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**Between Cultural Security  
and International Business Business  
Relations Between Poland and The Middle East**

**Abstract**

The article focuses on already existing business relations between Polish and Middle Eastern markets. It describes economic relations both levels – international, led by governments and led by private business entities and non-national companies. Major part of the article is the analysis of the potential influence of cultural factors on economic exchange and cooperation with Middle East. Article describes also issue of the image of Poland and Pole (seen as brands), and provides to the both sides of cultural and economical exchange possible solutions, leveling out the influence of culture-based misunderstandings.

*Keywords: cultural security, economy, business, Polish-Middle Eastern trade*

## Preface

Poland citizens are actively establishing closer than ever cooperation with Middle East enterprises. Common Polish stereotypes and simplified cultural cliché equates all inhabitants of Arabian Peninsula with Arabs, and further, links those Arabs with terrorism, organized crime or at least backwardness, poverty and numerous families (or contrary – with “One Thousand and One Nights” folk tales, fabulous wealth of Arabic sheikhs and air-conditioned public transport stops in Dubai) and yet economic relations between Poland and countries of the Middle East gather speed. Therefore it would be justified to analyze existing business relation between those markets and make an effort to place it on contemporary cultural-securitization map.

## State's Actions

### *Poland's Bilateral Treaties with Countries of the Middle East Related to Economy and Business*

Law collateral of Polish – Middle East business provided by governments confines in only few agreements, which can be found in Internet Treaty Base of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. Those agreements focus mainly on:

- 1) Regulation of the rule of cooperation in tourism, such as treaties with Egypt from 2011, the United Arab Emirates from 2015, Iraq from 1976, Saudi Arabia from 2004, Jordan from 2006, Israel from 1999 and Turkey from 1997, while symptomatic is lack of that kind of agreements with Iran, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria;
- 2) Regulation of transport and land communication (L), marine communication (M) and air communication (A), such as treaties with Egypt from 1979 (M) and 1975 (L), United Arab Emirates from 1999, Iran from 1978 (A), from 2003 (A), Iraq from 1962 (A) and from 1985 (L), Lebanon from 1969 (A), Syria from 1963 (A), 1979 and from 2004 (L), Israel from 1991 (A), Jordan from 2001 (A) and from 1979 (L), Turkey from 1977, 1978 and 2003 (L), from 1974 (A), 1934 and from 2013 (M);

- 3) Regulation of economic cooperation, such as economy-wide agreements with Egypt from 1963, 1931, 1967, the United Arab Emirates from 2013, Iran from 1974, 1975, 1978, 2017, Iraq from 1973, 1976, Israel from 1993, Jordan from 1999, Yemen from 1957, Turkey from 1980, in particular treaties on supporting and protecting investments with Egypt from 1998, the United Arab Emirates from 1994, Iran from 2001, Israel from 1992, 2003, Saudi Arabia from 2004, Jordan from 1999, Turkey from 1994;
- 4) Regulation of scientific and technological cooperation, such as treaties with Egypt from 2001, Iran from 1973, Iraq from 1959, 1973, Israel from 1997, 2016, Syria from 1966, Turkey from 1980 and from 2000, whereupon part of them are framework agreements referring to wide spectrum of scientific, technical, educational and cultural cooperation, such as treaties with the United Arab Emirates from 2002, 2015, Israel from 1991, 1992, 1993, Saudi Arabia from 2004, Jordan from 1979, Yemen from 1957, 1974 and from 2005, Turkey from 1995, 1997, 2003 and 20017, Egypt from 2003, 2007, Iran from 1969, Iraq from 1959, Syria from 1975;
- 5) Regulation of customs, financial, trade, banking and telecommunication, such as agreement with Egypt from 1993, Israel from 2001, Turkey from 1973, 1975, 1977, 1991, 2000, including treaties concerning avoiding double taxation and avoiding of tax evasion, such as with Egypt from 2001, the United Arab Emirates from 1993, 1994, 2015, Iran from 1998, 2006, Lebanon from 2003, Syria from 2003, Israel from 1991, Saudi Arabia from 2012, Jordan from 1999, Turkey from 1996.

