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THE MONARCHIES OF THE ARABIAN PENINSULA IN POLAND'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

ABSTRACT

Recently, Poland's relations with the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – gain new dynamics. Relations with some of these states are strategically important and demonstrate the potential to develop, whereas with the others they are rather limited, yet pragmatic. These differences are reflected in Poland's cultural diplomacy towards each of them. The study aims at discussing and analysing the type and range of activities performed within the scope of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the six monarchies of the Gulf in the last six years (from January 2020 to April 2025). The paper discusses the role of state institutions as creators of Poland's cultural diplomacy and, by presenting selected examples of cultural diplomacy activities, it explores the potential of Polish culture in terms of cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, Poland, monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

INTRODUCTION¹

Monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – occupy an interesting place in the foreign policy of the Republic of Poland. Although many times these states are seen through the lens of their membership in the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and treated jointly, Poland's foreign policy towards each of them is diverse and focused on achieving various goals. Therefore, relations with some of the Gulf monarchies are more developed and intensive whereas with the others – rather limited, yet pragmatic. Consequently, Poland's cultural diplomacy towards each of them reveals different dynamics, depending on the significance of individual GCC monarchies from the point of view of the aims of Poland's foreign policy. Poland's relations with the countries in question are not infrequently viewed primarily through the prism of economic cooperation, especially in terms of trade or import of crude oil and natural gas and, more recently, with relation to the development of tourism. The role of cultural diplomacy in building the relations between Poland and the Arab monarchies of the Gulf is often treated superficially or even marginally.

It can be noticed that during the last few years the Gulf monarchies enjoy growing interest within the Polish society which is reflected i.a. in the rise of number of business initiatives and in the widening of the scope of scientific research over this part of the Middle East. Nevertheless, international relations between Poland and the Gulf monarchies remain on the margins of these explorations which is particularly visible when it comes to international cultural relations and the domain of cultural diplomacy. The study addresses this gap by offering an insight into selected initiatives of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the GCC monarchies as well as the network of institutional actors engaged in creating it. The aim of the article is to discuss and analyse the type and range of activities performed within the scope of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula in the last six years (from January 2020 to April 2025). Additionally, the goal of the paper is to explore the potential of culture of the Polish society in building Poland's relations with these countries by focusing on these aspects of the Polish culture which are applied in cultural diplomacy towards GCC monarchies and locating them in social, historical and cultural context.

The initial part of the study delineates methodological perspective applied in the study. The second part outlines the concept of cultural diplomacy as one of the tools of the state's foreign policy and presents its significance for building the state's soft power. Then, the article focuses on key institutional actors engaged in implementing Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. Finally, the article discusses selected examples of acts of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the aforementioned states.

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METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula constitute a group of states that share certain similarities – for instance, in terms of history, cultural heritage or some aspects of life of their societies – but, at the same time, reveal many differences: starting from sizes of their territories and populations and ending with their economies, foreign policies and international ambitions. Also, each GCC state has its distinctive features – for example, political culture of their societies – that influence their internal policies and behaviours on the international forum. From the point of view of Poland's foreign policy their significance is diverse: relations with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are given priority and developed in the most intensive way,² relations with Qatar and Kuwait receive moderate attention whereas relations with Bahrain and Oman can be described as correct yet rather low-profile. This distinction translates into intensity of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards individual Gulf monarchies. It is, therefore, logical to apply the comparative perspective in order to analyse their place and role in the cultural diplomacy of Poland. The comparative approach is widely adopted in social sciences, in both implicit and explicit ways.³ One of its important assets is that it makes it possible to explore both similarities and differences of the analysed processes or phenomena.⁴

A two-stage research procedure was applied in the study. The first stage consisted of critical literature review thanks to which it was possible to determine the existing research gap and confirm the purposefulness of explorations over Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.⁵ The second stage included qualitative analysis of internet articles which was supported by MAXQDA, a software for computer-assisted mixed methods and qualitative data analysis. The collected research material is composed of 60 news excerpts retrieved from the Website of the Republic of Poland and websites of Polish state-founded institutions. In order to assure relevance of the research material, purposeful sampling was used. The news was posted between January 2020 and April 2025. The reason behind choosing such time frame is that it coincides with a number of events – of both global and domestic scale – that had a significant impact on Poland's foreign policy, making the government of the day reformulate it and adjust its aims and tools to a new geopolitical context. In response to rapidly growing number of cases of Covid-19, in March 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of pandemic. The majority of governments – including the Polish government – announced special measures aimed at limiting the

² Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are Poland's main political and economic partners in the Middle East. Website of the Republic of Poland, *ZE.A. Informator ekonomiczny*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/zea/informator-ekonomiczny>, 3 April 2025.

³ J. Hopkin, "Comparative Methods," in D. Marsh, G. Stoker (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke 2002.

⁴ A.J. Chodubski, *Wstęp do badań politologicznych*, Gdańsk 2008, p. 125.

