

Economic diplomacy in promoting exports. Case study of Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract. The research subject is economic diplomacy as a tool for promoting export development. It focuses on trade between Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates. The study seeks to answer the research question: To what extent does economic diplomacy affect export development? The research employed empirical methods, quantitative research, statistical analysis, comparative analysis, and case studies. Moreover, the Pearson correlation coefficient was applied. An essential element of the study was also the author's participant observation of numerous processes and phenomena in the area under investigation. The results show that exports from Central and Eastern European countries to the United Arab Emirates are growing in countries that have embassies. However, a detailed analysis indicates that economic diplomacy, supported by the presence of embassies and high-level visits, has had a limited impact on exports. Its influence was most pronounced during the initial stages of bilateral relations between CEE countries and the United Arab Emirates. On the other hand, GDP levels and their dynamics have had a stable impact. Relations between Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates are of key importance for trade routes connecting the North and the South.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic diplomacy, carried out by embassies and during state visits, ensures the state's economic interests abroad, including developing exports. From this perspective, analysing Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is necessary, given the growing challenges to current economic routes and the construction of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project. Due to the direct proximity of Central and Eastern Europe to Russia, Turkey, the Mediterranean basin, and the

Middle East, as well as the activities of the USA and China in the CEE region, it also has a global dimension, including for trade routes. Ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe is essential for economic relations in Eurasia and the North-South axis. This research is the first scholarly contribution on economic diplomacy in the light of relations between Central and Eastern European countries and the UAE, and export promotion.

The study examines the phenomenon of exports supported by economic diplomacy. The paper aims to answer the research question: to what extent does economic diplomacy affect export development? The research scope covers Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates. Each of the 20 Central and Eastern European countries was examined in its bilateral relations with the United Arab Emirates. The economic study on exports between 1998 and 2024, GDP, and visits of heads of state, government, foreign affairs and economy ministers, and members of the royal family holding high state positions covers the years 2010-2024. The issue of establishing diplomatic relations and opening embassies was analysed from its inception to the present day. The study aims to translate the findings into actionable recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of export growth in the context of the upcoming launch of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Another reason is the lack of a comprehensive study of this problem in the economic literature. So far, there is no study on CEE economic diplomacy, supporting exports, in its relations with the United Arab Emirates. Therefore, the presented article is an original contribution to the advancement of scholarship in both Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates. The adopted hypothesis is that, within the framework of economic diplomacy, embassies and top-level state visits affect trade development between Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates. However, this influence is significant in initiating new relationship dynamics with their role subsequently diminishing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Economic diplomacy in export promotion

One definition of economic diplomacy encompasses the broader concept of governance, in which economic measures are employed to achieve political goals (Baldwin, 1985; Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008). Okano-Heijmans (2013) synthesises trade and economic diplomacy with political factors. However, this does not integrate domestic processes. Van Bergeijk (2009) and Rana (2015), on the other hand, view exports and their promotion as the primary function of economic diplomacy, which Woolcock (2025) calls commercial diplomacy. In this context, Chatterjee (2020, pp. 67-72) presents the theoretical components of economic diplomacy and distinguishes it from commercial diplomacy. Analysing economic diplomacy across countries and regions requires an interdisciplinary approach, particularly from the perspective of international relations theory, economics, and global politics (Van Bergeijk, Okano-Heijmans & Melissen, 2011). Lee and Hudson (2004, p. 360) emphasise the need to adopt a political economy approach that integrates market relations with political relations, thus conceptualising diplomacy as a continuous political-economic dialogue. Furthermore, the interconnection of public and private actors and interests is crucial, as evident in the origins and evolution of diplomacy and diplomatic systems. This approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding and explain the multidimensional nature of diplomacy, including its commercial component (Piskorska & Dworski, 2025).

For VanGrasstek (2019), economic diplomacy is a part of a state's foreign policy that encompasses diplomatic activities related to international trade, trade negotiations, and the use of economic mechanisms to achieve the state's economic and political goals and interests, constituting an important part of a grand strategy. Economic decisions have a geopolitical context. Therefore, they are linked to states' foreign policies

(Chatterjee, 2020, pp. 67-72). At the bilateral and regional levels, trade is a key instrument of foreign policy. Trade, alongside foreign and security policy interests, is a key element in a country's overall orientation. Trade is part of its international profile and helps develop and support its interests. Trade can be part of foreign policy through reorientation, diversification, decisions on participation or non-participation in regional trade agreements, the opening of new trade and transport links, and the conclusion of bilateral cooperation agreements (Barston, 2019, p. 213). Therefore, trade has traditionally been a subject of interest for diplomacy. As Barston (2019, p. 217) emphasises, regional trade agreements are an instrument of diplomacy within foreign policy, supporting the strategy of influence and hegemonic control in and over regional organisations and groupings.