All other bilateral treaties apply to detailed, individual regulation, which are slightly (or not at all) related to business – they focus on establishing rules of diplomatic cooperation, cooperation of secret services and law enforcement agencies or rules of institutional cooperation, such as treaties with Egypt from 1973 (in that specific times it was the United Arab Republic) and from 1973, the United Arab Emirates from 2013, Iran from 1991, 1930 (in that time it was Persian Empire), from 2016, 2002, 2008, Iraq from 1982 and 1989, Lebanon from 2008<sup>1</sup>, Syria from 1985, 1986 and from 2004, Israel from

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement between the Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Poland and the Ministry of National Defence of the Lebanese Republic on free of charge transfer of armaments (came into force 10.07.2008). Based on this agreement, Polish side gave to Lebanon among others: 1 000 of 9 mm pistols type P-64, 2 000 of 7,62 mm assault rifles AKM/AKMS, 2 401 000 7,62 mm type 43 cartridges with the

1997, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2011, 2014, Saudi Arabia 1990, 2008 and from 2014, Jordan from 2015<sup>2</sup>, Yemen from 1994, Turkey from 1998, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, 2004, and agreements focusing on social security, such as treaties with Turkey from 2017, Israel from 2016 and finally treaties of everlasting friendship of two nations, such as agreement with Turkey from 1924 or with Iran from 1930.

### *Non-State's Actions*

In spite of lack of wide spectrum actions of Polish government, which could efficiently support economic trade with Middle East and although rising reluctance towards “The Others” in Central Europe, it seems that exchange of goods and services thrives. For example: import from Turkey has doubled in last eight years – in 2008 value of import from Turkey was 1 436 402 thousands USD, and in 2016 it was already 2 650 505 thousand USD (TSI 2017). According to data of Global Edge in 2016, Polish-Turkish trade was almost equal – value of export from Turkey to Poland was 2 329 393 883 USD, which constitutes 1,66% of Turkish export and import to Turkey was worth 2 977 655 906 USD, which is 1,53% of all Turkish import (GE 2017a).

Import from Yemen to Poland looks differently – it is so insignificant, that it is places much below the level of 0,01% of participation in Yemenis-Polish trade, recognized by Yemen's government on its official site (WITS 2017). Focusing on export from Poland: Yemen received in last years items and services of total value of 8 millions USD, which is 0,13% of Yemen's import (WITS 2017).

Trade with Saudi Arabia is much more balanced – while export from Saudi Arabia to Poland closed in 314 138 259 USD, which constitutes 0,66% of total Saudi export, import amounts 934 247 312 USD, which is 0,58% of Saudi import (GE 2017b).

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bullets P, 110 080 9x18 mm pistol cartridges with the bullets P, more than 10 000 of 23 mm HEI AA gun shells and HEAP AA gun shells, 12 096 of 400 g TNT blocks.

<sup>2</sup> Basing on agreement, which came into force in this year, Agreement No PD/3/162/2015/14 between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on free of charge transfer of ammunition, Polish side gave to Jordan's government: 3 000 360 of 7,62x39 mm rifle cartridges with tracer bullets (T-45), 2 248 260 of 14,5x114 mm of rifle cartridges with AP-I bullets (B-32), 922 908 of 14,5x114 mm rifle cartridges with AP-I-T bullets (BZI), 4 759 712 of 14,5x114 mm rifle cartridges with HE-I of instant action bullets (MDZ).

Exchange with Israel looks similarly – export from Israel to Poland in 2016 closed in 231 662 000 USD, which is 0,39% of Israeli export, and import in 268 982 000 USD, which constitutes 0,49% of Israeli import (GE 2017c).

In case of Jordan import is almost twice higher than export – export oscillates between the boundary of 17 140 380 USD, which is 0,25% of total export of Jordan and import to Jordan closes in 108 763 890 USD, which is 0,55% of Jordan's import (GE 2017d).

Egypt also shows some disproportions in export/import data – export to Poland in 2016 closed in 90 348 942 USD, which is 0,42% of Egyptian export, while import from Poland hits 368 186 305 USD, which is 0,80% of Egyptian import (GE 2017e).

