

THE ROLE OF THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN UAE-ARMENIA RELATIONS

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Abstract

This paper explores the important role of the Armenian community residing in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in strengthening bilateral relations between the UAE and Armenia. It highlights the contributions of the Armenian community in UAE to diplomatic relations and the promotion of Armenian culture in the region. The study also emphasizes the cultural programs organized by the embassies and the importance of fostering intellectual dialogue between Armenian and Emiratis. It discusses potential areas for collaboration in the diplomatic sphere between the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the UAE as well as the favourable business environment for UAE companies in Armenia.

Keywords: Hayastan All Armenian Fund, UAE –RA Bilateral Relations, Armenian Community, Armenian Embassy in UAE, Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi, Support to Armenia and Artsakh, Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Arpa-Sevan tunnel

Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years, relations between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Republic of Armenia (RA) have flourished steadily. Since its establishment in 1998, this diplomatic alliance has been nurtured through collaborative efforts across various sectors. These efforts include cooperation between the Armenian community and national institutions in both countries, and their respective embassies. This paper explores the diverse connections that unite Armenia and the UAE, spanning cultural interactions, humanitarian assistance, and political backing. From the outset, relations have been cordial on different levels, whether with the National Council, the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi," or the Embassy.

A significant contributor to fostering these ties has been the vibrant Armenian community in the UAE. Their enthusiasm for the establishment of the RA embassy in Abu Dhabi serves as a testament to their significant role in bridging the gap between the two nations. The embassy's inauguration marked a pivotal moment, paving the way for deeper interstate cooperation across various sectors. It has actively promoted cultural exchange through events showcasing the talents of Armenian artists. Additionally, ongoing dialogues between the UAE and Armenian embassies focus on solidifying

bilateral relations, fostering academic and scientific collaborations, and enhancing communication across different spheres¹.

The community relations have encompassed various aspects such as the "Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians²", relief aid following the earthquake, including support for Artsakh, and the establishment of political ties and cooperation, as detailed in the article.

This paper also explores the contributions of the "Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association." Their two-decade-long commitment to showcasing Armenian culture to the UAE has been instrumental in fostering mutual understanding. The Association's diverse cultural initiatives, encompassing art, music, and lectures, have garnered much praise. Notably, their high-quality music concerts have become a hallmark of their successful endeavours.

In conclusion, as Armenian culture flourishes in the diaspora, it continues to serve as a powerful symbol of national identity.

History of Diplomatic and Economic Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the UAE

Diplomatic relations between Armenia and Gulf nations, including Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE, were established between 1992 and 1998³, marking the inception of Armenia's multifaceted engagement with the Arab world. Arshak Poladian, the former ambassador to the UAE (2000-2006), mentioned that "our current relationships with the Arab world are multinational"⁴. Practical advancements in economic and trade cooperation began around 1993, notably with Armenia's inaugural participation in the 93-TECHNO EXPO exhibition in Sharjah, UAE, led by Minister of Industry Ashot Savaryan. This event marked the beginning of commercial exchanges between the two nations, with subsequent official delegations continuing to engage in similar endeavors to strengthen economic ties⁵.

Between 1998 and 2001, RA Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian embarked on diplomatic missions to various Arab nations, including Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Iraq, playing a crucial role in coordinating cooperation and engaging in political consultations with Arab leaders. Minister Oskanian held numerous meetings,

¹ The Governor of Sharjah and the President of Armenia are in talks about collaborating on scientific initiatives. <https://www.albayan.ae/across-the-uae/news-and-reports/2019-01-18-1.3463458>, 18. 01. 2019 (in Arabic).

² The Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians celebrated its 50th anniversary (The "Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians" was established in 1964 through the efforts of intellectuals and workers from Armenia). <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/787181>, 09.12.2014

³ UAE and Armenia are working together to create mutual leverage, <https://tinyurl.com/5dnvtaz4>, eurasiaar.org 26.02.2024 (in Arabic).

⁴ Interview with Arshak Poladian, Ambassador of Armenia to Kuwait and Bahrain. <https://bit.ly/4cFPRRY> (in Arm).

⁵ Poladian 2004: 73.

discussing regional and international affairs and exploring opportunities for collaborative initiatives⁶.

A significant milestone occurred on October 19, 2007, when Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vardan Minas Oskanian, met with Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al-Qasimi, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah in the UAE. During this meeting, a joint declaration on cooperation between Ras Al-Khaimah and Armenia was signed, highlighting mutual interests in energy, mining, transportation, telecommunications, and tourism development⁷.

In conclusion, the history of diplomatic and economic relations between Armenia and the UAE reflects a story of mutual cooperation, shared opportunities, and the potential for continued growth. By leveraging their strengths and fostering deeper ties across various sectors, both nations can unlock new avenues for economic prosperity and strengthen their partnership on the global stage.

Achievements of Armenia-UAE Diplomatic Relations

Established on June 25, 1998, diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)⁸ have evolved into a comprehensive partnership, recognizing the UAE's regional significance, political influence, and economic potential. Over the years, numerous economic forums, exhibitions, cultural exchanges, and other events have been organized, contributing to the strengthening of bilateral relations.

In 2018, the trade turnover between the two countries reached \$181.7 million⁹, underscoring the increasing economic ties. By 2018, the number of UAE investments in Armenia reached \$ 39 million¹⁰. Armenia's collaboration with the "Abu Dhabi Development Fund"¹¹ serves as a significant example of this partnership. Notably, during President Robert Kocharyan's visit to the UAE in April 2002, an

⁶ Poladian 2002.

⁷ Foreign Minister Oskanian's meetings in United Arab Emirates, <https://bit.ly/4cj5IVo>

⁸ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bilateral relations (diplomatic relations between RA and UAE were established in 1998. on June 25, with the signing of the corresponding protocol in New York), <https://bit.ly/3xP9IEG>

⁹ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bilateral relations, Economic Cooperation, <https://bit.ly/3XFzkJv>

¹⁰ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bilateral relations, Economic Cooperation, <https://bit.ly/3XFzkJv>

¹¹ Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Annual Report 2007-2008. The project work consists of rehabilitation and refurbishment of 49 km long Arpa-Sevan hydraulic tunnel with its control and operating equipment. The tunnel divert about 250 million cubic meter of water from Arpa and Yeghegis rivers to feed Lake Sevan. The project is aimed at assisting in achievement of ecological stabilization of the lake by raising the water level by 6 m in an effort to make up for the losses experienced through evaporation and over exploitation of the lake. The lake is used in provision of water for domestic and irrigation purposes in addition to supporting the fishery sector. The lake also plays an important part in the life of the Armenian community. Contribution Amount AED 36,730,000, Annual Report 2007 2008, <https://bit.ly/4cgMLUy>, <https://bit.ly/3ziSH0a>

agreement was reached with the fund to co-finance the Arpa-Sevan project, a crucial initiative supporting the rehabilitation of the Arpa-Sevan tunnel¹².

The fund's focus on financing projects in Islamic countries is noteworthy aspect of cross-cultural cooperation. Additionally, the involvement of Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi¹³, known for his strong adherence to Islam, in the restoration of the Haghardzin church demonstrates the depth of cultural exchange between the two nations¹⁴.

Further solidifying the relationship, in February 2008, an agreement was signed between the Armenian government and the "Abu Dhabi Development Fund," leading to a preferential loan of \$10 million¹⁵ for the reconstruction of the Arpa-Sevan tunnel¹⁶. Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan's discussions with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the UAE, Dr. Anwar Muhammad Karkash, on 7th December 2009 expanded cooperation across various sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and energy¹⁷.

Moreover, the allocation of a 1300 sq.m.plot of land by the Governor of Sharjah, UAE, to Armenia in 2016 for the construction of a permanent exhibition center for Armenian products demonstrates a tangible commitment to promoting trade and industrial relations¹⁸.

