ECONOMIC, LEGAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

TATYANA DENISOVA, SERGEY KOSTELYANETS. FROM TRADE TO GEOPOLITICS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE UAE'S ROLE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract. In the late 2010s to early 2020s, the presence of so-called "middle powers" in Africa, including Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), significantly expanded. Countries such as Turkey, Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and others, which act as regional "centers of power,"

have leveraged competition among major global states (China, India, the U.S., France, etc.) to advance their interests. These middle powers increasingly influence the political and economic development of African nations by participating in peacekeeping missions and peace negotiations, supporting allied regimes, intervening in conflicts (including through arms supplies to conflicting parties), and boosting investments in key sectors of African economies while expanding development assistance. The UAE has emerged as one of the largest geopolitical players in Africa, actively pursuing multidimensional cooperation with countries across the continent. Geographic proximity, religious ties with many African states and peoples, substantial investments, and development assistance have positioned the Emirates as one of the most desirable partners for African nations, including SSA states. This status is further reinforced by the UAE's accession to BRICS in 2024. While acknowledging the positive effects of UAE–Africa economic cooperation, the authors also highlight the negative consequences of the Emirates' interference in the internal affairs of African countries.

In the 2000s, the UAE, primarily the Emirate of Dubai with its relatively limited – compared to Abu Dhabi – oil reserves, began diversifying its economy and increasing investments in non-oil sectors. Africa proved to be an attractive destination for investment due to the continent's vast markets and rich natural resources; a special place in Dubai's economic expansion scheme was held by the Horn of Africa – thanks to geographical proximity and trade and migration ties that had existed for centuries. Initially, Emirati investors exploited investment opportunities in sectors such as infrastructure, tourism, and agribusiness; later, they expanded their activities into mining, information and communication technologies (ICT), and so on. Agricultural production was particularly important for the UAE, which imports over 85 per cent of its food due to the impossibility of developing agricultural production on its own territory because of a shortage of arable land and an unsuitable climate [Procopio, Čok, 2024, p. 4]. Furthermore, the increasing inflow (legal and contraband) of gold from Africa contributed to the rapid growth of the gold processing industry and re-export trade of the precious metal in the UAE.

After the 2011 "Arab Spring," which swept across North Africa and affected the Middle East, the UAE's African policy became more oriented toward solving multi-vector security problems. Ensuring food security through cooperation with relevant African partners began to be accompanied by, and to a certain extent even supplanted by, interests of a military-political nature: the pursuit of control over trade routes from