The other countries of Middle East although political destabilization also perform some trade with Poland. In 2016 despite of ongoing conflict with so called Islamic State (IS), corruption and chaos linked to the fall of state's structures in Syria, trade with this region oscillated in 8 291 112 USD (import from Poland) and 1 089 333 USD (export to Poland). Trade with Iraq looked smilingly – export from Iraq to Poland had the value of 188 501 320 USD. In case of Iran and Lebanon data is much lower – Iran imported from Poland items and services worth 49 840 094 USD and exported to Poland goods and services worth 411 015 USD, while Lebanon import closed in 67 456 288 USD, and export closed in 12 685 592 USD. Import from Poland to Oman was worth 41 781 836 USD, while export to Poland 9 204 826 USD, and to Yemen 10 735 526 USD, while export to Poland closed in 19 324 USD value (GE 2017f).

Generally in 2016 export from Poland to countries of Middle East was worth a little more than 5 billion dollars (5 052 441 589 USD), while import was worth more than 3 billion 750 million dollars (3 751 679 517 USD), which is visible sign of perceptiveness of those markets.

## **Business and Culture**

### *Cultural Lens in Trade and Economical Contacts with the Middle East*

The above data is astonishing if one will take into considerations the fact, that according to data included in led by Michal Wenzel research "Attitude to foreigners in Poland" Poles are not opened to contact with foreigners in any relation except while being

abroad. They mostly think that immigration is “rather bad for economy of the country” (4,5 at 11-point scale, where 11 means highest benefit), and presence of immigrants “does not influence Polish culture in any major way” (6,24 points, which is nearly equally between extreme impoverishment and extreme enrichment of culture) (Wenzel 2009, pp. 1-3).

Those results should not be surprising if one will notice that immigrants are not more than 2 percent of Polish society, which is the lowest value in entire European Union. There is an interesting fact – Wenzel’s research proved that Poles have very high requirements about criteria, that have to be accomplished while immigration to Poland. Most of those requirements are based on cultural and ethnical criteria. Poles often emphasize the necessity of being raised in Christian tradition and having white skin (*ibidem*, pp. 3-4).

Paraphrasing Wenzel’s research outcomes, there can be an assumption made: in case of attempt of establishing trade contacts with Poles (especially by non-white entrepreneurs), it is worth to show some knowledge about Polish culture, therefore it is essential on that stage to invest in pre-deployment cultural, geopolitical and religion training and in extreme cases to appoint some local agent, who could be a negotiator and a face of the company in Poland – especially when dealing with farmers, because they see professional contact with foreigners only through the lens of employing the cheapest force labor from neighboring countries. This labor is not established on equal positions, but those workers are hired only seasonally and for the lowest price. This means that for Polish farmers working on equal positions (or under supervision of foreigners) may be seen as degrading, therefore it would be good practice to start with local representative (so in time the company could send its own workers and managers).

Research conducted by European Social Survey focusing social distance, placed Poles in the middle of the ranking, right between extreme unwilling to those kind of contacts Greeks and extremely open Swedes, Austrians and Luxembourgers (*ibidem*, p. 6).

It is worth mentioning that only 3 percent of total population of Poles declares acquaintance with a person from Arabic or African countries, and 5 percent of population have employed a foreigner or have used their paid help (like babysitting). Openness to employ a foreigner grew with the place of living of the respondents. In the last twenty five years attitude towards employing of foreigners changed – in 1992 overwhelming majority of respondents declared that foreigners should not work in Poland at all, in

period 1999-2006 there came the acceptance for employing foreigners in some sort of works (especially in very low and very high paid jobs, or in other words in those jobs which needed none or highly specialist skills and knowledge), and currently the largest group thinks that foreigners should have the possibility to undertake any employment (*ibidem*, p. 10).

The largest consent on working in international environment in Poland demonstrate representatives of management staff and intelligentsia, people with higher education, working outside farming industry, whereupon wage-labour are the rarest group to declare any objections towards working in multinational environment (*ibidem*, p. 10).

On September of 2016 International Organization for Migration (IOM) published results of research led by IPSOS on its behalf. Poles pointed inhabitants of Western Europe (67 percent of respondents), Americans and Canadians (52 percent) and Ukrainians (51 percent) as closest to them culturally, therefore as those who are the quickest and easiest to establish close contacts (both private and professional). In comparison with previous years there is noticeably difference in trust towards specific groups – Poles still trust Americans and Canadians, but the level of trust to Ukrainians grew rapidly, the same as to Vietnamese (*Badanie na temat postaw wobec cudzoziemców w Polsce* 2016, p. 7).