In the first half of 2017, the trade volume between RA and the UAE amounted to \$27,237.1 thousand in exports and \$101,437.8 thousand in imports. The trade based on the country of origin was \$31,998 thousand, while the trading country totalled \$69,439.8

¹²The Government of the Republic of Armenia, PM Inspects Arpa-Sevan Tunnel Reconstruction Work, (Supported by the Development Fund of Abu Dhabi and co-financed by the Government of the Republic of Armenia, a program for the overhaul of damaged sections is being implemented in 2010-2017. The aim of the program is to provide for water supply stability and safety all along the aqueduct. The contractor is Arpa-Sevan OJSC, with a contract cost of AMD 11.798.546.320 and a balance of AMD 1.183.000.000 as of today), <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/8174/>, 06.11. 2015.

¹³ Ruler of Sharjah's generosity enables Armenian monastery to reopen, Dr Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed visited the Haghartsin Monastery in 2005. His donation helped fund the completion of refurbishment work. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/ruler-of-sharjah-s-generosity-enables-armenian-monastery-to-reopen-1.594656>

¹⁴ Armenia. The church restored by the Ruler of Sharjah and its accessories <https://bit.ly/4cE9aek>. His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Sultan Al Qasimi restores an Armenian church in Armenia, <https://khabararmani.com/?p=6249>. Sultan Al Qasimi restores an Armenian church in Armenia, (in Arabic). An Arab Muslim sheikh "save" an ancient monastery in Armenia. "The philanthropist," ruler of Sharjah, "may God inevitably lead him to Haghardzin, <https://tinyurl.com/2h5rhhzj>, "annahar" newspaper, 03-12-2013 (in Arabic).

¹⁵ Talk with Ambassador: Gegham Gharibjanyan, <https://news.am/eng/news/254756.html>, News.am Newspaper, 28.02.2015 (in Armenian).

¹⁶ Armenian Nature Protection Minister: Sevan Lake has risen by 43 cm since the Beginning of 2008, <https://www.ecolur.org/en/news/officials/%20--2008--43-/80/>, Ecolur, New Informational Policy in Ecology, 19.08.2008.

¹⁷ The United Arab Emirates are looking to strengthen trade-economic relations with Armenia, <https://bit.ly/3zpfSL>, b24.am, 07.12.2009.

¹⁸ Interview with Gegham Gharibjanyan, the RA Ambassador to the UAE and Qatar, reveals that one of the major companies in Abu Dhabi is gearing up for significant investments, <https://bit.ly/3VMIjK9>, 24.08.2017.

thousand¹⁹. It is worth noting that these figures do not fully reflect the potential for bilateral economic relations.

On March 22, 2017, a business forum between Armenia and the UAE took place in Abu Dhabi with 350 investors in attendance, 250 from the UAE and 100 from Armenia. The event was held under the auspices of RA President Serzh Sargsyan and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Emirate and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the UAE Armed Forces. The forum was organized by the Development Fund of Armenia, Union of Industrialists and Businessmen of Armenia, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce, and the Embassy of Armenia in the UAE²⁰.

Armenia highly relies on natural gas and nuclear fuel imports from Russia as it does not have any fossil fuel reserves. From the past one decade, the country has started seeing the relevance and potential of solar energy as the prices was dropping²¹.

During an investment forum focused on Armenia in Abu Dhabi on March 22, 2017, an agreement was signed between the Emirati company "Ocean Holding" and the RA Ministry of Energy. According to this agreement, "Ocean Holding" will invest \$100 million in the solar energy sector²². Additionally, two more agreements were signed during the same conference, one of which is also in the renewable energy sector. A major company from Abu Dhabi is gearing up to make significant investments in Armenia²³.

On November 30, 2019, Masdar, also known as the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, is an Emirati state-owned renewable energy company and one of the world's leading renewable energy companies, has signed a Joint Development Agreement (JDA) with the Armenian National Interests Fund (ANIF) for the development of solar power projects with a total capacity of 400 MW. The investment adds between US\$300 million and US\$320 million into the Armenian economy. A full member of the Masdar City-headquartered International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) since 2010, Armenia has pledged to generate more than a quarter of its domestic power needs from renewable sources and hopes to cap its carbon emissions at 633 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent between 2015 and 2050²⁴.

Masdar and Armenian government finalized an agreement to build solar power plant by 2025 in Armenia. Ayg-1 is a 200 MW plant which will become Armenia's largest

¹⁹ Same place. Interview with Gegham Gharibjanian.

²⁰ Same place. Interview with Gegham Gharibjanian.

²¹ Biggest Solar Plant by Masdar in Armenia, <https://bit.ly/3VEw9z0>, 03.08.2021.

²² \$100 million from UAE to fund solar power in Armenia, <https://eurasianetwork.eu/2017/04/02/100-million-from-united-arab-emirates-to-fund-solar-power-in-armenia/>, 02.04.2017.

²³ Interview with Gegham Gharibjanian, the RA Ambassador to the UAE and Qatar, reveals that one of the major companies in Abu Dhabi is gearing up for significant investments, <https://bit.ly/3VMJnK9>, 24.08.2017.

²⁴ Masdar signs JDA for the development of up to 400MW of solar projects in Armenia, <https://bit.ly/3L1i61E> (in English).

solar plant. The plant will have around half of the current capacity of Armenia's main energy generator²⁵.

While there is potential for growth based on the trade figures for 2017, the Armenia-UAE business forum in 2017, attended by key investors from both countries, was a significant milestone. This event, under the patronage of RA President Serzh Sargsyan and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, facilitated discussions on investment opportunities.

By leveraging on their strengths and fostering deeper connections across various sectors, both nations are well-positioned to unlock new opportunities and further enhance their partnership on the global stage.

Economic Cooperation: Trade Turnover between the UAE and Armenia

The UAE stands as Armenia's primary trade partner within the Persian Gulf, accounting for 90% of Armenia's total trade with the countries of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council²⁶.

On March 22, 2017, Armenia and the UAE mutually waived entry visa requirements²⁷, a move expected to boost the number of Emirati tourists visiting Armenia to 7,751 by 2022. Additionally, the simultaneous launch of low-cost flights between the two countries is anticipated to further fortify bilateral relations²⁸.

The total value of non-oil trade between the UAE and RA in 2017 amounted to AED 920 million, a significant increase from AED 375 million in 2015²⁹. Furthermore, the UAE's non-oil exports to Armenia in 2022 totalled \$229 million, with re-exports reaching \$747 million³⁰.

Projections indicate a substantial rise in trade volume, with non-oil trade between the UAE and RA expected to reach approximately \$1.53 billion in 2022, marking a 673% increase compared to 2021. Moreover, the UAE's non-oil exports to Armenia are estimated to reach around \$229 million in 2022, reflecting a 245% surge from the previous year³¹.

²⁵ Biggest Solar Plant by Masdar in Armenia, <https://solarquarter.com/2021/08/03/biggest-solar-plant-by-masdar-in-armenia/>, 03.08.2021.

²⁶ UAE Ministry of Economy, H.E. Bin Touq holds meeting with his Armenian counterpart to discuss strengthening of trade & economic cooperation, <https://tinyurl.com/mr27ye8s>, 14.02.2023.

²⁷ The Armenian President urges Emirati businessmen to promote joint entrepreneurs to enhance collaborative investments. <https://tinyurl.com/4w9784mk>, Al Ettihad newspaper, UAE, 23.03.2017, (in Arabic).

²⁸ UAE and Armenia are working together to create mutual leverage, <https://tinyurl.com/5dnvtaz4>, eurasiaar.org, 26.02.2024 (in Arabic).

²⁹ Trade between the UAE and Armenia amounted to 920 million dirhams in 2017. <https://bit.ly/3W4gdaw>, aletihad.ae newspaper, 30. 12. 2018, (in Arabic). UAE, Armenia trade exchange stood at AED920 million in 2017, <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302729557>, Emirates News Agency, WAM, 19. 12. 2018 (in English).

