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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY STUDIES

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES – ROMANIA RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT
OF EU – GCC FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms and Abbreviations

List of Figures

List of Tables

INTRODUCTION

1. Defining the Topic / Significance And Rationale
 - 1.1 Context of Romania's Positioning with the UAE
2. Aims, Objectives And Research Questions
 - 2.1 Defining the Parameters of Research for Advancing Romanian Interests in the UAE
3. Sources and Research Material
 - 3.1 Data Collection and Research Methodology
4. Outline of the Chapters
5. Limitations of the Research
 - 5.1 Challenges Faced and Implemented Solutions
6. Concluding Remarks

CHAPTER I

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: BACKGROUND AND PROFILE OF THE COUNTRY

1. Brief History and Characteristics of Transformation
 - 1.1 Foundation and Establishment
 - 1.2 Federal Authorities
 - 1.3 Tribal Components in the Development of United Arab Emirates
 - 1.4 Economic Performance. Trade Openness and Directions

CHAPTER II

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND ROMANIA: A STUDY IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

1. Conceptual and Functional Dimensions of Economic Diplomacy
 - 1.1 Literature Review
 - 1.2 Diplomatic and Political Engagement between United Arab Emirates and Romania
2. Legal Framework
 - 2.1 Bilateral Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding: A Review of the State of Collaboration and Cooperation
3. Economic Relations: Bilateral Engagement Built on Trade
 - 3.1 Situation on Trade Relations and Structure of Bilateral Trade
 - 3.2 Opportunities for Advancing Romanian Interests in the UAE in the Context of Bilateral Ties
 - 3.2.1 Defense Industry Cooperation in the Context of Bilateral Ties
4. UAE – Romania Engagement Framework: Key Imperative for the United Arab Emirates
 - 4.1 Policy Setting and Planning Engagements
 - 4.2 Identifying Respective Channels of Engagement
 - 4.3 Setting Romania's Arena – Focus on the United Arab Emirates
 - 4.4 Differentiators in Romania's Trade and Investment Promotion Strategies

4.5 Review of Outcomes and Framework Continuity

5. Concluding Remarks for the Advancement of the Bilateral Ties

CHAPTER III

BILATERAL INTERACTION BETWEEN ROMANIA AND THE COUNTRIES PARTIES TO THE CHARTER OF THE COOPERATION COUNCIL FOR THE ARAB STATES OF THE GULF

1. Overview of the GCC Member States: Addressing Essential Elements Imperative for Diplomatic Engagement

1.1 Establishing the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf: Security, Economic Principles and Cultural Identity

2. Shifting Dynamics between Romania and the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States

2.1 Bilateral Engagement between Romania and the GCC Member States: A Review of the State of Collaboration and Cooperation

2.1.1 Romania and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Established Economic Connections

2.1.2 Romania and the State of Kuwait: Opportunities for Investment Attraction

2.1.3 Romania and the State of Qatar: Growing Health and Education Links

2.1.4 Romania and the Kingdom of Bahrain: Modest Opportunities with Room for Growth

2.1.5 Romania and the Sultanate of Oman: Advancing Economic Links

3. Review and Conclusion

CHAPTER IV

EU – GCC FREE TRADE AGREEMENT. IMPLICATIONS ON ROMANIA’S RELATIONS WITH THE GCC

1. EU – GCC Cooperation Agreement as the Basis of the Relationship between the Two Blocs

1.1 Current Approach under the 1989 EU – GCC Cooperation Agreement

1.2 Application of the Cooperation Agreement – Review of Joint Council and Ministerial Meetings

2. EU – GCC Free Trade Agreement Negotiations

2.1 Literature Review

2.2. Parameters for Romania’s Positioning under the EU – GCC Framework

2.2.1 Romanian Influence in the GCC

2.2.2 Dynamics of the Romanian Diaspora in the GCC

2.2.3 Impact of Romanians’ Temporary Presence in the GCC

2.2.4 Case study: UAE – Expanding Links and Demand for Skilled Expatriates

2.2.5 Kafala Arrangements, Regulatory Framework and Security of Citizens

3. Concluding Remarks

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reflections on the Research and Key Findings