Woolcock (2025) analyses decision-making processes, international negotiations, and the practical actions of states in the global economy. He specifically examines commercial diplomacy and economic statecraft, combining International Political Economy theory with practical examples. Within the framework of external economic relations in the 21st century, guided by the "new economic diplomacy," there is a greater diversity of economic diplomacy. Currently, there are a significant number of non-governmental entities. However, at present, on the one hand, the multilateral system is struggling, and on the other, there is significantly greater activity in negotiating regional and multilateral trade agreements. At the same time, domestic affairs of states are increasingly taking precedence over foreign policy, including trade, which often hinders negotiations and the achievement of international agreements. Furthermore, Barston (2019, p. 223) notes that logistics diplomacy is an important yet neglected area of academic discussions on diplomacy. As a field of diplomacy, it has gained importance due to trade conflicts, changes and fluidity within groups, large-scale global logistics projects, and the growing interconnection of security and international trade issues, especially their nodal points. Furthermore, dynamic global changes, including the US-China rivalry and the crisis of multilateralism, are influencing the practice of economic diplomacy (Yueh, 2020). Carr argued that power is indivisible and that the spheres of politics and economy are intertwined. He emphasises that economic power is an instrument of political power, and economic factors are always subordinated to politics (Goldfischer, 2002).

2.2. Central and Eastern Europe - the United Arab Emirates relations

One of the co-authors of the definition of Central and Eastern Europe, Oskar Halecki (1952), defined this region between Sweden, Germany, and Italy, and Turkey and Russia, identifying it as a distinct, non-European civilisational entity located on two continents. With the decline of the bipolar world order, Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, especially the Persian (Arabian) Gulf region, were profoundly affected. In both geographic areas, a game for a new world order has begun. New trade routes can contribute to this process through economic integration and increased interdependence. On the other hand, they can increase the risk of trade, geopolitical, and military wars. Therefore, the repudiation of armed conflict in favour of economic integration is emerging as a strategic imperative (Wdzięczak, 2023). Since the fall of communism, integration processes have been underway in Central and Eastern Europe (Kuczyńska-Zonik & Olchowski, 2023). Of the 20 countries analysed, 11 are members of the European Union, and eight are candidates. Only Belarus is not an EU candidate. Furthermore, all EU member states in the region established the Three Seas Initiative in September 2015, prioritising the energy and transport sectors to become an effective trade hub connecting the North and the South, as well as the Scandinavian countries and the MENA region.

As Kacperek (2016) notes, four strategic circles can be identified in Central and Eastern Europe based on the location connecting strategic points in the Baltic, Adriatic, Black, and Mediterranean Seas. The first is Poland, Romania, and Ukraine, constituting the region's core and the geopolitical axis from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The absence of any of these circles prevents Central and Eastern Europe from becoming a subject. Slightly modifying Kacperek's (2016) proposal, the second circle comprises the Czech Republic,

Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, and Slovenia, which enable control of the Baltic-Adriatic route. It is also worth noting that Austria, a member of the 3SI group, is part of this circle but not analysed in this article. The third circle includes Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Königsberg, and Moldova, which control the two routes. The fourth circle includes Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Georgia. Furthermore, Greece, joining the Three Seas Initiative in September 2023, has become an important part of this strategic circle. Although this article does not consider Armenia and Azerbaijan, these countries are also important for the fourth circle. They will provide Central and Eastern Europe with almost complete control over the trade route running from the North and Baltic Seas, as well as the Baltic-Adriatic route, through the Black and Caspian Seas, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea, to the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf, including the United Arab Emirates (Kacperek, 2016).

Relations between Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates are gathering considerable momentum, with all parties pursuing strategies to diversify alliances and revenue sources. Under economic agreements, the United Arab Emirates established Joint Economic Commissions to support increased economic cooperation and trade growth (Krzymowski, 2023, p. 119). It has been the case since the UAE initiated its green economy programme in 2012. Relations between the United Arab Emirates and most Central and Eastern European countries intensified following the launch of the Three Seas Initiative (Krzymowski, 2022, p. 13). The United Arab Emirates has become the largest non-EU donor to Macedonia and the largest investor in Serbia (Bartlett et al., 2017). As Louppova (2017) notes, Ukraine has decided to develop strategic cooperation with the United Arab Emirates. Townsend (2016) highlights the involvement of the Emirati company DP World in the Black Sea. In the context of its involvement in Ukraine, Rahman (2020) highlights the broader global context and significance of DP World amid increasing trade tensions. Anticipating rising geopolitical tensions and trade wars, and consequently global market turmoil, DP World aims to be an entity that ensures stable trade (Rahman, 2020).

Central and Eastern Europe has the potential to become a global trading hub stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean (Kacperek, 2016). In both energy and geopolitical areas, Central and Eastern European countries are increasingly interested in developing relations with the United Arab Emirates (Sadecki, 2013). The MENA region could become a significant global trading hub if it manages to overcome the political and security challenges (Krzymowski, 2024). Central and Eastern Europe, in turn, could not only constitute a key element of the European political, economic, and security structure but also play a significant role globally, particularly in the MENA and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) regions (Repetowicz, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

Considering the methodology of the economic sciences, this study focused on Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates in the context of their exports, supported by economic diplomacy. For this purpose, appropriate economic methods were selected to determine the optimal analytical framework. The author relied on empirical methods, quantitative research, statistical analysis, comparisons, participant observation, and case studies to identify and characterise the regularities governing these economic processes. Additionally, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. Its formula:

$$R = \frac{\sum((X - M_x)(Y - M_y))}{\sqrt{(\sum SS_x)(\sum SS_y)}}$$

was applied to test the direction and strength of the impact of high-level visits on exports (Larson & Farber, 2014, p. 473). They were then subordinated to falsifiability. Moreover, the author of the article had the opportunity to verify the research results through several years of participation in many processes and phenomena in the studied area, including as an ambassador and senior advisor to Dubai Expo 2020, responsible for strategies and for intensifying and advancing relations with the CEE countries for the United Arab Emirates. Each of the 20 countries was tested in its relations with the UAE. The adopted research methods, combined with the author's experience and direct participation in the analysed processes, resulted

in the scientific research in question, contributing to the development of science in the discussed research area.