³⁰ UAE Ministry of Economy, H.E. Bin Touq holds meeting with his Armenian counterpart to discuss strengthening of trade & economic cooperation, <https://tinyurl.com/mr27ye8s>, 14.02.2023.

³¹ See same place. UAE Ministry of Economy, H.E. Bin Touq holds...

Foreign trade turnover between RA and UAE in the period from January to April 2023 amounted to about \$561.3 million, representing a significant increase of 6.4 times compared to the same period in 2022³².

Statistics from the Ministry of Economy of the UAE reveal that UAE investments in Armenia total \$35 million, predominantly allocated to agriculture, food security, and real estate sectors. Conversely, Armenian direct investments in the UAE amounted to \$32 million by 2021.

Both parties underscored the importance of fostering business communities in exploring promising growth opportunities in their respective markets. For further insights, readers can refer to statistics provided by the UAE Ministry of Economy³³.

It's noteworthy that the economic partnership between the UAE and Armenia is witnessing continuous growth. In 2022, the non-oil trade volume between the two countries reached \$1.53 billion, complemented by UAE investments in Armenia amounting to \$35 million. This investment is channelled into sectors such as agriculture, food security, and real estate. Additionally, the UAE's non-oil exports to Armenia amounted to \$229 million, with re-exports totalling \$747 million³⁴.

Advancing Commercial Portfolio through Tourism Initiatives

Tourism presents a pragmatic avenue for enhancing the bilateral trade portfolio. Notably, on July 2, 2019, RA Minister of Economy Tigran Khachatryan welcomed a delegation from the Emirate of Sharjah (UAE), led by Sheikh Fahim Al-Qasimi, Executive Chairman of Governmental Affairs. Discussions emphasized agriculture and highlighted tourism as a pivotal area for cooperation, fostering mutual understanding of cultural nuances and economic prospects. "Armenia is not a new country for us, Armenia is our friend, and we want to deepen the trade-economic cooperation" Sheikh Fahim Al Qasimi said³⁵.

The official launch of Air Arabia's inaugural Sharjah-Yerevan flight on August 16, 2013 marked a significant milestone. Very Rev. Mesrob Sarkissian, the Pontifical Vicar for the United Arab Emirates, attended the ceremony, highlighting the importance of the initiative in facilitating travel for the Armenian and foreign communities living in Sharjah

³² UAE-Armenia trade reached \$561.3 million in the span of 3 months. <https://bit.ly/3zt7SED>, al-Bayan Newspaper, UAE, 28.06.2023 (in Arabic).

³³ UAE Ministry of Economy, H.E. Bin Touq holds meeting with his Armenian counterpart to discuss strengthening of trade & economic cooperation, <https://tinyurl.com/mwec4w4h>, Al Khaleej newspaper, UAE, 15.02.2023. The Minister of Economy Seeks Armenian Counterpart to Enhance Economic and Trade Cooperation, <https://tinyurl.com/4sys3hf7>, al itihad newspaper, UAE, 15.02.2023 (in Arabic).

³⁴ UAE Ministry of Economy, H.E. Bin Touq holds meeting with his Armenian counterpart to discuss strengthening of trade & economic cooperation, <https://www.moec.gov.ae/en/-/h.e.-bin-touq-holds-meeting-with-his-armenian-counterpart-to-discuss-strengthening-of-trade-economic-cooperation>, 14.02.2023.

³⁵ Armenian minister, delegation of Emirate of Sharjah discussed cooperation agenda, <https://bit.ly/4cHa4Xn>, armenpress, 02.07.2019.

and the Northern Emirates³⁶. The weekly direct flights, totalling around 30, have since been instrumental in strengthening business connections between two countries, promoting tourism, and fostering cultural and decentralized cooperation³⁷.

In September 2023, RA and UAE established a visa-free regime³⁸ for regular citizens of both nations³⁹. This arrangement came into effect on February 1, 2024, enabling RA citizens to travel to the UAE without a visa⁴⁰. Under this regime, RA citizens can stay in the emirates for a maximum of 90 days within a 180-day period. Furthermore, RA citizens are granted entry, exit, and transit privileges in the UAE without visa requirements or fees, provided their passport remains valid for at least six months from the date of arrival⁴¹.

Assistance offered by the Armenian Community in the UAE to the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh

The Armenian community in the UAE was founded in February 1980 with a focus on promoting national cultural activities and establishing an organizational structure. Rev. Fr. Oshagan Tcholyan played a crucial role in forming the governing body, initially named the "Armenian National Council of Sharjah and Dubai," later renamed the "National Council of Northern Emirates⁴²" following the first diocesan Assembly decision. The relationship between this administration and Armenia from 1980 to 2005 can be categorized into several phases: Initial development in the 1980s, increased cooperation after the December 1988 earthquake, establishment of political ties since 1993, and ongoing collaboration since 1998.

The UAE's Armenian community has demonstrated unwavering support for Armenia. This dedication extends beyond the realms of politics and diplomacy, encompassing concrete actions such as charitable endeavors, humanitarian aid, and contributions to Armenia's development and reconstruction efforts.

It is worth noting that in these areas, the Armenian community in the UAE has often provided more support to RA than it has received in return. Nevertheless, Armenia has also extended assistance to the Armenian community in the UAE as needed, demonstrating a reciprocal commitment to mutual support and solidarity.

³⁶ The Armenian Community Attended the Inaugural Sharjah-Yerevan Flight. <https://bit.ly/4cJDmob>, Aztag Daily Newspaper, Lebanon, 17.08 2013.

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, The meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and the UAE, https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2023/09/07/mfa_uae/12186 , 07.09.2023.

³⁸ UAE Exempts Armenian citizens from pre-entry visas, <https://www.dubaieye1038.com/news/local/uae-exempts-armenian-citizens-from-pre-entry-visas/>, dubaieye.com, 12.09.2023

³⁹ Armenia and UAE establish a visa-free regime, <https://bit.ly/4eQLdSM>, 12.09.2023 (in Arm.).

⁴⁰ UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Visit Country, <https://bit.ly/3xsFoKN>

⁴¹ Starting February 1 citizens of the Republic of Armenia will be able to travel to the United Arab Emirates without requiring a visa, <https://armeniasputnik.am/20240105/petrvari-1-ic-hh-qaghaqacinern-arabakan-miacjal-emirutjunner-kmeknen-aranc-vizaji-70834511.html>, Armenian Sputnik.am, 05.01.2024 (in Arm.).

⁴² The inaugural diocesan elections in Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah was scheduled for December 16, 1994, marking the selection of the first diocesan assembly.

Community collaboration in the establishment of the RA embassy in the UAE

The active involvement of Armenians in the United Arab Emirates was instrumental in the opening of the Armenian embassy of regional significance in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE.

Between 1999 and 2001, the National Council worked closely with the community, diocese and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia⁴³ to initiate the establishment of the RA embassy in the Emirates. Details of this collaboration will be discussed further in the section on the Embassy. During a meeting of the National Board, discussions were held on the diocese's role in supporting the construction of the RA embassy and the responsibilities involved. In the lead-up to the embassy opening, starting from 1993, senior

officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia held official meetings with the supportive National Administration to assess the readiness of the community and the resources available in the Northern Emirates. During these meetings, the National Administration assured Armenian officials of their commitment to facilitating the project within their means⁴⁴.

In December of the same year, members of the diocesan body conveyed the sentiments of the meeting to a delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia during a meeting.

Following official negotiations and applications from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, the diocese took on the responsibility of funding the embassy⁴⁵.

The newly elected diocesan leadership of the Diocese of Kuwait and the Arab Gulf Countries convened a general meeting (at the 2nd term, the 1st session) on March 18-19, 1999, in Sharjah, under the guidance of Diocese Very Rev. Sebouh Sarkisian, the Pontifical Vicar of Kuwait and neighbouring countries at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church complex in Sharjah, representatives from the dioceses of Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah-Dubai welcomed the decision to establish an embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE and pledged their support for the project.