⁵ See: W. Jakubowski, L. Zamęcki, "Metodologia badań politologicznych," in W. Jakubowski, P. Załęski, Ł. Zamęcki, *Nauki o polityce. Zarys koncepcji dyscypliny*, Biłsk-Białe–Pułtusk 2013, p. 208.

spread of the coronavirus. As travelling and face-to-face participation in meetings were among those spheres on which restrictions were imposed, a great number of events was moved to the digital environment. In Poland the restrictions were lifted in July 2023. In the meantime, in February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine which threatened the European security and led to unprecedented influx of Ukrainian refugees to Poland and the neighbouring states. This, in turn, translated into joint efforts aimed at supporting Ukraine as well as growing interest of the European Union (EU) member states in raising the level of their security, including the sphere of energy security. At the time of writing of this paper the war is far from reaching an end. In December 2023, Poland experienced a major change of government since 2015: the right-wing government led by the Law and Justice party was replaced by coalition of centre and left-wing parties headed by the Civic Platform party. The switch in government resulted in adopting a more pro-European orientation in Poland's foreign policy. Finally, on 1 January 2025 Poland took over the six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union.

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Located in the constellation of scientific terms that describe ways in which the state uses elements of culture in order to reach its interests in the domain of international relations – as i.a. public diplomacy, soft power or cultural policy – cultural diplomacy remains a concept which is quite uneasy to define.⁶ In relation to a state's soft power, cultural diplomacy can be perceived as *an important tool for developing soft power*⁷ and *an obvious attempt to maximize a nation's soft power of culture and values*⁸. Therefore, it targets populations of other states. Traditionally state-driven, cultural diplomacy can also be viewed from the perspective of a state's foreign policy as being *an official instrument of foreign policy of a state*⁹. As such, it brings the state closer to achieving its goals, especially those of political, economic and security nature. Finally, cultural diplomacy can be defined as – as Milton Cummings puts it – *the exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and peoples in order to foster mutual understanding*¹⁰.

Cultural diplomacy encompasses a wide variety of efforts which tackle different aspects of culture. They can be grouped in several categories – types or genres of

⁶ See for instance: I. Ang, Y.R. Isar, P. Mar, "Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest?," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2015), pp. 365-381; N. Grincheva, "The Past and Future of Cultural Diplomacy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 30, no. 2 (2024), pp. 172-191.

⁷ N.J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy. Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age*, Cambridge–Medford 2019, p. 62.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ R. Zenderowski, "Uczestnicy i kreatorzy międzynarodowych stosunków kulturalnych," in R. Zenderowski, K. Cebul, M. Krycki (eds), *Międzynarodowe stosunki kulturalne*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 151-185.

¹⁰ M. Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Washington 2003, p. 1.

cultural diplomacy – such as: arts diplomacy, sport diplomacy, gastro diplomacy or heritage diplomacy.¹¹ Nicholas J. Cull mentions four core approaches to cultural diplomacy: cultural gift, cultural information, cultural capacity building and cultural dialogue. The first approach refers to situations in which an actor of cultural diplomacy chooses an element of its culture and presents it to the foreign audience hoping to generate appreciation or admiration; it often relies on stereotypes. The second perspective is based upon correcting a state's image by sharing an unknown aspect of its culture with the foreign public; its key advantage is novelty. The third approach assumes identifying the needs of foreign audience and meeting some of them through programmes in cultural capacity which may also promote development and mutual understanding. Finally, the fourth approach treats culture as a space for dialogue and exchange; it is a two-way perspective which demands an active participation of the other party.¹² All these approaches are applied in Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.

STATE ACTORS OF POLAND'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

A conclusion that can be reached after the review of scientific literature on cultural diplomacy is that there is no consent concerning its actors. More specifically, some scholars highlight the role of non-state actors in cultural diplomacy¹³ whereas the others reserve this domain to the state actors.¹⁴ Considering the limited scope of this study, it focuses solely on the activity of the state and state-founded institutions within the explored area.

Activities in the field of Poland's cultural diplomacy are performed by several actors, yet priority within this scope is given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Its role as principal creator of cultural diplomacy stems from Act of 4 September 1997 on government administration departments.¹⁵ In accordance with the aforementioned act, the MFA is entrusted with i.a. shaping of international image of Poland. It is also in charge of performing tasks within public and cultural diplomacy, as well as supporting

¹¹ See: N.J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy...*, pp. 76-77; T. Lähdesmäki, V.L.A. Čeginskas, "Conceptualisation of Heritage Diplomacy in Scholarship," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, vol. 28, no. 5 (2022), pp. 635-650.

¹² N.J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy...*, p. 73-76.

¹³ See: N. Biltekin, "Unofficial Ambassadors: Swedish Women in the United States and the Making of Non-State Cultural Diplomacy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 26, no. 7 (2020), pp. 959-972; N.J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy...*; Y.R. Isar, "Civil Society Actors in International Cultural Diplomacy," in M. Hoelscher, R.A. List, A. Ruser, S. Toepler (eds), *Civil Society: Concepts, Challenges, Contexts*, Cham 2022, pp. 233-248.

¹⁴ See: N. Grincheva, "The Past and Future of Cultural Diplomacy...", pp. 182-184; E.H. Potter, *Branding Canada: Projecting Canada's Soft Power through Public Diplomacy*, Montreal–Kingston 2009.