To measure the impact of economic diplomacy, a multidimensional approach was employed, accounting for various indicators. Consequently, so-called complex indicators were considered, including economic data that demonstrate the direct effect, such as export levels following high-level visits, economic agreements, embassy openings, year-on-year export dynamics, and changes in the country's share of total exports. Furthermore, the survivability of export dynamics in subsequent years was examined. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative methods were employed, including correlating high-level visits with exports and conducting case studies.

4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Politics intertwines with the economy (Goldfischer, 2002), and economic diplomacy, which promotes trade, is an element of a state's foreign policy (VanGrasstek, 2019). In shaping a country's foreign policy and security interests, trade is a key element (Barston, 2019, p. 213). Thus, economic cooperation and trade serve political goals (Baldwin, 1985; Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008), engaging commercial diplomacy, as defined by Woolcock (2025), and economic diplomacy (Okano-Heijmans, 2013). There is a close relationship between market and political issues (Lee & Hudson, 2004, p. 360). Although Chatterjee (2020, pp. 67-72) distinguishes between economic and trade diplomacy, exporting is a key element of both (Van Bergeijk, 2009; Rana, 2015). Consequently, economic diplomacy requires an interdisciplinary approach (van Bergeijk, Okano-Heijmans & Melissen, 2011). Moreover, economic diplomacy is influenced by global challenges, including the US-China rivalry and the crisis of multilateralism (Yueh, 2020). In trade conflicts involving strategic nodes, logistics diplomacy becomes particularly important (Barston, 2019, p. 223).

The 20 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, located between Sweden, Germany, Italy, Turkey, and Russia (Halecki, 1952), began establishing diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates in the late 20th century, after the fall of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union. At that time, Romania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Belarus opened embassies in Abu Dhabi. Other countries did it in the 21st century, but Croatia still does not have it. There is also no United Arab Emirates embassy in Zagreb. In 11 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the United Arab Emirates has opened embassies between 2004 and 2019. So, the UAE initiated the opening of embassies in the "Big Bang", the Central and Eastern Europe waves of European Union enlargement. This is important for the process and intensity of relations with the United Arab Emirates. Central and Eastern Europe is undergoing integration processes (Kuczyńska-Zonik & Olchowski, 2023). Relations between Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates are gaining momentum, with all parties pursuing strategies to diversify alliances and revenue sources. Under economic agreements, the United Arab Emirates established Joint Economic Commissions to support increased economic cooperation and trade growth (Krzymowski, 2023, p. 119).

Central and Eastern European countries are increasingly interested in developing relations with the United Arab Emirates (Sadecki, 2013). 19 CEE countries have signed economic cooperation agreements with the United Arab Emirates. Bosnia and Herzegovina still do not have this kind of agreement. Additionally, Georgia, Serbia, Ukraine (EU candidates: light blue), and Belarus signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements bilaterally (Table 1). CEPAs are free trade agreements, launched in September 2021, that aim to reach USD 1.1 trillion in the United Arab Emirates' foreign trade by 2031. Since 2022, when the first CEPA was signed, it has been a new tool of the UAE's economic diplomacy (Rashad & El-Wassal, 2025). In 2024, the United Arab Emirates achieved approximately USD 810 billion in non-oil foreign trade, which represents 75% of the target. In the remaining Central and Eastern European countries that are members of the European Union (blue in Table 1), multilateral negotiations are underway

between the UAE and the European Union. Regional trade agreements are a diplomatic instrument supporting the strategy of influence (Barston, 2019, p. 217). Therefore, there is much greater activity in the negotiation of regional and multilateral trade agreements (Woolcock, 2025).

Table 1

Diplomatic relations between CEE countries and the UAE

Country	Diplomatic relations, since	The Embassy opened in the UAE	UAE Embassy opened	Agreement on Economic Cooperation
with Embassies				
Romania	1989	1990	2004	1993
Poland	1989	1991	2009	2012
Hungary	1990	2006	2018	2015
Bulgaria	1991	2018	2019	2016
Ukraine	1992	1994	2013	1995; 2025 (CEPA)
Belarus	1992	1999	2008	2025 (TISIA/ CEPA)
Georgia	1992	2020	2018	2023 (CEPA)
Czechia	1993(1988)	1989	2014	2022
Latvia	1995	2014	2017	2016
Serbia	2007	2013	2014	2024 (CEPA)
Montenegro	2008	2010	2010	2025
without UAE Embassies				
Lithuania	1992	2020	Latvia	2017
Croatia	1992	Egypt	Germany	1994
Albania	1992	2011	Greece	2012
BiH	1993	1994	Montenegro	-
Slovenia	1992	2019	Austria	2015
Slovakia	1993(1988)	2013	Austria	2015
Moldova	1995	2018	Ukraine	2018/2024
N.Macedonia	1996	2014	Italy	2025
Estonia	2006	2019	Finland	2011/2012