Annexes

Bibliography

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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

After more than two decades since the establishment of diplomatic ties, the recent period has witnessed a remarkable renewal and consolidation of Romanian – United Arab Emirates relations. Many of the underlying factors and circumstances contributing to the bilateral contacts of the past two decades remain yet to be explored and analysed. This thesis examines the role of the existing engagement framework in shaping the relationship and reveals opportunities and potential for further development between the two states. Bilateral links, almost entirely absent until de recent years have now flourished and both countries are looking to capture mutual opportunities and develop a greater sense of complementarity.

This research determines what role the existing bilateral agreements specifically between Romania and United Arab Emirates have played in aiding to develop closer ties, and more broadly with the member countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf also referred to as the (GCC).¹ The thesis begins by providing a brief overview of the factors that led to the increasing Romanian – United Arab Emirates contacts in the recent decade, assessing these factors through relevant approaches in relation to the existing framework. It points out shortages in the current tactic, concluding that bilateral cooperation renders ample potential in multiple directions. It also employs and incorporates the lessons from EU – GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations as a relevant component to provide an empirical route in addressing challenges and limitations between the two blocs and constitutes a base to enhance cooperation between Romania and the Gulf Cooperation Council member states. On a country level, the matrix of areas of cooperation and proposed framework/mechanism is devoted to progress and forge closer connections and also explores the extent to which the newly created bilateral channels have enabled the implementation of proposed projects by bringing together relevant stakeholders and showcasing a more committed and well-informed interaction between the two countries.

¹ The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) also known as the Cooperation Council of the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG) is a political and economic union comprising of Kingdom of Bahrain, State of Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The thesis examines the bilateral relations between Romania and the United Arab Emirates especially the recent governmental level talks, their implications in terms of trade, strategic and niche opportunities and reflections on the requirements for diversification from traditional trading partners. The thesis takes into account the milieu and variables that helped and influenced in shaping the existing relation. That said, the study fills the gap in literature on this subject and provides a new perspective on contemporary relations and diplomatic engagement between Romania and the United Arab Emirates. Few studies have been written on the growing relationship between Romania and the UAE. Set against the EU – GCC FTA negotiations process and in the light of regional bilateral agreements, this study provides insight into Romania’s diplomatic process and engagement in the region, depicts a comprehensive overview of the promising ties and ultimately tackles the issue of how to improve relations with the member countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

Whereas we present a new perspective, with Romania and the UAE as the main focus, the purpose is to discuss the preconditions for advancing the Romanian interests especially opportunities to exploit latent synergies and to understand the constraints faced and come up with mutually beneficial solutions. This research also attempts to examine the multi-faceted relations between Romania and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries by gathering and assessing evidence and factors behind prevailing economic interests. Systematic efforts were made to record, explain and indicate the circumstances and motives that propelled the relations in a particular direction. I have chosen the UAE not only because it is a remarkable success story and it exemplifies a federal project that successfully triumphed in the Arab World but also because it is positioned as a major hub between three continents and represents a gateway and landing pad to the entire region. Likewise, with the increase of their economic diversification plans it has become more vital to align Romania’s position with the opportunities and goals embodied in their National Agendas imperative for the recalibration of the bilateral relations.

The thesis also offers a fresh analysis of those aspects of the region that have a bearing on the future advancement of the relations. To a remarkable degree the tribal mentality and considerations are deep rooted and still dominate the GCC societies. The prominent role of tribal ties and heritage is regarded as an inherent limitation of these societies. The existing literature on the EU – GCC FTA negotiations is predominantly missing the consistent link defined by cultural factors in a deeply rooted traditional society. The approach and debate in this research provides insight on how these characteristics and elements are interrelated and essential for building successful relationships with the Gulf Arab States. As a result, this study

may be useful to analysts and specialists focused on Middle East issues especially in relation to United Arab Emirates and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and it is hoped that this research will contribute to the advancement of business cooperation and bolster the economic links between UAE – Romania and further with the GCC region. This research is therefore particularly important and valuable in understanding the UAE – Romania and the EU – GCC relationship on a granular level, providing a plan for Romania to circumvent the FTA and advance complementary links with the GCC member states. It is anticipated nevertheless that the overall study as presented in this thesis will lead to further advancement of Romania's presence and interests in the region.