On March 25, 1999, President Robert Kocharyan of Armenia submitted a formal request for the embassy key to His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, the President of the UAE⁴⁶.

On December 2, 1999, Rashed Abdallah Nuaimi⁴⁷, the foreign minister of the UAE, presented a similar proposal to Vartan Oskanian, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of

⁴³ Sharjah Ruler meets Supreme Spiritual Leader of Armenian Church, <https://bit.ly/4cwMoFK>, WAM.AE online newspaper, 25.11.2008.

⁴⁴ The resolution to establish an Embassy of the Republic of Armenia was made during the General Meeting (The 2nd term, the 1st session) held on March 18-19, 1999, as reported in the HASK magazine, Antillas, Lebanon, March-April 1999, page 275.

⁴⁵ Harutyunyan 2012: 68.

⁴⁶ Poladian 2004: 26.

Armenia. A delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, led by the newly appointed trustee Arshak Poladian, conducted preparations in Abu Dhabi⁴⁸ and offered material and moral support for the project during meetings with the Pontifical Vicar of the Northern Emirates National Council and diocesan members⁴⁹.

On March 10, 2000, a special meeting was held by the National Councils and diocesan members with the specific of sending practical proposals to the Diocesan 6th General Assembly. The proposals included setting a deadline for participation in the cost of the embassy of the regions, establishing a special committee to oversee the budget, establishing a special committee to oversee the budget, creating a charter for embassy-committee relations, and ensuring that the decisions made at the meeting were implemented by local administrations and their designated committees. Agreeing to Armenia's suggestion and following the decision made during the March 10, 2000 meeting, the 6th Diocesan General Assembly (March 2000) appointed a permanent custodian committee for the embassy. This committee consisted of fourteen members, with four representing Kuwait, five from Abu Dhabi, and five from the Northern Emirates. The committee members included Varoujan Nerguizian (Chairman), Bedros Aslanian (deceased), Nshan Pasmajian (Treasurer), Krikor Jabourian, and Raffi Fattal. The operations of the RA Embassy in the UAE commenced in April 2000. The official opening of the embassy took place on September 23, 2000, with the presence of former Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vartan Oskanian, high-ranking officials from the Emirates, embassy diplomatic staff, and members of the Armenian community in the United Arab Emirates.

The 6th Plenary Session of the Diocese convened on Thursday, March 29-30, 2000, at the National Prelacy of Kuwait, presided over by the Very Reverend His Grace Sebouh Sarkisian, Pontifical Vicar of the Region. He emphasized that at this pivotal moment in our nation's journey, we are confronted with a significant responsibility, urging us to act with the utmost diligence. Regarding the decision to establish the RA embassy in the Gulf region, he regarded it as an opportunity to contribute to a noble and proud cause, serving as a testament to our existence.

Extensive discussions ensued regarding the implementation of the decision to establish the embassy within the jurisdiction of the RA government. Following deliberations, it was decided to establish a competent and responsible body at the diocesan level to commence work immediately, with the aim of preferably completing the task of opening the embassy in Abu Dhabi by the end of May⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Rashid Abdullah Al Nuaimi راشد عبدالله النعيمي is the former foreign minister of the United Arab Emirates. Nuaimi is a member of the ruling family of Ajman Al Nuaimi. (He holds a bachelor's degree in petroleum engineering, which he received from the University of Cairo in 1967). Source: Wikipedia.

⁴⁸ Poladian 2004: 26.

⁴⁹ Poladian 2004.

⁵⁰ Diocesan 6th Plenary Assembly. Establishing a diocesan committee for the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. HASK Amsakir, March-April 2000, page 320, <https://bit.ly/4bxfYtq>

According to the plan, the committee was formed and covered the embassy's expenses for two years. In response to a request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, the 8th General Assembly of the Diocese decided to extend the funding for another year. The Trustee Committee continued its work until the end of 2002, successfully fulfilling its assigned duties. Following another proposal from the embassy, the 8th General Assembly of the Diocese (March 2003) agreed to cover 20 percent of the embassy's costs for one year. Additionally, at the suggestion from Armenia, the 8th Diocesan General Assembly decided to prioritize the construction of the embassy within the diocese's capabilities.

In a subsequent resolution, the 10th Diocesan General Assembly (March 2004) authorized the UAE Diocese to establish a support committee. This committee, comprised of national representatives from the Northern Emirates, actively participated in the preparations for constructing the Armenian embassy in Abu Dhabi⁵¹.

The Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE commenced its operations in April 2000, and on September 23 of the same year, the embassy was officially inaugurated⁵². The inauguration ceremony was attended by former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Vardan Oskanian, high-ranking officials from the Emirates, the diplomatic staff of the embassy, and numerous members of the Armenian community residing in the United Arab Emirates.⁵³

The Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Abu Dhabi began its operations in April 2000⁵⁴ with Arshak Poladian serving as Chargé d'Affaires before being appointed as the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador in 2002⁵⁵. Subsequent ambassadors included Vahagn Melikyan (2006–2012), Gegham Gharibjanyan (2012–2018), Mher Mkrtumyan (2018–2021), and Karen Grigoryan who was appointed On October 7, 2022.

It is noteworthy that the "Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association" played an active role in the official opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the Emirates from September 21 to 28, 2000⁵⁶.

Furthermore, the flag that raised in front of the embassy building during the inauguration ceremony had been blessed beforehand at the St. Grigory the Illuminator Church in Sharjah. The blessing took place during the Divine Liturgy, which was led by the community's Fr. Aram Deyirmendjian. Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of

⁵¹ Northern Emirates Archives 2002, March 2003, March 2004.

⁵² Poladian 2004: 26.

⁵³ Poladian 2004: 26.

⁵⁴ Embassy of Armenia to UAE, Bilateral Relations, General information, <https://uae.mfa.am/hy/bilateral-ae>

⁵⁵ Arshak Poladian appointed RA Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary (He held the office of RA Charge d'Affaires until 2002 and was appointed RA Ambassador to that country between 2002 to 2006), <https://nt.am/en/news/141774/>, 24-08-2007.

⁵⁶ Daghljan, KalSahagian, Jerejian, Kasemjian 2014: 27 and 42.

Armenia, Vartan Oskanian, and his diplomatic delegation were present at the ceremony⁵⁷.

In 2005, the laying of the foundation stone for the permanent Embassy of the Republic of Armenia occurred. By 2007, construction was finished, and the new embassy building was inaugurated in the presence of President Robert Kocharyan⁵⁸. It was during this period that Ambassador Vahagn Melikyan assumed his post in Abu Dhabi, where he served until 2012.

This research paper coincides with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the UAE. In acknowledgment of this milestone, it is notable that a reception was held at the RA Embassy in the UAE to commemorate the occasion during the visit of RA Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan. The event was graced by the presence of heads of accredited RA diplomatic missions in the Near and Middle East, along with members of the Armenian community and other representatives⁵⁹. Welcoming remarks were delivered by Karen Grigoryan, the Ambassador of Armenia to the UAE, Vahan Kostanyan, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia and Arshak Poladian, the First Ambassador of Armenia to the UAE. They also touched upon the dynamics of bilateral relations between Armenia and the UAE⁶⁰, as well as the role of the Armenian community in the development of friendly ties between the two countries.

The Support of the Armenian Community in the UAE for Armenia and Artsakh

In the 1980s, the newly established Armenian community in the UAE began fostering relations with the **Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians**⁶¹. Annually, during the summer, one teacher and two students participated in the Committee's summer teacher training courses. Even though it was still in its early stages, the Armenian community was actively involved in providing charitable and humanitarian aid to Artsakh and Armenia. Some notable contributions included:

Relief Aid: Following the devastating December 1988 earthquake, the community of Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates organized a donation campaign, providing humanitarian assistance (medication, medical equipment, clothing, and food) and

⁵⁷ The UAE National Council newsletter "SHEPOR" Issue No. 9, October-November 2000 (in Arm.).