¹⁵ Act of 4 September 1997 on the Branches of Government Administration, Journal of Laws of 1997, No. 141, item 943 [Ustawa z dnia 4 września 1997 r. o działach administracji rządowej, Dz.U. z 1997 r. Nr 141, poz. 943], art. 34.

activities promoting the Polish economy, culture, language, tourism, technology and science which should be carried out in cooperation with other government bodies. Agata W. Ziętek indicates that the capacity of MFA in terms of promoting Poland abroad focuses on four key areas:

- I. *Coordination of all promotional activities which have an international dimension.*
- II. *Foreign information policy and public diplomacy.*
- III. *Programming and implementation of strategy of Polish cultural diplomacy.*
- IV. *Support of other ministers and governmental agendas in their sectoral promotional activities.*¹⁶

When it comes to structure of the MFA, the agenda responsible for performing duties within the third of the aforementioned areas is the Department of Cultural Diplomacy and Promotion of Poland. First of all, it promotes Polish culture, science and education through a variety of means, making sure that Poland is visible internationally and its voice is heard in the most important global debates. Secondly, it ensures the presence of Polish artists in the most significant cultural events worldwide. Thirdly, it negotiates international agreements covering cooperation in the field of culture, education, science and information and youth exchange. Lastly, the Department cooperates with foreign and domestic institutions, opinion-forming centres, non-governmental organisations and media abroad.¹⁷

Acting in the area of cultural diplomacy, the MFA takes advantage of its overseas potential: the network of embassies, consulates and Polish Institutes. Currently Poland maintains its embassies in four GCC member states: Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. As for Bahrain, it is within territorial jurisdiction of Poland's embassy in Kuwait and Oman – the embassy in Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ Polish Institutes carry out tasks in the field of both public and cultural diplomacy. The network of Polish Institutes includes twenty-five institutions, the majority of which is located in Europe. The network does not cover the Gulf,¹⁹ therefore, the responsibility for conducting cultural diplomacy activities in that region lies primarily with the four embassies. In this capacity, the embassies tend to act in three key manners. First of all, in the areas of primary importance for political interests of Poland they implement their own initiatives or launch ventures, doing it in a way which engages local partners. Secondly, they cooperate with local actors – both individuals and institutions – who demonstrate interest in the Polish culture and carry out projects which do not demand considerable financial engagement of Polish entities. Thirdly, they provide support for cultural

¹⁶ A.W. Ziętek, "Zagraniczna polityka kulturalna Polski," in A.W. Ziętek (ed.), *Międzynarodowe stosunki kulturalne*, Warszawa 2010, p. 172-173.

¹⁷ Website of the Republic of Poland, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, *Departament Dyplomacji Kulturalnej i Promocji Polski*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/departament-dyplomacji-kulturalnej-i-promocji-polski>, 2 April 2025.

¹⁸ Territorial jurisdiction of the embassy of Poland in Saudi Arabia covers also Yemen.

¹⁹ The only Polish Institute in the Middle East and North Africa is based in Israel. Website of the Republic of Poland, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, *Instytuty Polskie*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/instytuty-polskie>, 2 April 2025.

events organised by other bodies, providing that Polish artists or creators take part in these ventures.²⁰

Although the domain of cultural diplomacy is entrusted to the MFA, while acting within this area, it cooperates with other ministries, especially the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and the Ministry of Sport and Tourism, and agendas supervised by these ministries, such as i.a. Polish Book Institute, Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Adam Mickiewicz Institute, National Institute of Music and Dance or Polish Tourism Organization. Also, selected tasks are carried out by other state actors, for instance the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad or the National Support Centre for Agriculture. The former is an agenda of the Ministry of National Education. Its mission is to shape and shaping and maintain the sense of national identity of Polish people living abroad through i.a. education especially teaching of the Polish language, culture and history, and dissemination of Polish culture.²¹ As for the latter, it is an agenda of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and it is charged with i.a. promotion of the Polish agri-food sector abroad.²²

POLAND'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY ACTIVITIES IN THE GULF: EXAMPLES

Official relations of Poland and the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula did not have sound potential to develop before the last decade of the 20th century. The end of the Cold War – marked by the fall of: the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the Warsaw Pact in July 1991 and, finally, the Soviet Union in December 1991 – paved the way for far-reaching changes in the states of Central and Eastern Europe as well as in the global order. At the end of 1980s Poland embarked on its way to political, social and economic transformation. In June 1989 the first partly-free parliamentary elections in the post-World War II Poland were held, commencing a peaceful transition to democracy. In terms of international relations, it was the moment of new opening: to the West and the countries that remained in the sphere of its influence, such as the states of the Gulf. Also, as Roman Chałaczekiewicz acknowledges, during the Cold War the monarchies did not demonstrate interest in establishing relations with Poland due to ideological reasons.²³ By that time Poland had already developed diplomatic ties with Kuwait (since 1963). In September 1989 Poland established diplomatic relations with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. In 1990 Oman followed the steps of the three Gulf states and in 1991 Bahrain did the same. The last of the Gulf monarchies – Saudi Arabia – established its diplomatic ties with Poland in 1995.

