.

On January 15, 2006, Father Ashot was consecrated as a Bishop by the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

Bishop Ashot continues to serve as the Primate of the Diocese of Egypt.

Shahan Kandaharian studied at Hamazkayin Nshan Palanchyan Seminary in Beirut. Graduated from Haykazyan University, got a master's degree from Yerevan State University, and studied at the American University. In Beirut, from 1984 to 2000, he edited the periodical "Kaytser," and since 2002, he was the director-chief editor of the daily newspaper "Azdak."

He is the author of articles and public speeches related to Armenian-Turkish relations, the Cyprus issue, the Artsakh issue and the freedom struggle, and the field of information. Member of the Executive Board of the Unions of Journalists of Lebanon and Armenia, International Association of Journalists, Coordinating Body of Armenian Journalists, Deputy Chairman of the State Commission dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Lilit Harutyunyan is a head of the Department of Arab Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, and Associate Prof. of Yerevan State University. Former visiting fellow at Institut de recherches et d'études sur le monde arabe et musulman (IREMAM), University of Aix-Marseille, France, Sciences Po Lille, University of Lille, France, Institute of Islamic Studies, Free University, Berlin (March-September, 2018), CMNS, Marburg University, SWP (German Institute for International Security and Affairs), Berlin, Germany. Main research interests: Modern history of Syria and Lebanon, Modernization of regimes and political elites in the Arab world, Non-Muslim /Christian & Jewish/ Communities of Arab Countries, Comparative Regionalism in the Middle East and South Caucasus, Geopolitics and transformations in the Middle East, Syrian refugee issues in EU and the Middle East, Islam in the South Caucasus, etc.

Teaching courses: Ethnic and confessional realities in the Arab countries, (MA course), Middle East in Transition, (MA course), Social and political processes in the Modern Arab world (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt), (Graduate course), Arab-Turkish relations (20-21st centuries) (MA course), Jewish and

Christian communities of Arab countries: co-existence and conflict (20th century-the beginning of 21st century) (MA course in English for Erasmus+ international students).

Hrayr Jebejian was born in Beirut, Lebanon, on February 8, 1957. University education: Bachelor of Business Administration from Haigazian University in Beirut in 1981, Master of Science in Agriculture Economics from American University of Beirut in 1984. Doctor of Ministry in Bible Engagement from New York Theological Seminary in 2014. Joined the Bible Society in Lebanon in 1980, and since 1993, the General Secretary of the Bible Society in the Gulf, which consists of seven countries in the Arabian Peninsula. He worked as a management advisor for the United Bible Societies- Europe Middle East Area from 1991-1996, to develop the newly established Bible Societies in the Former Soviet Union and East European countries, with a special focus on Armenia. Chairman of United Bible Societies Middle East, North Africa region from 2006-2014. Bible Society Consultant for Iran from 2003 to 2006, to develop relations with Christian churches and organize publishing programs for Bibles and Christians literature for community use. Founding member of the Fellowship of Gulf Christian churches in 2003.

Active involvement in inter-church relations, also in local and regional church and para-church conferences. Experienced in working in highly multi-national and multi-ethnic communities. Writing articles on socio/ethnic- religious and genocide related subjects in different Armenian newspapers and electronic media in Lebanon, Armenia, and abroad.

Books and articles published: The first book, “The Armenian’s Path of Struggle for Existence” (December 2010), is an anthology of the articles over the last 30 years (in Armenian). The second book, “Armenian Diaspora Lives: As I Saw Them,” was published in April 2018 (in Armenian). The third book was published in 2019 in English, “Bible Engagement: The

Discovery of Faith, Hope and Self." The book is an academic study on the big migrant-labor community in the Gulf and how the message of the Bible can have an impact on their spiritual and socio-economic welfare. The fourth book in Armenian was published in November 2023, "Armenian Ethnographic Insights: Vision, Will, and Hope."

Academic articles were also published in two encyclopedias in 2018. The first one, "Christianity in North Africa and West Asia," and the second one, "Encyclopedia of Christianity in the Global South" (2 volumes). The third one was published in 2022, "Surviving Jewel: The Enduring Story of Christianity in the Middle East."

Hrayr Jebejian is a recipient of the "Ambassador of the Motherland" medal from the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia in 2014. The "St. Mesrob Mashdots" medal from His Holiness Catholicos Aram First of the Catholicosate of Cilicia, Beirut, Lebanon, in 2019, also the "St Mesrob Mashdots" medal from His Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch of Armenian Catholic Church in 2022, for his long years of services to the Bible cause and Armenian communities all around.

Antranik Dakessian has been the Editor-in-Chief of the *Haigazian Armenological Review* since 2018. He teaches history of the Lebanese Armenian community, Armenian communities of the Middle East, Armenian socio-political thought, and medieval Armenian art at Haigazian University. He has published a number of research articles on microhistories of the Armenian communities in the Middle East Arab states, has authored books on Vahan Bedelian and Parsegh Ganachian, and a book on the integration of the Armenians in the Lebanese polity.