Source: Own Study

Relations between the Arab States and most Central and Eastern European countries intensified after the launch of the Three Seas Initiative in September 2015 (Krzyszowski, 2022, p. 13). Integrated Central and Eastern Europe has almost complete control over trade routes from the North and Baltic Seas to the Adriatic, Black, Caspian, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas, as well as to the Persian (Arabian) Gulf (Kacperek, 2016). In times of increasing geopolitical tensions and trade wars, DP World has been an active player in trying to ensure stable trade (Rahman, 2020), including in the Black Sea (Townsend, 2016). Research shows that exports from Central and Eastern European countries to the United Arab Emirates with embassies have increased dynamically, except for Ukraine, during armed conflicts. However, Ukraine has decided to develop strategic cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (Louppova, 2017). Nevertheless, the global economic crisis in 2009 and 2020 exerted an adverse impact on all the analysed countries. Moreover, a large decline in exports occurred between 2011 and 2014, except in Poland, which demonstrated the largest-ever increase in exports to the UAE during this period (Figure 1).

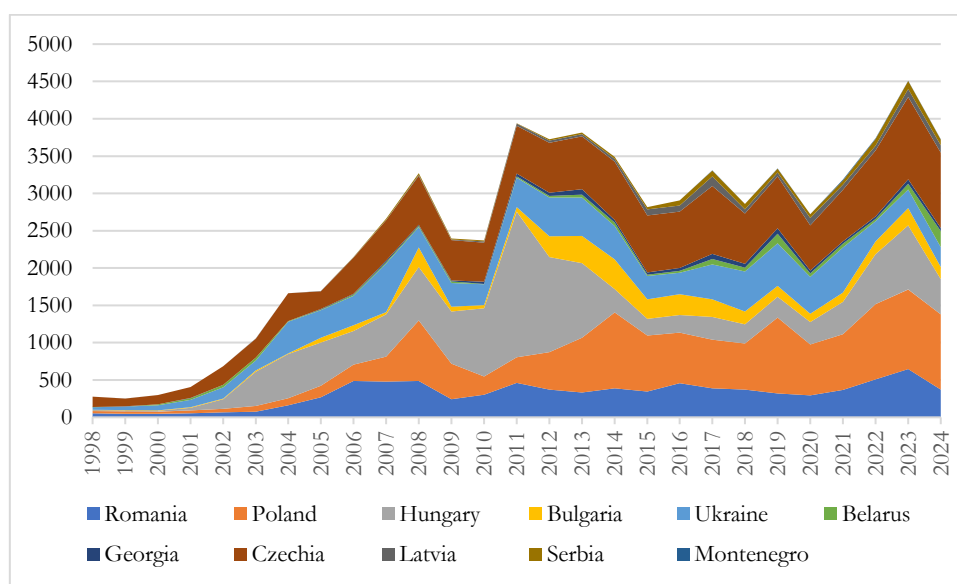


Figure 1. CEE's export supported by both embassies

Source: Own study based on <https://oec.world/en>

The United Arab Emirates' exports to Central and Eastern European countries, supported by embassies, are generally low and unstable (Figure 2).

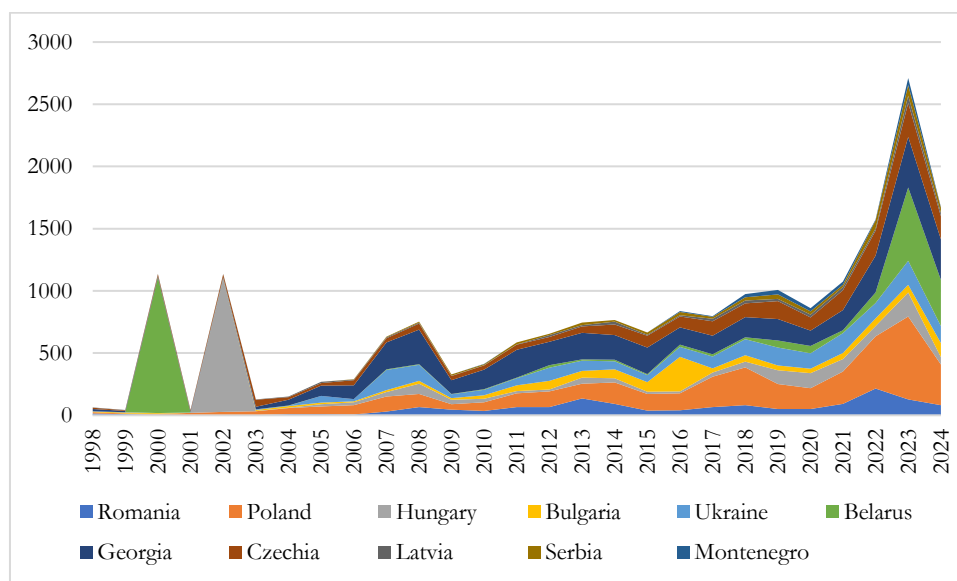


Figure 2. UAE's export supported by both embassies

Source: Own study based on <https://oec.world/en>

Exports of Central and Eastern European countries to the United Arab Emirates, excluding the UAE and Croatian embassies, have generally been on the rise for 10 years (Figure 3).