⁵⁸ The President of Armenia officially opens the Armenian Embassy building in Abu Dhabi, <https://bit.ly/4buWrcJ>, wam.ae UAE online newspaper, 12.12. 2007 (in Arabic).

⁵⁹ A reception dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries was also held at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE, with the participation of the heads of the diplomatic missions of Armenia accredited in the Middle East, as well as representatives of the Armenian community. Celebration in recognition of the 25th anniversary of the relation partnership between RA and UAE, <https://youtu.be/OcMYLjKlq3c?si=-2HXgvP3XLrdRt4u>, Abu Dhabi, UAE, 11.09.2023

⁶⁰ At the reception hosted at the RA Embassy in the UAE, the discussion focused on the dynamics of the relationship between the two countries. <https://tinyurl.com/mr3dsk5z>, 11.09.2023.

⁶¹ The Committee for Cultural Relations with Diaspora Armenians was established in 1964 by the initiative of Armenian intellectuals and workers.

financial aid to orphans. Individual benefactors from the Armenian community in the UAE also extended assistance to the orphans in Armenia.

Humanitarian Assistance (1990-1992): The National Councils of Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates, in collaboration with the assistance of the Prelacy of Iran, coordinated efforts to deliver 100 tons of flour through the city of Meghri. This flour was then distributed to deprived families in the Pert village.

Disaster Relief Programs: Between 1990 and 1992, the mentioned National Councils of the two communities initiated programs to aid Armenia during times of disaster. They utilized funds gathered from previous National Councils for this purpose.

Clothing Donation: Between 2000 and 2005, the local parish committee of St. Grigory Illuminator church sent tons of clothing to Yerevan as part of their charitable efforts⁶².

Establishment of "New Cilicia" Village (2016-2017): Through funding and initiative from the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, the "New Cilicia" village was established in Artsakh⁶³. This village, comprising newly constructed apartments and essential amenities, was designated for families of Artsakh martyrs based on priority⁶⁴.

The Diocese of Kuwait and the Arab Gulf countries contributed to the reconstruction of "New Cilicia" with a donation of \$65,000, with Kuwait covering 60% of the costs and the Northern Emirates community contributing \$15,600. Notably, "New Cilicia" is situated near the Kichan and Nor Ghazanchi villages in the Martakert region, and the NKR government's housing commission allocated the apartments to the recipients⁶⁵.

The Armenian community of the UAE also supported the development and reconstruction of the newly independent Armenia.

Between 1990 and 1992, the National Councils of the aforementioned two communities in the UAE funded the **establishment of a carpentry company** valued at over USD 200,000, which was then donated to the furniture industry of the city of Stepanavan in Armenia. All machinery for the company was imported from Italy and transported from Dubai to Armenia by a dedicated committee. Oversight of the company on behalf of the communities' National Councils was entrusted to the Central Committee of the Armenian Relief Society (Yerevan). Subsequently, like many other companies in Armenia, the company underwent privatization.

Hayastan All Armenian Fund: In December 1993, the Central National Assembly made the decision to create Hayastan All-Armenian Fund committees within the Dioceses of the Holy See of Cilicia to facilitate donations and aid in the reconstruction of

⁶² Construction works in the Artsakh village of "New Cilicia" are close to completion, <https://bit.ly/3xw2FLS> 20.06.2016, Horizon Weekly online newspaper, Canada (in Armenian)

⁶³ The Houses in Artsakh's "New Cilicia" village have been handed over to the families of Artsakh's martyrs <https://bit.ly/3XPickl>, Aztag Daily online newspaper, Lebanon, 09.05, 2017 (in Arm.).

⁶⁴ Ashekian 2008: 138. Northern Emirates Archives, Sharjah, UAE.

⁶⁵ A dwelling place will be constructed in Artsakh with funding from the Catholicosate of Cilicia of the Great House. <https://old.hayernaysor.am/cl/archives/191196> Hayern Aysor.am, 18.06.2016

Armenia⁶⁶. In 1997, the National Council of the Northern Emirates established a bank account for this purpose. Initially, there were challenges in fundraising for church-building projects, and the National Council faced difficulties in launching the fund effectively in the first few years. However, later efforts led to a successful donation campaign.

The Diocesan Assemblies have pledged their continuous support to this cause, actively contributing under the guidance of relevant structures within the Armenian Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia. In 1998, the National Council contributed to the refurbishment of the largest hospital in Artsakh⁶⁷.

On the 9th November 2020, the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the United Arab Emirates Mher Mkrtumyan visited the **Hayastan All-Armenian Fund** to transfer the next amount donated by the Armenian community of the UAE to the nationwide fundraiser – \$ 131,790⁶⁸. Additionally, donors from the UAE included Haroution Istanbuli and Sarkis Hagopian⁶⁹.

The primary focus of the newly established Armenian community in the UAE was also to support the development of Artsakh during its years of independence. Some notable contributions included:

From 1992 to 1995, the National Council was involved in cultural activities, held discussions with RA officials, visited local entities, and provided assistance to Artsakh and Armenia.

In 1998, the National Council contributed to the refurbishment of the largest hospital in Artsakh. The community actively participated in all donation campaigns and raffle draws organized for Artsakh. Individual philanthropists from the community have supported orphans from Armenia.⁷⁰

On November 25, 2010, students from the "Ohannesian" Armenian school in Sharjah contributed to the "Water is Life" telethon-2010 dedicated to Artsakh by the "Hayastan All Armenian fund"⁷¹.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the UAE National Day⁷² from November 29 to December 3, 2011, the State Dance Ensemble of Armenia performed concerts in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Al-Ain, and Dubai, at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture of

⁶⁶ Embassy of Armenia to UAE, Hayastan All Armenian Fund <https://uae.mfa.am/en/hayastan-fund>, source www.himnadram.org

⁶⁷ Ashekian 2008: 138. Northern Emirates Archives, Sharjah, UAE.

⁶⁸ The Armenian community in the UAE raised \$ 131,790 <https://iravaban.net/en/301033.html>, 09.11.2020. The RA Ambassador to the UAE transferred the money collected by the Armenian community to the All-Armenian Fund, <https://b24.am/economy/262558.html>, 09.11.2020 (in Arm.).

⁶⁹The Hayastan All Armenia Fund-Our donors, <https://www.himnadram.org/en/donors>

⁷⁰ Ashekian 2008: 138-139. Northern Emirates Archives, Sharjah, UAE (in Arm.).

⁷¹ 10.9.6 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2010: 228.

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Performances by the State Dance Ensemble of Armenia in the UAE, <https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2011/12/03/folk/2628>, MFA Press-releases, 03.11. 2011 (in Arm.).

the United Arab Emirates. The Republic of Armenia Embassy in Abu Dhabi supported the events⁷³.

The UAE community also showed support for Syrian Armenians.

On December 6, 2012, the National Council of Abu Dhabi hosted a fundraising dinner for Syrian Armenians, with the proceeds benefiting the Armenian Prelacy in Syria. The event attended by Armenian Ambassador to Kuwait Gegham Gharibjanyan, Very Rev. Shahe Panosian, the Pontifical Vicar of Kuwait and Arab Gulf countries⁷⁴.

Collaboration between the Armenian Community of the UAE and the RA Embassy

The partnership between the National Administration and the embassy thrives on mutual respect and a cooperative atmosphere. According to community officials, the Embassy of Armenia in the United Arab Emirates serves as a pillar of moral support and authority for the Armenian community. The embassy actively contributes to various aspects of community life as needed⁷⁵.

It's worth mentioning and extending a warm welcome to the benefactors and entrepreneurs within the Armenian community in the UAE, notably Varoujan Nerguizian, the executive director of Sharjah Bank (a Lebanese Armenian), as well as the architects of the embassy building, Berdj Aprahamian ⁷⁶(originally from Jerusalem) and Salah Hariri (a Lebanese Arab), who played a key role in the construction of the embassy⁷⁷.