²⁰ A.W. Ziętek, "Zagraniczna polityka...", p. 173-174.

²¹ Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad, *Podstawowe informacje*, at <https://www.oreg.pl/o-nas/podstawowe-informacje/>, 6 April 2025.

²² Poland Tastes Good, at <https://www.polandtastesgood.pl/en/>, 4 April 2025.

²³ R. Chałaczekiewicz, *Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie. Historia, kraj i ludzie*, Pułtusk–Warszawa 2011, p. 367.

The analysis of the collected research material reveals uneven distribution of activities and ventures launched within the domain of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula: such efforts are almost unseen when it comes to Oman and Bahrain. State-driven cultural activity is present also in these two countries, nevertheless, it does not target the foreign audience and, hence, cannot be considered as part of Poland's cultural diplomacy. Also, many news concern cultural events promoted by the embassies. However, if such activities were organised without any support of state institutions, they fall outside the scope of this study. Another point to be made is that online content uploaded by the embassies of Poland in the Gulf countries varies significantly in terms of its quantity and scope: in some cases news that concern cultural activities are rather scarce or – as in the case of the embassy in Riyadh – overshadowed by other type of content, for instance concerning economic cooperation. When it comes to the range of activities organised or co-organised by actors of cultural diplomacy, it is quite diverse: from concerts and exhibitions to a variety of issues related to the Arabian horse. It is not the aim of this study to present a detailed picture of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the GCC monarchies – it rather focuses on selected examples discussed below.

Art diplomacy – including i.a. art, music, literature, theatre, film – is widely used in reaching the societies of other states. Musical performances are organised to commemorate important historical events or anniversaries and to enhance official receptions. In the case of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the Gulf states, it is predominantly classical music – masterpieces of great Polish composers played by Polish musicians. To back it with three examples: in May 2023 the embassy of Poland in Kuwait in collaboration with Kuwait Music Academy organised a concert *Land of Chopin*²⁴. In May 2024 the embassy commemorated the 20th anniversary of Poland's accession to the European Union by organising a concert at which Polish artists performed several pieces by Antoni Moniuszko, Fryderyk Chopin, Mieczysław Karłowicz and Stanisław Niewiadomski²⁵. In November 2024 a concert commemorating the Independence Day and Polish Army Day was organised by the embassy of Poland in Saudi Arabia. The programme of the concert included pieces composed by Fryderyk Chopin, Grażyna Bacewicz, Aleksander Tansman, Ignacy Jan Paderewski, Szymon Laks and Marcin Błazewicz²⁶. Classical music concerts can be viewed as an example of cultural gift approach, a rather safe and uncontroversial choice.

²⁴ Website of the Republic of Poland, *'Land of Chopin' Concert*, 25 May 2023, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/land-of-chopin-concert>, 2 April 2025.

²⁵ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Anniversary Concert – at the Yarmouk Cultural Center*, 14 May 2024, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/anniversary-concert---at-the-yarmouk-cultural-center>, 2 April 2025.

²⁶ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Duo Karolina & Iwo Performed a Concert on the Occasion of the Independence Day and Armed Forces Day*, 17 November 2024, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudiaria/bia/duo-karolina-iwo-performed-a-concert-on-the-occasion-of-the-independence-day-and-armed-forces-day>, 6 April 2025.

Exhibitions (of various kind) are an attractive means of conveying information about a state and its people.²⁷ For instance, in November 2023 the embassy of Poland in Kuwait organised an exhibition *Baltic Amber treasure from Poland*. The event was held in the 360 Mall in Kuwait and was open to the general public. It was accompanied by a lecture the study of the chemical properties of amber, organised in collaboration with the International Amber Association.²⁸

A film can be an appealing way of sharing certain information about the history and culture of a nation. In December 2021 the screening of the film *Red* directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski was held in the embassy of Poland in Kuwait²⁹. In June 2022 the embassy organised the screening of the film *Powidoki*. The film is directed by Andrzej Wajda and tells the story of life of a painter, Władysław Strzemiński.³⁰ Showing the picture of Poland in the past, the films may appear as somehow exotic to the foreign audience. Nevertheless, the aforementioned shows of the films can be seen as cultural information: they reveal those aspects of Poland's history and culture which to many inhabitants of the GCC monarchies may be not only unknown but also interesting.