There are a few frequently described characteristics and relevant background components that shed light on some crucial considerations and current conditions pertinent to the progress of the relations with the Gulf Arab States and also place bilateral ties with Romania in a wider context. In addition, the historical legacies that impact the relations have been briefly sketched given that until recently many of these parameters and factors remain and can be conducive to closer links between the parties.

The GCC countries are aligned under the resource dependency model, they also face individual challenges highlighting priorities on a country and regional level. Declining revenues from energy sources, budget constraints, demographic changes and generational shifts lead the Gulf countries to re-evaluate priorities by diversifying their respective economies. However, GCC exports remain highly dependent on hydrocarbons, limiting implementation of valid economic diversification strategies. One area of potential advancement of these diversification strategies is the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with relevant trading partners such as the European Union. However, in light of the FTA negotiations, GCC countries faced criticism for alleged human rights violations leading to a stalemate with the European Union and halt of all FTA negotiations. The current context requires a more nuanced approach for the development of the relationship (especially FTA progression) and Romania's position in the current mix – with recommendations to position Romania as a neutral trusted partner for the Gulf Cooperation Council that would lead to increased economic cooperation between Romania and the Arab Gulf States. The foundations for the EU – GCC rapprochement were laid in 1989 Cooperation Agreement under which the European Economic Community (EC) and the GCC committed to enter into negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. The thesis will review the Implementation of the Cooperation Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiation process from the inception of talks until present, focused primarily on the outcomes of the negotiations.

This research contributes to the body of knowledge of UAE – Romania bilateral relations by incorporating the multidimensional EU – GCC FTA framework and its nuances in light of the recent developments in the region. It offers thoughts on Romania – GCC regional relationships, evolution of United Arab Emirates – Romania relations and implications for Romania of implementing an engagement strategy in parallel with the EU – GCC Free Trade Agreement negotiation context.

An essential component of this research rests on sources comprising of original agreements and protocols obtained from the UAE Ministry of Economy, archival document with restricted access, materials collected from interviews with government officials, researchers and analysts in the UAE designed to gather information about key issues, relevant to chart the development of the bilateral UAE – Romania relations. In addition, the field work conducted in the GCC region and UAE in particular has proved invaluable for the conduct of this research. Living in the United Arab Emirates for the past ten years, meeting UAE and Romanian officials posted in the region, diplomats from numerous other embassies and regional experts provided first-hand experience on the research subject and also added credibility and substance to this study.

In relation to trade related matters, the United Arab Emirates captures a forefront position as Romania's first commercial partner in the GCC and the 3rd position amongst the Middle East region. This research claims that an engagement framework tailored for the UAE could better position Romania and Romanian capabilities in the region (by initially using the UAE as a soft landing pad to the rest of the region) and give access to opportunities in the light of UAE's diversification plans and Vision 2021. The implications and limitations of such an engagement framework which is also relevant and applicable for the other five GCC member states is intended as an alternative strategy to advance and also sustain Romania's interests in the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, it is expected that this study will inspire further research in relation to the issue of UAE – Romania bilateral relations especially with regard to other Gulf Cooperation Council member states, by highlighting the importance of the GCC region for Romania and its interests in the context of the existing Romania – European Union relationship and trade reliance.

The UAE provided an excellent case study because the traditional default model of engagement proved to be particularly unsuited to the unique characteristics of the GCC region. The existing Romania – GCC engagements, provide several limitations to achieving the full potential of the relationship between the parties. Most of the agreements, memorandums of understandings and conventions between Romania and the GCC countries pre-date economic

development in the GCC (1990's). The discrepancy between the terms of these instruments and the reality of the GCC countries in 2018, present an opportunity for Romania to revive such agreements under a targeted approach. Romania must focus on advancing its current capabilities in the relevant sectors and present these capabilities under relevant instruments.