Both groups are more often than in previous years seen as potential coworkers, family members or friends. On the other hand, opinions about Arabs deteriorated, but there has to be emphasized that (although it was not described by researchers in methodological assumptions) for most of Poles Arabs are also Iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Turks and large group of Africans, Tatars and others. Irrespective of methodology, trust to group labeled as “Arabs” dropped from 18 to 12 percent (*ibidem*, pp. 6-7).

What is distinctive, evaluation of potential threat to Polish security in most of the cases remain constant, although there is less pejorative assessment of Ukrainians (drop from 35 to 30 percent), but there is also a rise – Africans started to be seen as real threat (“They threaten to Polish security” according to 24 percent of respondents) and Arabs, who are huge threat according to record 69 percent of researched population (*ibidem*, p. 7). But there is a brighter side of this research – “For all national groups people who had a contact with foreigners in the past, declared higher level of acceptance of the presence of foreigners in the places of work, living and in the family” (*ibidem*, p. 8).

Going back to fears – regardless of eventual contact with foreigners in the last year, almost 2/3 of respondents do have some anxiety about influx of foreigners to Poland, whereupon this anxiety is declared mostly by people who derive data from massmedia, and their number is highest in the oldest group of respondents, after 60 year of life (*ibidem*, p. 8). Research proved also, that in spite of low numbers of immigrants, they generate disproportionately large anxiety – 60 percent of researched people declared that immigrants are a threat to countries', and 80 percent thought, that they are a threat to Polish' security. Additionally, 23 percent thought that immigrants are a threat to Polish cultural security, while only 9 percent declared opposite opinion (*ibidem*, p. 9).

There is one atypical fact in the survey – although much more respondents (comparing to previous years) declare contact with foreigners (in 2015 it was 19 percent, in 2016 it was already 28 percent), percentage of people declaring contact with somebody from Arabic countries dropped from 7 to 3 percent (*ibidem*, p. 12).

On the same level maintained a position rate of contact with others non-European nations (except Turkey, Vietnam, Arabic contries, USA, China and India). Important factor is also a place where Poles can meet a foreigner. Contact with inhabitants of Arabic and African countries occurs mostly at work and in neighborhood, contrary to contacts with Chinese, who were met mostly at school (*ibidem*, p 13).

Generally Arabs are the most pejorative perceived group of all, and every year this perception is getting worse – in 2016 it rose with 9 percent (to 92 percent) of those who think that Arabs are not culturally close to Poles, and with 13 percent (to 80 percent) number of respondents who claim that Arabs are not trustworthy. Other numbers also changed – there was an increase of 17 percent (to 73 percent) of respondents who declare that Arabs are a threat to Poland (*ibidem*, p. 24) and decrease from 37 percent in 2015 to 27 in 2016 on working with Arabs (*ibidem*, p. 25). Similarly, but not such drastic drops are showed in survey about contacts with Africans.

Research takes also closer look at the issue of foreigners on Polish labor market – ¼ of respondents thinks that foreigners do have a positive influx on labor market in Poland, and 45 percent have the opposite opinion (*ibidem*, p. 36). There is also visible growth of number of respondents claiming that foreigners should have access to other jobs than Poles (from 43 to 48 percent), although they are rather seen as physical workers, like construction workers, farm or orchard workers, mechanics (*ibidem*, p. 38). De-

spite this data it is worth emphasizing that a half of the respondents thought that foreigners should have a right to manage their own business in Poland, to be entrepreneur and 42 percent – to work in some corporation in Poland.