Below are some notable visits made to the Armenian embassy in Abu Dhabi by members of the National Administration of Dubai and the Northern Emirates.

On Sunday, September 9, 2012, Members of the Council of the Armenian Community in Dubai and the Northern Emirates, under the leadership of Fr. Aram Deyirmendjian paid a courtesy visit to the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia where they were warmly welcomed by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia in the United Arab Emirates Gegham Gharibjanyan and the Consul Marad Melikyan. The visit served as an opportunity to discuss issues of concern that exist between the community and Armenia, especially the latest development in Syria which largely affected the Syrian Armenian Community.

⁷³ 10.9.5 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2011: 257.

⁷⁴ 10.9.5 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2012: 234.

⁷⁵ The Commemorative Book of the Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association (1990-2010), Yerevan 2014, pp. 27 and 42.

⁷⁶ Mangassarian, Sh. Engineer Berdj Aprahamian's work and the book dedicated to Abu Dhabi both deal with the city's development and progress, <https://tinyurl.com/mrunrd2t>, Darperag21 online, Lebanon, 07.03 2024.

⁷⁷ Harutyunyan, Pashayan 2012: 68, The book was funded by a grant from the Ministry of Diaspora in Armenia, https://haygirk.nla.am/upload/1941-/arabakan_erkner_2012.pdf

Both the Diaspora as well as the Government of Armenia spare no effort to extend their help and assistance to their brothers and sisters in Syria. After expressing mutual readiness to cooperate, the Ambassador accepted the invitation extended by the Council to lecture on September 29, in Pierre Keusseyan hall to celebrate **the 21st anniversary** of the re-independence of the Republic of Armenia⁷⁸.

On Thursday, May 11, 2023, His Grace Bishop Mesrob Sarkissian, prelate of the UAE and Qatar, along with the newly elected National Council of the Armenian community and pastors from Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and the Northern Emirates, visited the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia. They held discussions with Ambassador Karen Grigoryan, where they presented the activities, future plans, and reorganization efforts of the Diocese. H.G. Bishop Mesrob Sarkissian emphasized the importance of the longstanding cooperation between the Council of the Armenian community and the Embassy. Ambassador Grigoryan outlined the embassy's upcoming plans and expressed support for the activities of the Armenian community council and the Armenian Prelacy. Deputy Chairman of the National Council, Ardo Hampartsumian, also underscored the significance of fostering mutual relations and maintaining full cooperation with the embassy⁷⁹.

The Role of the RA Embassy in Revitalizing the Armenian Community Life in the UAE

Armenia, through its embassies in different countries, plays a significant role in organizing and revitalizing community life in the Armenian Diaspora communities. The independence of Armenia, the establishment of diplomatic relations with different countries, and the setting up and functioning of embassies have not only boosted national self-awareness and pride among Armenians living abroad but have also served as a major catalyst for the rejuvenation of national life in the Armenian Diaspora communities⁸⁰.

Armenian embassies abroad, besides their diplomatic functions, take the initiative to organize Armenian community events or collaborate with local Armenian organizations to participate in various community activities.

Special emphasis is placed on commemorating significant days for Armenians, such as the Independence Day of the Republic of Armenia (September 21), the Day of the sovereignty restoration or the Day of the restoration of Armenian statehood (May 28), the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Armenian Genocide (April 24), as

⁷⁸ Visit of the Council of the Armenian Community in Dubai and the Northern Emirates to the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia in the UAE. <https://emahay.com/en/visit-council-armenian-community-dubai-northern-emirates-ambassador-republic-armenia-united-arab-emirates/> September 9, 2012

⁷⁹ The recently elected National Council paid a visit to the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, 11.05.2023 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=616094007220735&set=pb.100064604233394.-2207520000>

⁸⁰ Sardaryan S. The role of the RA in preserving the Armenian Identity in the Diaspora, <https://bit.ly/3zoALSm>, p.84.

well as the visits of the RA state officials and the Catholicosate of the *Great House of Cilicia*.

To list a few them:

On May 5, 2012, His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia visited the RA Embassy in the UAE. The day before, on May 4, Aram A. laid the foundation stone of the Church of the Holy Martyrs of Abu Dhabi. On November 20, 2012, as part of his visit to the UAE, RA Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandyan met with representatives of the Armenian community and briefed them on RA foreign policy, the situation regarding the resolution of the NK (Nagorno Karabagh) issue, and the RA government's efforts to support Syrian Armenians. On November 25, 2012, at the initiative of the RA Embassy in the UAE and the National Administration of Dubai and Northern Emirates, a meeting was organized in Sharjah between RA Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian and representatives of the Armenian community⁸¹.

On March 26-27, 2015, the RA Minister of Diaspora Hranush Hakobyan visited Abu Dhabi, where she met with the staff of the RA embassy in the UAE⁸².

On April 11, 2015, Very Rev. Mesrob Sarkissian, the Pontifical Vicar for the United Arab Emirates, along with members of the newly elected National Board of Abu Dhabi and Dubai and Northern Emirates, visited the RA Embassy in Abu Dhabi⁸³.

Cultural initiatives led by the embassy in partnership with the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi"

The array of ceremonies and events hosted within the Armenian community of the UAE spans a considerable timeline, encompassing gatherings from 2000 to 2017. Notably, these include celebrations and commemorations organized by both the Embassy of Armenia in the UAE and the National Administrations of the United Emirates. Additionally, cultural endeavors initiated by the embassy through the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi" have left a lasting impact. From March 24-29, 2001, the newly established Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Abu Dhabi hosted its inaugural cultural event at the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation. The event included an exhibition showcasing the works of 10 artists, along with various samples of Armenian craftsmanship⁸⁴.

Armenian cultural figures and guests visiting Abu Dhabi via the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi" were graciously guided to the embassy, where they were warmly received by acting ambassadors and briefed on the embassy's endeavors.

⁸¹ 10.9.6 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2012: 233.

⁸² 10.9.5 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2015: 252.

⁸³ Idem: 252.

⁸⁴ Daghljan, KalSahagian, Jerejian, Kasemjian 2014: 42.

In addition to its diplomatic and consular duties, the embassy gradually became involved in cultural affairs. Notable initiatives such as the "Days of Culture of Armenia" (December 14-19, 2002) under Ambassador Poladian's leadership were made possible through the rapport established by the Association with various cultural organizations over the years.

The "Days of Armenian Culture" were held twice in the UAE, first in 2002 in Abu Dhabi and later in 2004 in Sharjah, known as the cultural capital of the UAE. The signing of a practical program of cultural cooperation between Armenia-UAE/Sharjah on the eve of cultural days in 2004 symbolizes the deepening of cultural relations. Notably, Sharjah Culture Days were hosted in Armenia in September, marking a significant milestone as it was the first time such an event took place in the South Caucasus, attended by Emir of Sharjah, Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi⁸⁵. The consistent support provided by the "Armenian Cultural Association of Abu Dhabi" for all cultural initiatives organized by the embassy demonstrates their dedication to promoting cultural exchange. In return, the RA Embassy supported the association's efforts to ensure the success of their projects, enriching the cultural scene of the Emirates with Armenian heritage⁸⁶.

During his official inaugural visit to the Arab Emirates from March 16-29, 1999, Very Rev. His Grace Sebouh Sarkissian, Pontifical Vicar of the Diocese of Kuwait and the Arab Gulf Countries, met with representatives of the "Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association" to discuss relevant cultural and social issues⁸⁷.

Furthermore, on March 16, 2023, "Echoes of Armenia," a folk dance show and cultural event organized by Ajman Tourism of the "Tourism Development Authority" of the Emirate of Ajman, UAE, in collaboration with the Sultan bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation, marked a significant cultural milestone for the Emirate of Ajman⁸⁸.