The EU – GCC Cooperation Agreement has not progressed to realise its full potential due to the fact that the content and dimension of the Cooperation Agreement was based on a non-preferential trade arrangement – it lacked the extension of privileges granted by the EU to its international partners, an act which from the GCC's perspective side-lined (and dented the GCC confidence regarding EU intentions). This model reflects the same problems faced in the negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement that came to a halt since 2008. The GCC bypassed a block wide deal with the EU in favour of bilateral arrangements between individual member states and European countries. Equally the GCC evolved since the Cooperation Agreement and Free Trade Agreement requirements. However, that evolution did not erode tribal and social norms essential to the Gulf States and the nature of their decision-making.

This research aims to bring to the forefront the main UAE – Romania framework as a solution that would circumvent the EU – GCC free trade stalemate. The framework would place Romania as a favourable trusted partner with the GCC leading to commercial exposure and mutual benefits. The application of the framework is examined under the UAE – Romania analysis/case study with appropriate recommendations. The introduction presents the rationale to the study, objectives and significance, sources and research methodology implemented and states an overview of the whole thesis.

The first part, integrated by chapters I and II sets the scene by portraying historical influences that shaped the establishment of the UAE, the astounding level of sophistication its great development strides, the fundamental role of tribal features and the emblematic component of tribal allegiances. It describes the economic diplomacy component as a mechanism that enables the interplay of relevant actors as well as various structures that systematically exert influence in advancing national economic interests. It also brings to the forefront the UAE – Romania diplomatic engagement and economic relations as well as Romania's legal framework concluding that the region provides a fertile base for engagement.

Chapter II portrays the architecture of the relationship between UAE and Romania consisting of the official position and status of the bilateral relations ascertained by reviewing the official contacts, existing bilateral instruments, key areas of engagement and cooperation, weaknesses and key achievements. The second chapter is also devoted to exploring the ties between both partners and reveals alternatives for the future course of this relation in the years'

ahead, highlighting areas where greater room for manoeuvre exists in order to enhance the relations.

The goal of chapter III is to outline and portray the context for understanding the current dynamics of Romania – GCC bilateral interaction highlighting aspects related to the cultural context, characteristics and contemporary trends embraced by the GCC societies and their transformation while maintaining traditions and customs deeply cherished by their people. This chapter also presents a chronology of the political and diplomatic contacts and reviews the establishment of bilateral agreements based on economic interests in enhancing trade relations.

Chapter IV contextualises the implementation of the Cooperation Agreement (to ascertain certain limitations and challenges) in parallel with the progression path for the FTA conclusion, highlighting the prerequisite for a tailored individual approach (separate negotiations for each GCC country and thereupon a lift to the regional field). The forefront of this approach takes into account specific individual interests and a complete framework in the current context as a solution to more favourable outcomes and a win-win solution to all parties. The chapter utilizes the research to shed light on the requirements of a leading edge engagement framework and strategy for Romania to circumvent the FTA and advance complementary links with the GCC member states. The chapter also discusses contemporary trends and dynamics of Romanian presence in the region in light of recent geo-political developments.

The concluding part is devoted to discussions on the proposed framework for the UAE and the GCC (original contribution) and recommendations for further research in order to advance the existing relations while considering predominant limitations. In addition, the study concludes that the framework presents its own challenges, however it is the best alternative in light of the lack of the FTA progress and relevant practical implementation. Guidelines and recommendation for enhancing economic ties between Romania – UAE and the GCC are also brought forward.

The engagement framework proposed part of this research, for Romania with the UAE as an initial landing pad/gateway and then with the rest of the GCC, encompasses a number of stakeholders and variables that must be incorporated and makes a significant contribution towards assuring greater advantages and positioning. Therefore, it represents a noteworthy solution (examined and corroborated with solid evidence) for Romania to adapt its strategy with the GCC to advance Romanian interests and capabilities and to acclaim areas fruitful for Romanian economy, while upholding EU guidelines and cooperation. Through this, significant benefits could be reaped on a major scale for both Romania and the GCC due to a coordinated approach.

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