The dynamics and ways of conducting cultural diplomacy adapt to circumstances and the needs of the day. A perfect example that illustrates this are ventures launched during the Covid-19 pandemic: concerts and exhibitions organised online or in other electronic forms. The digital form made them easily accessible for the general public. Celebrating the 40th anniversary of signing the August Agreements and the establishment of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity', the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a multimedia exhibition *40th Anniversary of the Solidarity Birth*.³¹ Exhibitions were also prepared in the form of electronic materials which could

²⁷ In this light it is worth to mention one of the past exhibitions: in 2017 the embassy of Poland in Doha in cooperation with Hamad Bin Khalifa University organised an exhibition and a lecture concerning the Tatars in Poland. The Tatars are an ethnic group which lives in Poland since 14th century. Although their mother tongue is Polish, they have a distinctive culture and – like no other group in Poland – they confess Islam. The event is an example of cultural information approach to cultural diplomacy. Not infrequently Poland is looked at through the lens of the idea of the Catholic nation, therefore to many people of the Gulf information about the Tatars in Poland may be quite a novelty. Yet, at the same time, due to the fact that the societies of the GCC monarchies are predominantly Muslim, the information concerning the Tatars in Poland may be both interesting and attractive. A. Modrzejewski, J. Potulski, "Folk Religion and the Idea of the Catholic Nation in Poland as an Intellectual and Pastoral Heritage of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński," *Religions*, vol. 13, no. 10 (2022), pp. 1-17; Website of the Republic of Poland, *Katar*, 15 January 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/katar/relacje-dwustronne>, 1 April 2025.

²⁸ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Polish Amber Exhibition in Kuwait*, 7 November 2023, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/polish-amber-exhibition-in-kuwait>, 2 April 2025.

²⁹ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Film Screening at the Embassy of Poland*, 29 December 2021, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/film-screening-at-the-embassy-of-poland>, 3 April 2025.

³⁰ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Screening of 'Powidoki'*, 20 June 2022, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/screening-of-powidoki>, 4 April 2025.

³¹ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Exhibition '40th Anniversary of the Solidarity Birth'*, 31 August 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudi-arabia/exhibition-40th-anniversary-of-the-solidarity-birth>, 4 April 2025.

be downloaded. That was the case of the two exhibitions which aimed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Warsaw of 1920 – 1920-2020 *The Battle of Warsaw: Polish Victory for the Freedom of Europe* prepared by the Military Center for Civic Education of the Ministry of National Defence³² and *The Polish-Soviet War. The Battle of Warsaw 1920* prepared by the Institute of National Remembrance.³³ As for other digital initiatives, in 2020, commemorating the 76th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising Adam Mickiewicz Institute in cooperation with the Warsaw Uprising Museum launched the project *Unseen Soundwalks: Warsaw Uprising '44*. The project included a series of 10 immersive soundwalks, in both English and Polish, relating to the most significant events of that time and a podcast.³⁴ Also, in November that year a virtual concert *Paddymania* was used to celebrate the Independence Day. The programme of the concert included songs from the musical *Virtuoso*, a tribute to Ignacy Jan Paderewski.³⁵ Paderewski was both an excellent Polish pianist, composer and one of the fathers of Poland's independence.

An important sphere of cultural relations between Poland and the Gulf states is the one of protection of cultural heritage as well as return and restitution of cultural property. It is an example of an area in which, on the one hand, Poland has considerable experience and, on the other hand, the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula have demonstrated needs. In this light it should be stressed that it was only in the 21st century when the GCC monarchies' interest in protection of cultural and natural heritage started to grow.³⁶ On the part of Poland, the leading role in this respect is played by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology (University of Warsaw). The Centre has a strong track record of carrying out archaeological and conservation projects in the Middle East and North Africa in cooperation with local partners. As for the Gulf, the centre was engaged in research in Kuwait (since 2007; Al-Subiyah, Bahra and Failaka), Saudi Arabia (since 2014; Aynuna), Oman (since 2015; Qumayrah), the UAE (since 2016; Saruq al-Hadid).³⁷ In November 2022 the embassy of Poland in Kuwait

³² Website of the Republic of Poland, *Exhibition The Battle of Warsaw 1920-2020*, 13 August 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudiarabia/exhibition-the-battle-of-warsaw-1920---2020>, 4 April 2025.

³³ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Exhibition INR 'The Polish-Soviet War. The Battle of Warsaw 1920'*, 19 August 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudiarabia/exhibition-inr-the-polish-soviet-war-the-battle-of-warsaw-1920>, 4 April 2025.

³⁴ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Unseen Soundwalks: Warsaw Uprising '44*, 30 July 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudiarabia/unseen-soundwalks-warsaw-uprising-44>, 2 April 2025.

³⁵ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Invitation on a Virtual Concert 'PADDYMANIA'*, 10 November 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/saudiarabia/invitation-on-a-virtual-concert-paddymania>, 2 April 2025.

³⁶ For instance, the analysis of UNESCO World Heritage List (created in 1978) shows that the first property of Bahrain was inscribed on the List in 2005, the property of Saudi Arabia – in 2008, the property of the UAE – in 2011 and the one of Qatar – in 2013. The exceptions to this rule are Oman with first property inscribed on the List in 1987 and Kuwait without any properties inscribed. UNESCO, *World Heritage List*, at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>, 4 April 2025.

³⁷ Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, *Season after Season*, at <https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/badania/sezon-po-sezonie/>, 4 April 2025.

organised a presentation of the results of works of the joint Polish and Kuwaiti team in Al-Subiyah.³⁸ The aforementioned projects are perfect examples of heritage diplomacy – a genre of cultural diplomacy that relates to *joint international projects or government initiated activities abroad for preserving tangible cultural heritage*.³⁹ These efforts form an example of cultural capacity building: by working together archaeologists and other experts engaged in the excavations and conservation projects exchange professional experience, build their professional careers and contribute to the development of knowledge about the Arabian Peninsula and its people at different stages of history.