The "Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association" has a rich history of organizing various initiatives, including:

In 1990, the "Abu Dhabi Armenian Cultural Association" held its inaugural event in December, featuring a lecture dedicated to Armenian miniatures and painting titled "Traces of Armenian Art in Foreign Countries." The lecture was delivered by the late Lebanese-Armenian educator, art commentator, and painting critic, Vazken Tutunjian. The first session took place in the lobby of the "Le Meridien" hotel in Abu Dhabi, followed by another session in Dubai, held in the hall of the "Crown Plaza" hotel⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ Pashayan A., Interview with Arshak Poladian, Ambassador of Armenia to Kuwait and Bahrain, " And how does the press of the United Arab Emirates address Armenia and Armenian topics? <https://bit.ly/45NurjI>, Noravank Scientific Educational Foundation, 09.11.2006 (in Arm.).

⁸⁶ Same place, Interview with Arshak Poladian, Ambassador..., 09.11.2006.

⁸⁷ Visit Northern Emirates and Abu Dhabi communities, HASG Amsakir, March-April 1999, p. 276, Antilias, Lebanon.

⁸⁸ Ajman Tourism organizes "Echoes of Armenia" in collaboration with the Sultan bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation, <https://bit.ly/3RSsDzV>, ZAWYA.com press-release, UAE, March 14, 2023.

⁸⁹ Daghlian, KalSahagian, Jerejian, Kasemjian 2014: 47.

In 1991, an evening of honor was organized to commemorate the poet and novelist Yervant Barsoumian, which was hosted in the private house of Zareh Tutunjian.

Also in 1991, a lecture was held dedicated to four Armenian aesthetic poets: Taniel Varuzhan, Siamanto, Misak Medzarents, and Vahan Tekeyan. The speaker for this event was the late Lebanese-Armenian writer, Aram Sepetjian. The lecture, organized by Catherine Brighton Mangassarian, an Irish-born individual who settled in Abu Dhabi and worked at the British Council, took place on May 3 at the hall of the "Le Meridien" hotel in Abu Dhabi

In 1992, the association organized an event focusing on the life and poems of Baruyr Sevag, with Aram Sepetjian serving as the speaker.

Additionally, in April, a Duduk evening was hosted, featuring the renowned duduk player *Djivan Gasparyan* as a guest. With the support of Vasil Aghelian, a resident of Kuwait, the Association extended an invitation to Djivan Gasparyan to Abu Dhabi⁹⁰.

Embassy Engagements with Armenian Community Events

In addition to the official visits, the RA Embassy also actively participates in ceremonies held within the Armenian community. In the year of 2023, notable visits by Ambassador Karen Grigoryan underscored the significance of community events. For instance, on the occasion of the 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Ambassador Grigoryan attended a commemorative mass at the St. Grigory the Illuminator Church in Sharjah⁹¹. Similarly, on May 28, 2023, Ambassador Grigoryan participated in a ceremony commemorating the 105th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia, including a Republican prayer service and blessing of the flag, held at St. Gregory the Illuminator Church in Sharjah⁹².

Furthermore, after 18 years since the establishment of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in Abu Dhabi in 2000, the Consulate General of the Republic of Armenia was inaugurated in Dubai, UAE in 2018⁹³.

High-profile visits by RA officials, such as the president, chairman of the National Assembly, and prime minister, serve as significant occasions for the Armenian communities in the Diaspora. These visits typically include meetings with the Armenian community and other related events. By collaborating with local Armenian organizations, Armenian diplomatic missions abroad contribute significantly to the revitalization of community life in Diaspora Armenian communities, thereby fostering a stronger connection among Diaspora Armenians.

Furthermore, on April 16, 2011, the establishment of the "Moushegh Ishkhan" branch of the Hamazkayin Cultural Association took place at the "Pierre Keusseyan" hall within the St. Grigory the Illuminator church complex in the Sharjah Emirate. Former

⁹⁰ Idem: 48.

⁹¹ 108th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Sharjah, UAE, <https://bit.ly/3XKuyKx>, <https://bit.ly/3XPpoxb>

⁹² 105th anniversary of the First Republic of Armenia, Sharjah, UAE, 28.05.2023: <https://bit.ly/4cxz6bw>, <https://bit.ly/3zlfB7R>, <https://bit.ly/3xBuYbG>

⁹³ Embassy of Armenia to UAE, Bilateral Relations, General information <https://uae.mfa.am/hy/bilateral-ae/>

RA Ambassador Vahagn Melikian attended the inauguration and expressed his support for the newly formed branch. Ambassador Melikian emphasized the significance of collaboration between the embassy team and Hamazkayin in addressing pan-Armenian issues, offering the embassy's resources for Hamazkayin's activities. He urged unity and joint endeavors to advance the interests of the Armenian community.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the UAE National Day⁹⁴ from November 29 to December 3, 2011, the State Dance Ensemble of Armenia performed concerts in Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Al-Ain, and Dubai, at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture of the United Arab Emirates. The Republic of Armenia Embassy in Abu Dhabi supported the events⁹⁵.

Among the community's ceremonial events, the following deserve mention:

Commemoration of Armenian Republic and Independence Anniversaries:

The Armenian community in the UAE has regularly marked the anniversaries of the founding of the First Republic of Armenia (May 28) and the Independence of the Republic of Armenia, nearly every year since 2000. These events typically feature the involvement of the Pontifical Vicar of the Armenian Diocese of the UAE and Qatar, as well as the RA Ambassador and Embassy officials in the UAE. At times, artists and musicians from Armenia also joins in these celebrations.

Armenian Cause (Hay Tad) Discussions: On February 12, 2010, a round table discussion was convened at the RA Embassy in the UAE, organized by the Armenian National Committee and chaired by committee member Huri Mayisian. The discourse focused on topics such as repatriation and the draft law of RA, as well as Armenian-Turkish relations in 2009⁹⁶.

Literary and Cultural Commemorations: Notable literary and cultural figures in Armenian history are commemorated within the community. For instance, on October 19, 2012, a concert commemorating the 300th anniversary of Sayat Nova's birth was held in Dubai under the auspices of the RA Embassy in the UAE and organized by the UAE branch of the Armenian Relief Society⁹⁷.

Celebrating Armenian Victories: Special events mark significant victories in Armenian history. For instance, on March 26, 2015, a coordination session was conducted at the RA Embassy in Abu Dhabi to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War. Similarly, on May 9, 2015, an event

⁹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Performances by the State Dance Ensemble of Armenia in the UAE, <https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2011/12/03/folk/2628>, MFA Press-releases, 03.11. 2011 (in Arm.).

⁹⁵ 10.9.5 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2011: 257.

⁹⁶ 10.9.6 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2010: 227.

⁹⁷ 10.9.6 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2012: 234.

commemorating the 70th anniversary of this victory took place at the "Madinat Arena" hotel in Dubai attended by representatives of various embassies⁹⁸.

Commemorating Armenian Genocide and Sumgait Martyrs: In the UAE, as in all Diaspora communities, initiatives to commemorate the Armenian Genocide and the Sumgait Massacres have played a pivotal role for years. These initiatives are driven by an unwavering commitment to pass on from generation to generation the demand for Armenians' just rights and justice. Alongside commemorating the anniversary of the Genocide, the Armenian community in the UAE also honours the victims of the Sumgait massacres. UAE solemnly observes the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide⁹⁹ and pays tribute to the victims of the Sumgait pogrom¹⁰⁰ and massacres.

Notable commemorations included:

A memorial service held on February 22, 2013, at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Sharjah, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Sumgait Martyrs. The event was attended by Gegham Gharibjanyan, the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the UAE, embassy staff, representatives of the National Council, and community members¹⁰¹.

On April 24, 2015 Divine Liturgy took place at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Sharjah followed by the lighting of a candle in the St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church complex courtyard to mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Very Rev. Mesrob Sarkissian, the Pontifical Vicar for the United Arab Emirates, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to the UAE Gegham Gharibjanyan, and donor Victor Baroud unveiled a bronze monument dedicated to the centennial of the Armenian Genocide¹⁰².