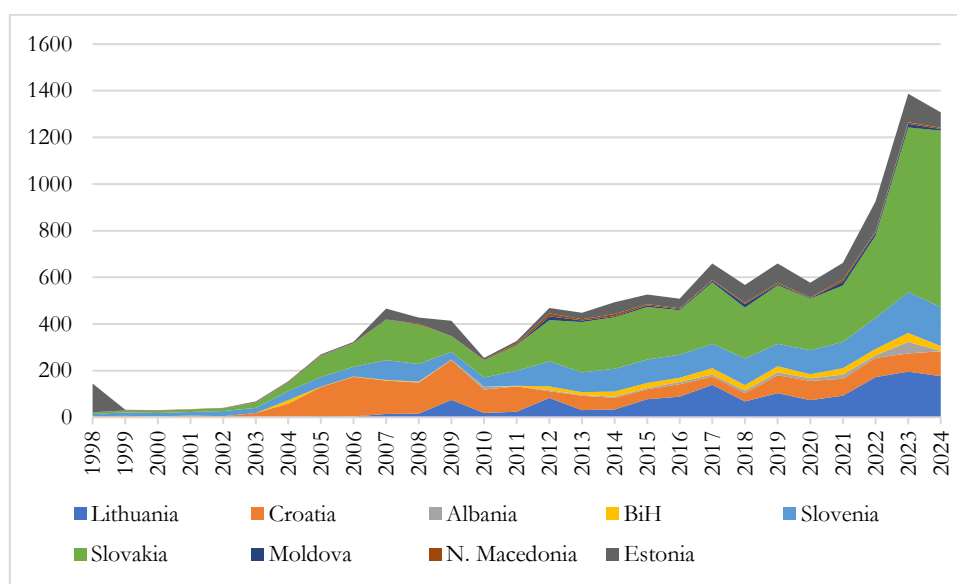


Figure 3. CEE's export without UAE embassies

Source: Own study based on <https://oec.world/en>

The United Arab Emirates' exports to Central and Eastern European countries, excluding the UAE and Croatian embassies, have generally been on a strong upward trend over the past 10 years (Figure 4).

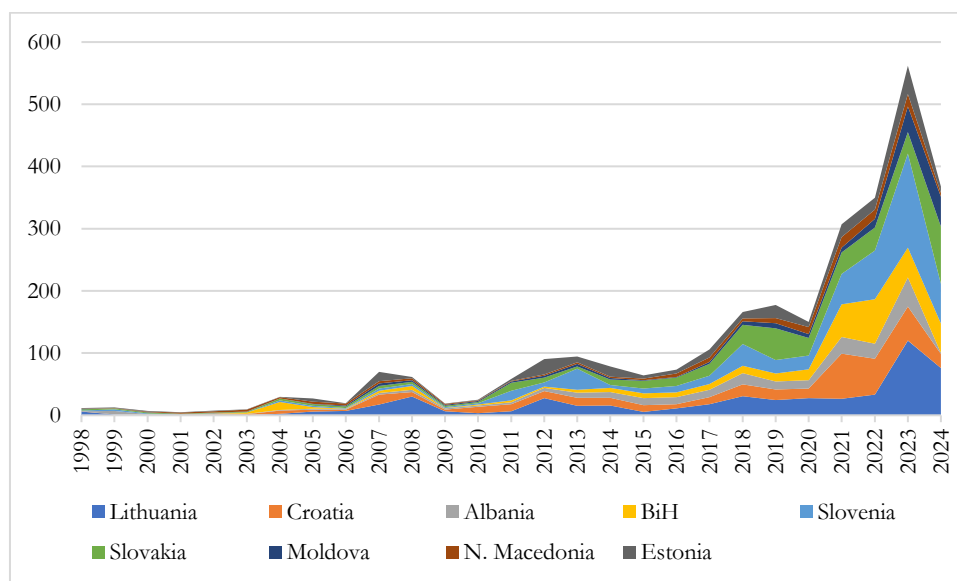


Figure 4. UAE's export without UAE embassies

Source: Own study based on <https://oec.world/en>

Studies of 20 CEE countries and the United Arab Emirates demonstrate that over the last 15 years, each country has recorded a high level of visits from the others. Visits by heads of state and government, ministers of foreign affairs and economy, and members of the royal family holding high state positions were considered (Figures 5 and 6).