Another area where interests of Poland and its Gulf partners meet is education. The government of Saudi Arabia offers scholarships for citizens who choose to study in Poland, especially when it comes to medical and technical programmes.⁴⁰ A number of Gulf cadets and students receive education in Polish military academies, in particular the Naval Academy in Gdynia. Cadets from Kuwait and Qatar were accepted the Academy for the first time in 2015 and the ones from Saudi Arabia – in 2016. Although the majority of the Gulf students receive their education in English, there are, however, some who chose to study in Polish. In the context of cultural diplomacy, it is worth mentioning that apart from studying, they can also attend Polish language classes and learn about the history and culture of Poland. Moreover, among cultural events organised in the Academy there are some that enable foreign students to share elements of their respective national cultures with their Polish colleagues. Last but not least, the Academy has an Arabic version of its website.⁴¹ Steps taken within the sphere of education and Polish language courses can be viewed in terms of cultural capacity building as they respond to certain type of needs of the Gulf students and improve their skills. At the same time, these efforts can be seen in terms of cultural dialogue as they bring together Polish and Arab students of the Academy.

Poland's embassies are engaged in educational initiatives which – by reinforcing the Polish culture through education of Polish citizens and members of their families living abroad – indirectly reach foreign populations. Polish schools operate at Poland's embassies in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates⁴². They are run by the Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad. When it comes to education, an interesting grassroots initiative was launched in Qatar: in 2013 in Doha a group of parents established Polish School in Qatar – an informal institution which offers classes for Polish children in Qatar. The institution is able to operate thanks to support of

³⁸ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Presentation of the Results of the Polish-Kuwaiti Archaeological Mission*, 2 November 2022, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/presentation-of-the-results-of-the-polish-kuwaiti-archaeological-mission>, 2 April 2025.

³⁹ T. Lähdesmäki, V.L.A. Čeginskas, "Conceptualisation of Heritage Diplomacy...", p. 638.

⁴⁰ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Arabia Saudyjska*, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/arabiasaudyjska/relacje-dwustronne>, 1 April 2025.

⁴¹ Naval Academy of the Heroes of Westerplatte, *International Cooperation. History*, at <https://www.amw.gdynia.pl/index.php/pl/erasmus?view=article&cid=5241&catid=328>, 4 April 2025.

⁴² Centre for the Development of Polish Education Abroad, *Wykaz szkół przy polskich placówkach dyplomatycznych w Azji*, at <https://www.orpeg.pl/szkoly/szkoly-polskie/azja/>, 6 April 2025.

Poland's embassy in Doha and Ministry of Education and Higher Education of Qatar.⁴³ Although steps taken within the domain of a state's cultural diplomacy are generally directed to foreign populations and not to its own citizens living abroad, to a certain extent, the aforementioned educational initiatives can be perceived as supporting Poland's cultural diplomacy: it is the Polish people who share some aspects of their culture with representatives of other societies.

An important element of culture which finds use in cultural diplomacy is the national cuisine. Its relevance is especially visible in terms of Poland's economic interests, for instance export of agri-food products to strategic markets. When it comes to the Gulf, the two most important markets are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. These markets are the targets for activities carried out within the programme *Poland tastes good* launched by the National Support Centre for Agriculture in order to promote export of Polish agri-food products.⁴⁴ The actions planned within the programme are promotional in their nature, however, the cooperation with Poland's embassies and the fact that Polish culinary traditions are not infrequently part of events organised within the programme makes it possible to perceive these actions as a form of cultural diplomacy. The National Support Centre for Agriculture organises national stands at leading food and agricultural fairs all over the world – including Gulfood⁴⁵ and ISM Middle East⁴⁶, both held in Dubai, or Foodex Saudi in Riyadh⁴⁷ – and its activity is supported by Polish chefs who serve traditional Polish dishes to the visitors. By trying the specialities of Poland's national cuisine the general public becomes acquainted with elements of its culture and heritage. Without doubts, the described activity falls under the scope of gastro diplomacy, a genre of cultural diplomacy which aims at reaching foreign audience's minds through their stomachs.⁴⁸ The cultural gift approach can be applied here. Moreover, the type of food chosen to be 'the gift' has to be selected with due diligence: it should easily evoke association with Poland, reach the culinary

⁴³ The school aims at supporting parents in bilingual upbringing of their children. The classes concern mostly the Polish language and culture, and are conducted by parents on a voluntary basis. They take place on Fridays in one of Qatari schools. Szkoła Polska w Katarze im. Witolda Pileckiego, at <https://szkolapolskakatar.edu.pl/>, 5 April 2025; Website of the Republic of Poland, *Katar*, 15 January 2020, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/katar/relacje-dwustronne>, 5 April 2025.

⁴⁴ Poland Tastes Good, *Foreign Promotion Activities of KOWR*, at <https://www.polandtastesgood.pl/en/o-projekcie/zagraniczne-dzialania-promocyjne-kowr/>, 10 April 2025.