### *Polish Image Abroad in Context of Relation with the Middle East*

In 2013 Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered research, which is still essential for foreigner business in Poland – it had a goal to “Determine the image of Poland, which should be promoted abroad”. Research also was ordered to determine necessary changes, which have to be implemented in order to establish and maintain economic relations with other countries. The report suggested, that image of Pole, although a little blurry, is improving and pejorative stereotypes about Poles are slowly being replaced by positive stereotypization (*Badanie opinii “Określenie wizerunku, który Polska powinna promować za granicą”* 2013, p. 10). Back in 2013 the research proved that “Positive changes in the image of Poland abroad consist mostly in the fact that our country is much more visible, recognizable and appreciate. We have opened ourselves to the World, we got to know to other countries and we showed our good side. Most of all we showed to the World our highly educated, excellent skilled workmen and professionals. Poland is a country rapidly developing and changes can be seen in every sector of economy. Poles have better life conditions than ever, they have better infrastructure, free country – they have civil rights, live in democratic country. Very important was also joining the European Union” (*ibidem*, p. 11). It remains unclear what changed in the image of Poland after carrying the research, but there are some indicators that issues described by researchers may be considered void.

Research also proved that Poland is seen by foreigners mostly as touristic country and the main flaw of Poles is excessive tendency to drink alcohol (29 percent of respondents declared that Poles are the nation of drunkards) (*ibidem*, p. 11). What may surprise is the fact that tourists visiting Poland pointed out that Poles are: “nice, likeable, polite, friendly, hospitable and open, without prejudices, smiled and frank”, but what is symptomatic – in those description there are no reference to hard working, entrepreneurship, or economic thinking (*ibidem*, p. 12).

Among pejorative features respondents listed: “lack of tolerance, racism, drunkenness, style of driving cars, behavior of Polish drivers, constant complaining and rude

behavior”, what may influence on running a business with Poles (*ibidem*, p. 12). On the other hand, Poles are seen as resourceful and calculating, which may result in overcoming their resentments and prejudice, because of profitability of possible cooperation. Since Poles after meeting face to face most often change their thinking (in a positive way) and start to see people behind differences and nationality, after starting cooperation issue of initial stereotypization and prejudice should be solved (Stephan, Stephan 1999, p. 150).

In 2013, when the research was conducted, Poland and Poles associated mostly (as a brand) with historical events, wildlife and cultural heritage and most of all – with great historical figures<sup>3</sup>. As a brand, Poland was invisible, it could be characterized mainly by the lack of image, than good or bad image (*Badanie opinii “Określenie wizerunku, który Polska powinna promować za granicą”* 2013, p. 12). Huge impact on Polish image has its location – for the West, Poland is culturally close to the East (almost Russia), for the East it is already the West (*ibidem*, p. 10). Currently, in 2017 eastern belonging of Poland is rather confirmed and intensified, but it is hard to announce any verdict without proper further research.

Foreigners who had a chance to spend some time in Poland noticed that Poles do not talk to each other on the streets, they think mostly about themselves in public spaces, they do not know their own neighbors, they attend to the church every Sunday, and they buy everything with reduced price (*ibidem*, p. 31). This data says a lot about possibility of cooperation with Poles, because those features would be most probably transferred on business activity – for Poles it is important to be able to show quick profits and to establish business relation without personal or close contacts with business partners.

In the light of brand research, Poles are hospitable and kind, religious and on the fourth and fifth place: “hard-working and enterprising, brave and creative” (*ibidem*, p. 16). This image of Poles helps to keep hope, that economic exchange, exchange of technology and know-how with countries outside favored culturally countries is not only possible, but would be profitable for both sides.

One of most bewilderment features of Poles is their lack of team-building and team-working skills and tendency to submit personal animosity over common business

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3 Although one of the problems of Polish brand are sometimes names of its heroes, thank to which, they are not associate with Poland – many people still think that Chopin (basing on the sound of name) was a Frenchman, like Maria Curie-Sklodowska, and Copernicus was a German.

(*ibidem*, p. 44). Foreigners, who want to settle down in Poland, encounter the same problems, which could complicate also business activity in Poland. Among those problems are: the fact that most of Polish clerks do not speak any other language except Polish, lack of translating official websites and official forms and prints, bulletins and instructions and manuals, complicated formalities and something that was described in the report as: “bureaucracy resistance, which makes any case very hard or deliberately hampered” (*ibidem*, p. 49).