Armenian National Army Anniversary Celebration: The Armenian community also celebrates the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Armenian National Army.

On January 27, the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the United Arab Emirates and the Council of the Armenian Community in Abu Dhabi, organized a Holy Mass in the Holy Martyrs Church in Abu Dhabi, officiated by Very Reverend Father Mesrob Sarkissian, Catholicos Vicar of the Great See of Cilicia in the United Arab

⁹⁸ 10.9.5 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2015: 253.

⁹⁹ 10.9.6. The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2010: 227.

¹⁰⁰ The Sumgait pogrom was a pogrom that targeted the Armenian population of the lakeside town of Sumgait in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic in late February 1988. Wikipedia.

¹⁰¹ 10.8.7 The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2013: 229, National Library of Armenia, https://tert.nla.am/hayspyurq_taregirq_2013.pdf

¹⁰² 10.9.5. The countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the commemorative events held in the Armenian community of the UAE, RA Ministry of Diaspora 2015: 252.

(In the yard of St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church in Sharjah stands another Khatchkar, a hand-chiselled sculpture crafted from Armenian tufa stone weighing two tons, serving as a powerful memorial. Generously donated by the Sukiasyan family from Armenia, it was inaugurated on April 23, 1996, in commemoration of the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide).

Emirates and Qatar, dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Armenian national army. At the end of the ceremony, a reception was held, organized by the Women's Committee. The Holy Mass was attended by the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia in the United Arab Emirates, Gegham Gharibjanian, diplomats, and representative of the Armenian national bodies and members of the community¹⁰³.

Engagements of the RA Embassy with UAE Government Institutions

It is essential to acknowledge the proactive engagements of the RA Embassy in the UAE, which serve to enhance Armenian-Emirati bilateral relations and foster the implementation of mutually beneficial projects.

From March 23, 2010, to March 9, 2020, notable visits to the embassy included meetings with prominent UAE figures such as Dr. Rashed Ahmad bin Fahadi¹⁰⁴, UAE Minister of Environment and Water, and Sultan bin Sait Al Mansouri¹⁰⁵, UAE Minister of Economy. Discussions with Dr. Said Mohammed al-Shamsi, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs for International Organizations Affairs, facilitated the alignment of common interests between both countries¹⁰⁶.

Chairman Muhammad Ahmad Al-Merri of the "National Federal Council" of the UAE expressed high appreciation for the significant contributions of the Armenian community in the UAE to the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the Emirates¹⁰⁷.

Meetings with Amal Al Qubaisi, Chairwoman of the UAE "National Federal Council" (UAE SDF, Parliament), emphasized the friendly relations between Armenia and the UAE. It was underscored that deepening bilateral cooperation in an inter-parliamentary format would further strengthen the existing ties¹⁰⁸.

Discussions during the Armenian-Emirati intergovernmental joint commission session with UAE Minister of Education Hussein bin Ibrahim Al Hammadi focused on educational agreements and opportunities for expertise and student exchanges in the education sector¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰³ Embassy of Armenia, Holy Mass in Abu Dhabi dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Armenian Army, <https://uae.mfa.am/hy/news/2017/01/28/army28012017/4249>, 28.01.2017.

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Armenia, Armenian Ambassador Vahan Melikyan had a meeting with UAE Minister of Environment and Water Dr. Rashed Ahmad bin Fahad. <https://bit.ly/4eFKioj>, 24.03.2024 (in Arm.).

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Armenia, Ambassador Vahagn Melikyan met with UAE Minister of Economy Sultan Bin Said Al Mansouri, <https://bit.ly/3LaWxvs>, 14.09.2011 (in Arm.).

¹⁰⁶ Discussion of collaboration between the Emirates and Armenia, <https://bit.ly/3L7iLPd>, Al Ittihad newspaper, UAE, 05.08.2013 (in Arabic).

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Armenia, The Ambassador Gegham Gharibjanian had a meeting with the Chairman of the UAE's Federal National Council, <https://bit.ly/3VLPcrb>, 03.03. 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Ambassador Mkrtyumyan's meeting with the Chairman of the UAE Federal National Council, https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2019/04/22/uae_meeting/9428, 22.04. 2019 (in Arm.).

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Armenia, The RA ambassador met with the UAE Minister of Education, <https://www.mfa.am/hy/press-releases/2019/07/14/armemb-uae/9728>, 14.07.2019 (in Arm.).

Meetings with Sheikh Saud bin Saqr al-Qasimi, Crown Prince of the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah, UAE, involved detailed discussions on bilateral protocols, agreements, and legal frameworks¹¹⁰.

Additionally, during an official visit focused on scientific cooperation to the governor of Sharjah, the RA ambassadors of the UAE and the director of the Sharjah Mint, Varoujan Nerguizian, represented the Armenian community of the UAE¹¹¹.

It is noteworthy that the UAE Embassy in Armenia initiates various programs and events aimed at strengthening bilateral cultural relations. These efforts include participation in cultural exhibitions to showcase Emirati culture, as well as organizing lectures on Emirati civilization's culture and history in Armenian universities¹¹².

Conclusion

The organized presence of Armenians in the UAE has played a pivotal role, as evidenced by the establishment of the Armenian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, a significant development for the Gulf region. The Diocesan Assemblies of the Diocese of Kuwait and Arab Gulf Countries (March 1999 and March 2000) have wholeheartedly supported this initiative, furthering practical organizational efforts in line with the directives of the relevant bodies of the Catholicosate of Cilicia in Lebanon.

Relations between the UAE community and the RA Embassy have flourished on the basis of mutual respect and cooperation, with active participation from national administrations through effective propaganda efforts. With the re-independence of Armenia and the opening of the RA Embassy in Abu Dhabi, Armenia has entered a new phase of cooperation, marking 25 years of steadily developing relations between RA and the UAE (1998-2023). These relations are founded on mutual respect and the enduring warmth between the two friendly peoples, facilitating the revitalization of trade and economic ties and the implementation of various investment programs.

The cooperation between Abu Dhabi and the RA Embassy underscores the significance of economic development and investments as crucial pillars of Armenia's independence. The UAE ranks among Armenia's largest trade partners, highlighting the strategic importance of their economic relations. As the eighth-largest market for Armenian exports and the eleventh-largest source of Armenian imports worldwide, the UAE plays a pivotal role in Armenia's trade landscape.

Today, the UAE stands as an important partner for Armenia, contributing not only to mutually beneficial regional projects and a thriving business environment but also to the deepening of inter-civilizational dialogue. The UAE's attentive approach to the Armenian community reflects its commitment to tolerance and cultural diversity.

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Republic of Armenia, Ambassador Mkrtumyan's official trip to the Emirate of Ras al-Khaimah. https://uae.mfa.am/hy/news/2020/03/09/amb_rak/7732, 09.03 2020.

¹¹¹ The Ruler of Sharjah and the President of Armenia are in talk about potential scientific collaborations. He chaired the meeting of the Advisory Board of ICCROM – Sharjah, Centre of International Cultural Heritage Organisations. <https://bit.ly/3xzY0IL>, Al Bayan online Newspaper, UAE, 18.01.2019 (in Arabic).

¹¹² Cultural cooperation, <https://bit.ly/3LpxSDP>

The opening of the UAE Embassy in Armenia in 2015 and the RA Consulate General in Dubai in 2018 further solidify the diplomatic ties between the two nations. The Armenian community in the UAE, spanning over 42 years, has made significant contributions, particularly in facilitating the establishment of the RA Embassy.

While the Arab political dialogue and partnerships with countries evolve, Armenia's engagement with Arab nations continues to grow. The establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations between RA and Saudi Arabia stands as a testament to closer mutual cooperation, alongside Armenia's engagement with Gulf countries.

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