⁴⁵ Poland Tastes Good, *Polish National Stand at the GULFOOD 2025 Fair*, 17 March 2025, at <https://www.polandtastesgood.pl/en/news/polish-national-stand-at-the-gulfood-2025-fair/>, 10 April 2025.

⁴⁶ Poland Tastes Good, *Polish National Stand at the ISM Middle East 2024 Confectionery Fair in Dubai*, 9 October 2024, at <https://www.polandtastesgood.pl/en/news/polish-national-stand-at-the-ism-middle-east-2024-confectionery-fair-in-dubai/>, 10 April 2025.

⁴⁷ Poland Tastes Good, *Polish National Stand at the Foodex Saudi 2024 Fair in Riyadh*, 1 October 2025, at <https://www.polandtastesgood.pl/en/news/polish-national-stand-at-the-foodex-saudi-2024-fair-in-riyadh/>, 10 April 2025.

⁴⁸ N. Nirwandy, A.A. Awang, "Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy Social Convention Culinary: Engaging Gastro Diplomacy Warfare for Economic Branding," *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 130 (2014), p. 323.

taste of the Gulf people and do not violate the norms of Islam, therefore it has to stay in conformity with the *halal* diet.

Historically, for the people of the Gulf the horse was a source of pride and prestige. The Arabian horse – a breed of horse which originates from the Arabian Peninsula – is traditionally bred in studs owned by representatives of royal families of the Gulf and other prominent personalities. The Arabian horse still remains an important status symbol.⁴⁹ The Polish people started to appreciate the qualities of the Arabian horse as early as the 16th century and, in particular, in the 17th century during the wars with the Ottoman empire. In the 18th century the art of breeding and training of the Arabian horse was developed in the Polish studs, reaching prestige in the 19th century. In 1918 – after 123 years of remaining under partition – Poland regained independence but the most valuable studs remained outside its newly established borders. Despite being left only with a small group of Arabian mares, Polish breeders managed to recreate the breeding of the Arabian horse in State Stud in Janów Podlaski.⁵⁰ In the post-World War II there are two Polish State Studs which achieved significant international prestige in terms of breeding the Arabian horse: in Janów Podlaski and in Michałów. The two studs, in cooperation with the National Support Centre for Agriculture, organise the Polish Arabian Horse Days – an annual event celebrating the heritage of breeding and training the Arabian horse. The event takes place in August and encompasses i.a. horse shows and auctions, of the most important of them being the Pride of Poland which dates back to 1969.⁵¹ Traditionally, the Polish Arabian Horse Days are attended by horse enthusiasts from all over the world, including significant number of visitors from the Gulf. The event is well-established and integrates the community of people who value the Arabian horse. Hence, the cultural dialogue approach can be used here.

Thanks to its agility and endurance, the Arabian horse was highly valued for cavalry, giving it a significant military advantage. It is also appreciated for its beauty and grace which is mirrored in culture of both, the Polish and the Gulf people. The horse is praised in the Arabic poetry and religious texts, including the holy Qur'an. As for Polish culture, it is present in famous paintings, sculptures, film and literature. A perfect example of an element of culture that bridges Poland and the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula is a nineteenth-century manuscript *Concerning the Horses of the Orient and Those Originating from Oriental Breeds* written and illustrated by a Polish nobleman Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski. Passionate about horses and the Arab culture, he travelled to the Arabian Peninsula – officially in order to acquire Arabian horses and, more personally, to widen his knowledge on the Orient.⁵² Originally written in French, the manuscript contains valuable information on the Arabian horse and its breed as well

⁴⁹ As Roman Chałaczekiewicz puts it: *It is simply appropriate for a big businessman to have purebred and valuable horses*. He also mentions that despite being a symbol of prestige and glory, the horse can also be a form of advertisement. R. Chałaczekiewicz, *Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie...*, p. 273.

⁵⁰ R. Pankiewicz, *The Breeding of the Purebred Arabian Horses in Poland in Their Genealogical Charts (1983-1986)*, [n.d.] 1989, p. 7-9.

⁵¹ Polish Arabian Horse Days, at <https://www.polisharabianhorsedays.com/>, 10 April 2025.

⁵² See: J. Reychman, *Podróżnicy polscy na Bliskim Wschodzie w XIX w.*, Warszawa 1972.

as unique descriptions of Arabia – its landscapes, architecture and, most importantly, the culture of its people. In 2012 on the request of the Qatar Museums Authority, the Polish National Library commences works of scientific edition of the manuscript and by 2018 Rzewuski's work was translated to Polish and English. The edition of the manuscript was presented for the first time in 2018 during the 29th Doha International Book Fair. In February 2021 the embassy of Poland in Qatar in collaboration with the Cultural Village Foundation – Katara organised an exhibition presenting Rzewuski's masterpiece.⁵³ In June 2022 the embassy of Poland in Kuwait held an exhibition *Emir of Poland* which outlined the life and travels of Rzewuski.⁵⁴ The aforementioned efforts can be seen through the lens of both cultural gift and cultural dialogue perspectives. On the one hand, Rzewuski's manuscript is a perfect example of an element of culture that links the Poles and the Gulf people while on the other hand, the exhibitions depict the potential to develop cooperation. Moreover, the efforts aimed at editing, translating and publishing the manuscript can also be seen from the point of view of the role of translations in cultural diplomacy,⁵⁵ a relatively new trend in studies over cultural diplomacy with potential to develop.