He is the Director of the Haigazian University-based Armenian Diaspora Research Center (2011). He is a member of the Scientific Council of the Dzidzernagapert Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (2018) and the Academic Board of the Armenian National Institute (2024) and serves on the

editorial boards of several Armenian Studies periodicals. Dr. Dakessian has organized a number of conferences on Armenia-Diaspora Relations, Armenian Trans-nationalism, and Armenian identity, as well as a series of conferences on Armenians of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt-Sudan-Ethiopia, Cyprus-Greece, and the Arab Gulf States. He has edited and published the proceedings of these conferences as well as eyewitness accounts of a number of Armenian Genocide survivors.

Tatevik Manukyan is a research fellow of the Department of Turkey of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, Assistant Professor of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, YSU, and International Scientific - Educational Center, NAS RA.

Tatevik has participated in such research projects as SCOPE - “Religion and soft power: Religious Communities in the South Caucasus as Objects of External Influences” (2014-2017). HESC - “The Policy of Turkey towards Armenia during the governing period of the Justice and Development Party (2002-2012)” (2011-2013), Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow (2013), HESC - “The geopolitical Importance of the Kurdish factor in the Syrian crisis” (2022- 2024).

Tatevik has passed many research internships such as research training at Cairo University, Center of Islamic Culture (2006), Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow (2011), Fribourg University, Switzerland (2014), Tartu University, Estonia (2015), Tbilisi State University, Georgia (2017).

Her main research interests are the modern history of Turkey, Turkish domestic and foreign policy, regional security, the modern history of the Kurds, Kurdish issues in Turkey, Kurdish national movements, Kurdish identity issues, comparative regionalism in the Middle East and South Caucasus, and ethnic and religious minority in the South Caucasus.

Teaching courses: Kurdish Issue in Middle East (MA course), Kurdish Issue in Turkey and Azerbaijan (MA course).

Araks Pashayan is the Head of the Department of International Relations of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, and an Associate Professor at Yerevan State University. Former visiting fellow at the IFPO (Damascus).

Her main research interests are the modern history of Arab countries, Islamic factor in international relations, Islam in Azerbaijan, Armenian communities in Arab countries, geopolitics and transformations in the Middle East, etc.

Teaching courses: Modern History of the Arab countries (graduate course), Political Islam in Transition (MA course), Islam in Azerbaijan (MA course), Islam, oil, and Politics in the MENA region (20th century–the beginning of the 21st century) (MA course in English for Erasmus+ international students).

Grigor Vardanyan is a senior research fellow at the Department of Arab Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA, and a former visiting scholar at the American Foreign Policy Council's Central Asia-Caucasus Institute (October–November 2022), University of Cairo, Center of Arabic Language Teaching (March–April 2019).

His main research interests are the modern history of Syria and the Middle East, intra-regional problems and Arab state relations, and the Alawite community of Arab countries, particularly Syrian Alawites. Transformations in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Gor Gevorgyan is a senior research fellow at the Department of Arab Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies, NAS RA.

His main research interests are the modern history of Egypt and the Middle East, intra-regional problems and Arab state relations, modernization of regimes and political elites in the Arab world, comparative regionalism in the Middle East and South Caucasus, geopolitics, and transformations in the Middle East. Transformations in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Vilen Mnasakanyan was graduated from the Faculty of Economics at the Institute of Economics and Business of the Russian-Armenian University in 2021, and in 2023 he completed a master's degree in "State Regulation of Economy" at the same university. Since September 2024, he has been a postgraduate student in the field of International Economics. He is the head of the Student Scientific Society of the Institute of Economics and Business, "Young Ambassador" NGO and the Armenian-Arab youth center.

He is the author of about a dozen scientific articles (the latest one is "Analysis of trade turnover between Armenia and Turkey: existing risks and opportunities", Haigazian Armenological Review, 2023, 43/2), more than two dozen scientific reports (the latest ones are "The strategic role of Armenia in the regional economic dynamics: a bridge between North and South, East and West", "Armenia as a crossroads of civilizations: historical and cultural ties" conference, National Academy of Sciences of Armenia; "Analysis of economic relations between Armenia and the Persian Gulf countries: the role of the Diaspora", "The Armenian communities of the Arab countries of the Middle East: current trends and transformations", Institute of Oriental Studies) and two monographs ("International best practice on excise tax rates and its localization in Armenia", "The influence of integration processes on migration flows")

From September 2024 to the present, he has been a senior analyst for the implementation of investment banking at the Investment Banking Department of Ardshinbank CJSC and a lecturer at the Russian-Armenian University.

His scientific interests include international economic relations, integration processes and their impact on developing countries, state fiscal regulation, geo-economic processes, Islamic financial system.

Setrag Hovsepian is a Damascus-born Armenian who attended an Armenian school in Damascus and was a moderately active member of the community

as a Boy Scout and a choir member. He graduated from Damascus University and later pursued academic degrees in Armenia and France. He is pursuing a Ph.D. in the United States, writing a thesis on the Armenian schools in the Arab world, its teachers, and the status of the Western Armenian language nowadays.

**The Armenian communities of the Arab countries of the Middle
East: current trends and transformations**

Translation and technical editing by Veronika Torosyan

*Տպագրվել է Արփինե Բեգլարյան ԱԶ տպարանում
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Տպաքանակը՝ 100 օրինակ:

Հեռ.: +374 43 10 70 90