

AN APPROACH TO NON-TRADITIONAL PARTNERS: THE EVOLUTION OF THE TIES BETWEEN ARGENTINA AND THE GULF MONARCHIES DURING THE ADMINISTRATIONS OF CRISTINA FERNANDEZ (2007-2015)

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the evolution of the political-diplomatic and the economic and trade links between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies, as well as the factors that explain this evolution, during the administrations of Cristina Fernandez (2007-2015). Meanwhile, the premise that informs it is that during Fernandez's governments the political and diplomatic relations between Argentina and the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar became more dynamic as a result of the Argentine interest in strengthening economic and trade ties with those States.

The deepening of these ties is explained in terms of some of the main areas of Argentina's foreign trade policy, which focus on the following: to diversify trade partners, attract investment and increase the volume of trade. Moreover, the aforementioned actors are perceived as potential partners in that the Gulf monarchies need to ensure food security and advance technological cooperation, in a context marked by the international financial crisis.

Keywords:

Argentina; Gulf monarchies; Cristina Fernandez; diplomatic political ties; trade and economic relations

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Introduction

The Arabian Gulf, located on the Arabian Peninsula in southwest Asia, is an area of geostrategic importance not only because it is the meeting point of three continents - Asia, Africa and Europe - but also because of its hydrocarbon reserves. The six Gulf monarchies - Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar have about 30% of proven global oil reserves. Moreover, these six states together control 23% of proven global gas reserves (Meltzer, Hultman, Langley, 2014: 18).

As a result, thanks to the importance that these resources have for these countries' economies, they have obtained economic benefits that have allowed them to experience exponential growth in recent decades. Argentina's interest in approaching those states falls within this context, as they not only have vast resources but also huge sovereign funds, and are potential partners due to their need to ensure access to food and technology. In fact, despite the significance of the human rights issue as one of the main axes of Argentina's political agenda and the tensions that it could generate, the link with the Gulf monarchies has deepened in recent years.

That said, the general aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the evolution of the political-diplomatic and the economic and trade links between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies, as well as the factors that explain this evolution, during the administrations of Cristina Fernandez (2007-2015). We have chosen this timeframe because we believe that it was during these governments that contacts increased, particularly between Argentina, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. Moreover, Buenos Aires' approach to these states during the proposed study period is unparalleled in the history of the relations between them.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned points, we take the following initial supposition as a guideline hypothesis: during the governments of Cristina Fernandez, the political and diplomatic relations between Argentina and the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar became particularly more dynamic as a result of the Argentine interest in strengthening economic and trade ties with those states.



In this respect, deepening those ties results from Argentina's objectives in terms of foreign trade policy, including: diversify trade partners, attract investment and increase the volume of trade. Moreover, Argentina perceived the aforementioned actors to be potential partners due to Gulf monarchies' need to ensure food security and advance technological cooperation in a context marked by the international financial crisis.

Given the above, it is relevant to explain a number of ideas and concepts that are key to the analysis. In our view, foreign policy is

"a particular area of government action encompassing three analytically separable dimensions: political-diplomatic, military-strategic and economic and trade, which acts externally against a wide range of actors and governmental and non-governmental institutions, both bilaterally and multilaterally" (Russell, 1990: 255).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this study aims to examine only two of these dimensions: the political-diplomatic and the economic and trade.

It should be pointed out that this public policy (Ingram, Fiederlein, 1988) aims to give visibility and translate the strategy of the political society, or part of it, to propose ways of inserting the state in the global context (Miranda, 1988: 22). In this regard, the inclusion or condition to be taken into account by politics and the world economy (Miranda, 2001: 169) has been a major concern both in the government of Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) and during the administrations of his wife, Cristina Fernandez (2007-2015), which have sought to achieve it by expanding the margins for autonomous action.

Indeed, after a decade of exclusive insertion (Miranda, 2001: 173) or coupling according to Russell and Tokatlian (2013: 162), these administrations have opted to diversify their external links leading to greater relative autonomy regarding Argentina's external action.

We agree with those who point out that both during the Kirchner government and Fernández's administrations, Argentina's foreign policy has had a strong economic imprint (Zelikovitz, 2011: 6). This becomes evident if we consider the place the renegotiation of the foreign debt has had on the agenda, as well as these administrations' attempts for international links to translate into new business opportunities in different regions, in export diversification and in new investment.