Author of the article would rather point some inertness characteristic to Polish bureaucracy and Polish culture, which according to Geert Hofstede can be described as culture with very high level of uncertainty avoidance index (93 points in 100-points scale), high level of power distance (68 points) and masculinity (64 points) (Hofstede Insight 2017), which makes clerks try to postpone any decisions. They are unwilling to make decisions by their own (it inspire fear of negative assessment made by their supervisors), they are afraid to have any individually initiative (which mean that they will not prompt any different, effective solution of solving their problems, they concern only with their narrow activity), they do not try to make any work in their bureau more efficient (if they would they would be probably the first to dismissal, because “they are walking before the line”, they can be a threat to their supervisors – maybe they “fancy their supervisors position”). Those features may come across while cooperating and working with Poles.

## **Polish – Meddle Eastern Business Cooperation**

In the beginning of 21. century professor Wally Olins formulated main idea for Polish brand: “Creative Tension” (pol. “Twórcze Napięcie”). This idea was positively verified by historical events and currently is a good direction for Polish entrepreneurs. Polish wealth according to professor Olins lays in oppositions: Poland is the West, but it understands well the East, Poles despite of tendency to being emotional and idealistic, can be resourceful, pragmatic and enterprising, they are ambitious, but they are able to abandon ambition to practical prosaic, they can swim upstream, but they know when “the game is not worth a candle” (it is not worth the effort) (*Badanie opinii “Określenie wizjerunku, który Polska powinna promować za granicą”* 2013, p. 23).

Going back to business – in most countries of the Middle East, cultural barriers are visible mainly on interpersonal level, and on the institutional level, when the entrepreneur encounters different, unknown to him or her administrative, legislative and customs system. Cultures of administrating may be so various, that, even if not in purpose, it may be a huge obstruction on the way of intense exchange between Poland and Middle East.

In the case of Yemen, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Jordan main problem impacting international cooperation is among others: inaccurate and incorrect filling of custom forms, lack of homogenous regulations (like public procurements), complex laws and high costs of promotion and participation in fairs – prices of stalls, products promotion, airline tickets and accommodation. Except listed by Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs barriers there are also poor promotion (by both sides) of international exchange on this directions, tendency to use local representative by Polish producers – when a representative withdraw from the market it is often almost impossible to find the way to the producer, so the whole exchange must be worked out again (MSZ 2017).

Similarly, in case of contacts with entrepreneurs from Saudi Arabia, main problem remains maladjustment of legal systems of both parties, which can multiply costs of introducing Polish brands and products to Saudi market (among others: restrictive laws of SASO, Saudi Arabian Standard Organization, which has laws and rules deviating from European laws and rules – thanks to those differences Polish entrepreneurs have to make pricy and long-lasting qualification procedures, which will permit Polish food and drugs on Saudi market). Second problem is lack of proper advertisement targeting – Polish products' advertisement either contains promotion of objects and services banned by Islam ("haram"), or is prepared to European market afterwards it is censored for Muslim markets (*ibidem*). Meanwhile it should be produced from the basics for specific Saudi (or in general – for Muslim) market.

In case of Polish business relation with entrepreneurs from Middle East security issues and short-time orientation can be also a problem (*ibidem*).

Nevertheless Polish economical exchange with those regions thrive. For example: cumulated worth of Polish investments in United Arab Emirates (UAE) is valued as 478 million USD. Except already working on local market producing companies (like Arabcan Co., belonging to Cracow's Canpacku), cosmetic companies (like Inglot), air-conditioning devices (like VTS Clima), furniture (like MDD), or construction (like

Librus), there are a few new cooperation every month. Quick glance at Polish-Emirates trade partners proves that companies working in UAE (like Telefonika Kraków, Kolner, Solaris) generate significant export from Poland (*ibidem*).

## Conclusion

Business relation between Poland and countries of the Middle East are determined in one hand by possibilities of those markets, their needs, demands and supply and in the other hand by boundaries of intercultural communication, communication on the administrative level and – in the end – by limits of interpersonal communication. Personal animosity performed by Poles or inhabitants of Middle East may (but not necessarily) hamper business functioning, although both Poles and Middle Easterners are pragmatic and profit-oriented, which makes small differences easy to overcome by both sides with mutual financial and economic benefits. Analysis of security of investments, communication, functioning in Middle Eastern societies, despite still ongoing political, religious and ethnical unrests shows, that Middle East is quite stable market, worth investing and developing. There is also important issue of rapid economic growth of most of Middle East markets and societies, creating new fields of cooperation, which should not be overlooked.

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