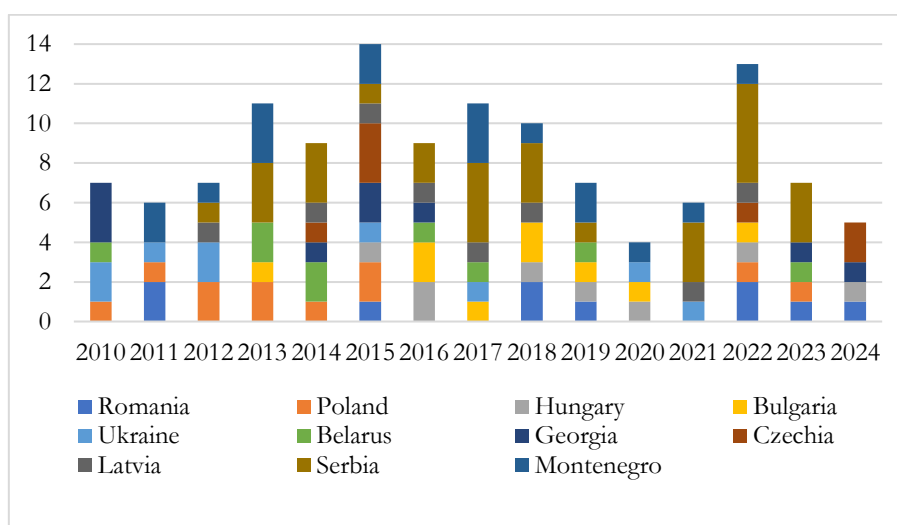


Figure 5. High-level visits supported by embassies

Source: Own study

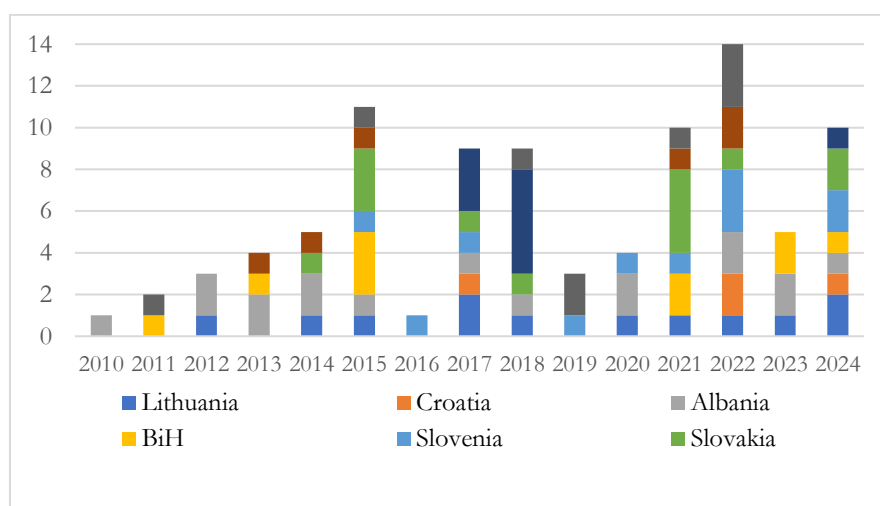


Figure 6. High-level visits without UAE embassies

Source: Own Study

A study of 11 Central and Eastern European countries that have embassies in the United Arab Emirates and the UAE has diplomatic missions in these countries shows that, in only two cases, i.e., Georgia and Serbia, high-level visits positively impacted exports to the UAE. The United Arab Emirates is the largest investor in Serbia (Bartlett et al., 2017). In Serbia, immediately after visits, and in Georgia, after 3 years. Exports of the United Arab Emirates to Central and Eastern European countries, where its embassies are located, were effectively supported only by high-level visits to Serbia after 1 year and to Hungary after 3 years. A stronger correlation is observed between the GDP of Central and Eastern European countries and their exports to the UAE. As the GDPs of Poland, Serbia, and Montenegro grew, exports to the United Arab Emirates increased. In the case of the United Arab Emirates' GDP, it had an even greater impact on exports to Central and Eastern Europe. As the United Arab Emirates' GDP increased, exports from Romania, Poland, Belarus, Czechia, Serbia, and Montenegro grew. In the case of the United Arab Emirates' exports, supported by embassies, the UAE's GDP showed a correlation with 9 out of 11 countries, except

Bulgaria and Montenegro. In comparison, CEE countries were affected in 8 cases, except for Bulgaria, Romania, and Belarus. These two countries were closely correlated (Table 2).

Table 2

Impact on export by top visits and GDP

Country	CEE's Export			UAE's Export		
	Top Visits	CEE's GDP	UAE's GDP	Top Visits	UAE's GDP	CEE's GDP
Supported by Both Embassies						
Romania	0.39/0.18/-0.43/-0.01	0.46	0.54	0.36/-0.21/-0.01/0.29	0.65	0.46
Poland	0.16/0.01/-0.16/-0.59	0.61	0.79	-0.20/-0.28/-0.46/-0.46	0.83	0.83
Hungary	-0.54/-0.37/-0.32/0.05	-0.12	-0.15	-0.05/0.36/0.036/ 0.55	0.53	0.71
Bulgaria	0.01/-0.14/-0.75/-0.55	-0.22	0.11	0.38/-0.43/-0.31/-0.02	0.04	-0.03
Ukraine	0.10/0.17/0.15/-0.11	0.23	-0.25	-0.38/-0.31/-0.17/-0.35	0.72	0.52
Belarus	-0.05/-0.01/-0.35/-0.21	0.38	0.69	-0.03/-0.20/-0.38/-0.36	0.75	0.41
Georgia	-0.40/-0.17/0.13/ 0.66	0.14	0.23	0.09/-0.06/-0.33/-0.22	0.79	0.85
Czechia	0.32/0.16/0.36/-0.18	0.66	0.83	0.15/0.04/-0.02/-0.15	0.85	0.86
Latvia	0.09/0.21/0.44/0.33	0.49	0.43	-0.09/0.07/0.37/-0.17	0.71	0.77
Serbia	0.54/0.62/0.28/0.13	0.62	0.73	0.34/ 0.66/0.29/-0.25	0.8	0.75
Montenegro	-0.08/-0.24/0.20/-0.13	0.59	0.58	-0.19/0.16/0.04/-0.00	0.4	0.52
without UAE Embassies						
Lithuania	0.61/0.23/0.41/0.16	0.80	0.82	0.42/0.25/0.22/0.27	0.81	0.84
Croatia	0.16/-0.02/ 0.62/0.25	0.57	0.19	0.33/0.36/-0.08/-0.15	0.59	0.58
Albania	0.17/0.20/-0.47/0.36	0.43	0.39	0.19/0.15/-0.47/0.30	0.5	0.43
BiH	0.23/-0.04/0.36/-0.16	0.54	0.68	0.25/0.25/-0.09/-0.11	0.8	0.85
Slovenia	0.42/ 0.58/0.73/0.57	0.77	0.91	0.22/ 0.76/0.47/0.53	0.8	0.81
Slovakia	0.16/0.04/ 0.55/0.41	0.89	0.89	0.29/0.03/0.17/ 0.68	0.77	0.83
Moldova	0.32/0.05/-0.47/0.26	0.48	0.53	-0.02/-0.08/-0.11/-0.14	0.85	0.89
N.Macedonia	0.25/0.05/-0.37/-0.46	0.06	0.13	0.23/0.39/-0.00/-0.31	0.59	0.72
Estonia	0.48/ 0.50/0.07/0.44	0.82	0.77	0.07/ 0.67/0.02/0.03	0.6	0.58