Although many aspects of Poland's national culture are presented through the cultural diplomacy activities, there are also some which are left aside as for instance falconry. For centuries the people of the Arab world, especially the Gulf, have been practicing falconry and perfecting their skills in this discipline. The falcon was used not only for hunting but formed an immanent element of their lifestyle and leisure time activities. The esteem given to these birds was also reflected in poetry, literature and art. The falcon is perceived as a symbol of prestige and authority,⁵⁶ its image forming an element of emblems of the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. Practiced in the world of Islam since early Medieval, the art of training and flying falcons became widespread in Europe during the times of the Crusades (11th and 12th centuries).⁵⁷ Since that time the falcon gained significant place in the Polish literature, art and heraldry.⁵⁸ Alongside the art of breeding of the Arabian horse, falconry forms part of

⁵³ Website of the Republic of Poland, *The Opening of the Exhibition Presenting the Manuscript 'Concerning the Horses of the Orient and Those Originating from Oriental Breeds' Written by Count W.S. Rzewuski*, 2 February 2021, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/qatar/the-opening-of-the-exhibition-presenting-the-manuscript-concerning-the-horses-of-the-orient-and-those-originating-from-oriental-breeds-written-by-count-w-s-rzewuski>, 10 April 2025.

⁵⁴ Website of the Republic of Poland, *Ceremonial Opening of the Exhibition 'Emir from Poland'*, 7 June 2022, at <https://www.gov.pl/web/kuwait/ceremonial-opening-of-the-exhibition-emir-from-poland>, 3 April 2025.

⁵⁵ D. Roig-Sanz, L. Campanella, E. Carbó-Catalan, "Translation as a Soft Power Resource: Exploring the Possibilities, Scope, and Challenges of an Interdisciplinary Approach," *Perspectives*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2025), pp. 1-23.

⁵⁶ R. Chałaczkiwicz, *Zjednoczone Emiraty Arabskie...*, p. 274.

⁵⁷ A. Samsonowicz, "Sokolnictwo w średniowiecznej Polsce," in U. Szymak, P. Sianko (eds), *Sokolnictwo – wpływ na bioróżnorodność i dziedzictwo kulturowe w Polsce i w Europie*, Wasilków 2016, pp. 71-72.

⁵⁸ J. Sielicki, "Wartość kulturowa sokolnictwa," in D.J. Gwiazdowicz (ed.) *Kultura łowiecka*, Józefów 2018, pp. 185-187.

cultural heritage of Poland and the monarchies of the Gulf. As such, in 2021 it was inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as shared item of 24 states,⁵⁹ including Poland, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. However, unlike in the case of the Arabian horse, the potential of falconry as shared cultural heritage seems not to be applied in Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula.

CONCLUSIONS

Cultural diplomacy may have many roles, however, the one of Poland's cultural diplomacy towards the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula is to bring them closer and increase the potential of building and maintaining good relations. These, in turn, may foster cooperation in terms of politics and business. The importance of individual monarchies from the perspective of Poland's strategic interests is clearly visible in terms of cultural diplomacy efforts as well as content published by the embassies of Poland abroad. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates receive much attention, Kuwait and Qatar are also in the orbit of interest whereas Bahrain and Oman remain rather on the verge of interest.

Poland's cultural diplomacy activities addressed to the six monarchies of the Gulf take on diverse forms – starting with concerts and exhibitions and ending with archaeological excavations, the heritage of breeding and training the Arabian horse and translation of a manuscript. The range of means applied within this scope as well as the number of aspects of the Polish culture tackled while performing cultural diplomacy activities can be described as considerable. A single item – as Rzewuski's manuscript – can offer possibilities to create a narrative that can reach the people of the Gulf and demonstrate that distant cultures can actually cross – or meet – at a certain point. There are, however, still some elements of Polish culture that are not tackled despite their potential to be used in cultural diplomacy activities.

Poland's cultural diplomacy efforts target various groups of people of the GCC monarchies, such as representatives of elites, the general public, experts, students, enthusiasts of Arabian horses. Moreover, these efforts are not made only overseas but also in Poland as the example of the Gulf students in Poland shows. In principle diversification of means of cultural diplomacy on the one hand and targeted groups on the other should lead to more effective results. The exact range and efficiency of these efforts remain open questions. One of the limitations of this study is that finding the answer to these questions stays beyond its scope. It is, nevertheless, certain that thanks to growing cultural exchange – which is fostered by tourism, as not only the Poles travel to the

⁵⁹ These 24 states are: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Spain, Syria and the United Arab Emirates. UNESCO, *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity: Falconry, a Living Human Heritage*, at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/falconry-a-living-human-heritage-01708>, 10 April 2025.

Gulf but also the citizens of the Gulf states visit Poland – international cooperation between Poland and the monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula is expanding in a considerable way.

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