Source: Author's results based on own calculations

However, as the research results presented in Table 2, among the 9 CEE countries with no UAE embassies, exports from five countries, i.e., Lithuania (the same year), Estonia (after 1 year), Croatia and Slovakia (after 2 years) and Slovenia (consequently after 1 year) to the United Arab Emirates were effectively supported by high-level visits. Exports of the UAE to Central and Eastern European countries, where its embassies are not located, were effectively supported by high-level visits to Slovenia and Estonia (after 1 year), and to Slovakia (after 3 years). The correlation between exports to the United Arab Emirates and the GDP of Central and Eastern European countries without UAE embassies is even more pronounced. Such a relationship was observed in 8 of 9 countries, except Albania, which showed a close correlation. Moreover, the United Arab Emirates' GDP affects its exports to all 9 countries.

Comparing the share of exports to the UAE from individual Central and Eastern European countries in their total volume (Table 3) with the dynamics of high-level visits, the study shows that among countries with embassies on both sides, only Hungary and Belarus demonstrate no impact of high-level visits on exports to the United Arab Emirates. However, in 9 countries, the highest export growth to the UAE occurred at the same time as the visits or within a year after them. Poland is a prime example. The most significant increase in exports to the United Arab Emirates took place during the highest-ever visit dynamics, from 2011 to mid-2015. However, for CEE countries without UAE embassies, three countries, Slovenia, Moldova, and North Macedonia, also show no correlation in the dynamics of the growth of the share of exports to the United Arab Emirates. Nevertheless, the United Arab Emirates has become the largest non-EU donor to North Macedonia (Bartlett et al., 2017). Estonia, for example, demonstrates the impact of

visits after one year, and Croatia after two years. Meanwhile, Lithuania, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia demonstrate a direct effect of high-level visits on increased export shares to the UAE.

Table 3

Share of CEE exports to the UAE in the total volume in %

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Supported by Both Embassies															
Romania	0.56	0.68	0.60	0.44	0.47	0.47	0.58	0.44	0.37	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.40	0.47	0.27
Poland	0.13	0.15	0.23	0.31	0.41	0.33	0.29	0.24	0.20	0.32	0.21	0.19	0.23	0.23	0.21
Hungary	0.96	1.74	1.23	0.93	0.28	0.23	0.23	0.27	0.21	0.22	0.25	0.30	0.44	0.53	0.30
Bulgaria	0.21	0.22	1.05	1.24	1.36	1.02	1.05	0.74	0.51	0.44	0.34	0.31	0.35	0.48	0.34
Ukraine	0.54	0.57	0.75	0.79	0.83	0.82	0.79	1.08	1.13	1.14	1.00	0.88	0.61	0.69	0.65
Belarus	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.11	0.13	0.06	0.1	0.25	0.16	0.38	0.17	0.14	0.08	0.19	0.53
Georgia	1.69	1.83	1.82	2.47	1.11	1.48	1.78	2.49	1.45	1.98	1.04	0.61	0.63	1.03	0.63
Czechia	0.39	0.39	0.42	0.44	0.45	0.48	0.47	0.50	0.33	0.35	0.32	0.31	0.37	0.43	0.38
Latvia	0.16	0.23	0.23	0.21	0.27	0.68	0.66	0.91	0.32	0.33	0.60	0.33	0.26	0.48	0.49
Serbia	0.14	0.06	0.14	0.15	0.18	0.22	0.44	0.45	0.38	0.26	0.26	0.22	0.31	0.35	0.23
Montenegro	0.09	0.02	0.09	0.03	0.01	0.24	0.53	0.69	0.43	1.12	0.28	1.90	1.15	0.39	0.78
without UAE Embassies															
Lithuania	0.09	0.01	0.003	0.09	0.10	0.31	0.36	0.47	0.20	0.31	0.22	0.23	0.37	0.46	0.44
Croatia	0.84	0.81	0.23	0.49	0.35	0.32	0.39	0.22	0.21	0.45	0.48	0.33	0.32	0.31	0.41
Albania	0.76	0.03	0.23	0.15	0.23	0.31	0.48	0.39	0.36	0.46	0.45	0.50	2.67	1.12	0.05
BiH	0.02	0.04	0.32	0.20	0.38	0.43	0.33	0.41	0.34	0.39	0.30	0.32	0.29	0.41	0.23
Slovenia	0.14	0.19	0.33	0.25	0.27	0.31	0.30	0.27	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.20	0.19	0.24	0.21
Slovakia	0.11	0.14	0.22	0.25	0.26	0.30	0.25	0.32	0.23	0.28	0.26	0.23	0.33	0.60	0.65
Moldova	0.02	0.02	0.74	0.30	0.22	0.30	0.22	0.32	0.58	0.20	0.12	0.53	0.28	0.35	0.21
N.Macedonia	0.10	0.15	0.31	0.14	0.19	0.12	0.10	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.05	0.11	0.07	0.07	0.06
Estonia	0.07	0.06	0.15	0.17	0.31	0.32	0.31	0.48	0.45	0.51	0.39	0.33	0.56	0.63	0.35

Source: Author's results based on own calculations

The United Arab Emirates focuses its exports, primarily petroleum and its products and gold, on Asian markets such as India, Japan, and China, which together account for over 40% of its goods. The share of Central and Eastern European countries in the UAE's total exports is marginal, with most individual countries not exceeding 0.1% and the region not exceeding 3%. Since 2020, there have been noticeable increases in exports to Poland (over 10% annually) and Slovakia (over 11%), with simultaneous declines for Hungary (-11.8%) and Estonia (-12.5%). The main exports to these countries are aluminium, refined petroleum products, telephones, and gold. However, data for smaller economies such as Montenegro, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina are often omitted from mainstream trade statistics because their values are negligible (OEC, 2025). New trade routes, on the one hand, may contribute to economic integration, but on the other hand, they may increase the risk of trade-related, geopolitical, and military conflicts (Wdzięczak, 2023).

When analysing official visits of the highest level from Central and Eastern European countries to the UAE over the last dozen or so years, it should be noted that in the period 2011-2015, Poland was the unequivocal leader. The Czech Republic and Slovakia show the same dynamics, much smaller than in Poland. During this period, Hungary made only one visit at this level. However, from July 2015 to 2024, the situation completely reversed. Hungary became the leader, and Slovakia endeavoured to sustain the momentum of visits. Analysing exports to the United Arab Emirates over the past dozen or so years, it should be noted that until 2014, Poland was the leader in growth, and Hungary recorded the most significant decline thereafter. The Czech Republic and Slovakia recorded stable export growth. Slovakia started stable export growth. Moreover, the Czech Republic has experienced substantial export growth to the United Arab Emirates since 2018. The strategic goal of these countries is the European Union, which can be an effective

tool for pursuing interests outside its territory (Krzymowski, 2011, p. 46). In today's conditions, in both the energy and geopolitical spheres, Croatia and Slovenia, as Mediterranean countries, will be increasingly interested in developing relations with the MENA region, including the United Arab Emirates (Sadecki, 2013). It should also be stated that GDP dynamics impacted exports between Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates. However, economic diplomacy supported by the presence of embassies and top-level visits had a limited impact on exports. This influence was noticeable primarily at the beginning of the process of the relationship-building process. The empirical findings thus corroborate the hypothesis. If the political and security challenges in the MENA region are overcome, the Gulf could become a more important global trade centre (Krzymowski, 2024). Central and Eastern Europe, meanwhile, could play an increasingly important economic role in the region (Repetowicz, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

This article examines the extent to which economic diplomacy influences export development, using 20 Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates as examples, analysing the period 1998–2024. The importance of embassies from the very beginning of their establishment and the establishment of diplomatic relations, as well as high-level visits from 2010 to 2024, including heads of state, foreign and economic ministers, and members of the royal family holding high-ranking positions, is considered. Simultaneously, the impact of GDP on trade is examined. The research shows that exports from Central and Eastern European countries to the United Arab Emirates, where embassies are located, are increasing, but primarily in the early stages of establishing diplomatic relations. More detailed studies show that economic diplomacy, supported by the presence of embassies and high-level visits, has had a limited impact on long-term exports. However, GDP levels had a significant impact. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that, regardless of current trade levels, economic and trade diplomacy between Central and Eastern European countries and the United Arab Emirates should be a key factor in new trade routes connecting the North and the South.

Since the beginning of 2011, i.e., the so-called Arab Spring, relations between the United Arab Emirates and Central and Eastern European countries have become more dynamic. The strategic transport and economic element of Central and Eastern Europe will enable Europe to connect to the Baltic Sea, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the GCC countries. In addition, it should be remembered that the world was emerging from the global economic crisis. In such a situation, Central and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates, which are stable in the Middle East, emerged as natural partners for the deepening of bilateral cooperation. In its economic diplomacy, the UAE has undertaken deliberate and sustained measures to establish and deepen relations with Central and Eastern European countries. The results presented in this article are intended to stimulate further in-depth scholarly inquiry in-depth analyses of the Three Seas Initiative in the context of its role and importance in relations with Middle Eastern partners.

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