It is in this context that Argentina's approach to the Gulf monarchies occurs, as the latter emerge as potential partners, since

"they are markets that currently have low relevance with regard to the volume of operations, but which constitute important opportunities for Argentine products" (Grosso, Moldovan and Todesca, 2009: 6).



Finally, it should be noted that the link between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies has scarcely been addressed by academia, while most of the analyses on the subject come from the media. In this regard, although academics have paid attention to the link Argentina established with another Gulf State, such as Iran (Botta, 2010, 2012), there are few works referring Argentina's foreign policy towards the Gulf monarchies. Among them we can point to a series of articles produced by the Centro de Estudios en Relaciones Internacionales de Rosario – CERIR (Centre for Studies in International Relations in Rosario) that examine Argentina's foreign policy toward the Middle East during the administrations of presidents Menem, De la Rúa (Carrancio 1998, 2001), Duhalde, Kirchner and Fernández (Paredes, 2008, 2010), although none pays special attention to our particular object of study. On the other hand, it is important to mention that trade and economic ties with these actors is the area that has been studied the most (Stumberger; Poggi, 2011). That said, we intend to advance the study about the future of these ties using various secondary sources - mainly articles in the national and international press - and also primary ones - official speeches, Proceedings of the State of the Union, press releases and semi-structured interviews.

The deepening of political-diplomatic ties

The Middle East has not occupied a privileged place on the agenda of Argentina's external relations. Conversely, over time it has been a marginal area with regard to its political and economic relations. From an overall perspective this can be explained by virtue of the distance between Buenos Aires and those territories and also due to the absence of a shared idiosyncrasy, since in religious, social and cultural terms, Argentina is markedly different from those countries. These are countries with diverse ethnic and religious groups, as well as different political regimes, which in recent decades have gained notoriety internationally due to increasing conflict in the area. Nevertheless, during the administrations of Cristina Fernandez there was an approach to the states in the region, as attested by the following: proliferation of visits and high-level meetings with representatives of various Arab countries, very active participation in the ASPA Summits, the reopening of the Arab League Office in Buenos Aires in February 2008, and Argentine support for the Palestinian cause. One cannot ignore the involvement of Buenos Aires in the Palestine Donors Conference, the opening of Argentina's Diplomatic Representation Office in Ramallah in 2008, the sending of white helmets to Gaza following the Operation Cast Lead in 2009, and recognition at bilateral and multilateral levels of the Palestinian state, in 2010 and 2011, respectively (Fabani, 2012: 70 ff). Furthermore, Argentina's approach to the Palestinian cause and, as a correlation, adjustment¹ to its traditional policy of equidistance with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during this administration are signs of the greater scope for autonomous action that the country acquired during the reference period. In this framework, during Fernandez's governments the increase in political and diplomatic ties with a group of actors with which Argentina has not traditionally maintained a close relationship stands out. These countries are the Gulf monarchies, specifically Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar.

¹ These are the variations in the intensity of effort and the adjustment of objectives against one or more items on the foreign policy agenda (Hermann, 1990: 5).



It should be stressed that these four countries share a common language – Arabic-, religion and a similar culture precisely because most of their inhabitants follow the Islamic religion. Meanwhile, at political level the four have a monarchical form of government and, in economic terms, they rely on heavily oil-dependent economies.

Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the fact that each of these states also has its peculiarities. They differ in terms of number of inhabitants, territorial extension, characteristics of the political system, foreign policy options, military capabilities, progress in terms of economic diversification, and in the proportion of Shiites and Sunnis faithful among them.

The population of Saudi Arabia exceeds 27 million and the extension of its territory reaches 2,149,690 km² (Diplomatic Information Office of Spain, 2015: 1), making it the most populous and largest of the four countries. It is the country with the largest army and the oldest alliance with the United States.

As for Kuwait, it stands out due to its greater political openness comparing with its neighbours. In fact, the emirate has the oldest and most entrenched pro-democracy institutions (Crystal, 2005: 1).

For its part, out of the four the UAE is the country that has made most progress in terms of economic diversification. So much so that Dubai has become an international tourism destination. It has also become a major economic, commercial and financial centre. Partly driven by this development, there has been a boom in construction (Sturm, 2008: 14).

Finally, Qatar has one of the highest GDP per capita in the world, and its income derives mainly from oil and natural gas exports. This country is the largest producer of liquefied gas in the world and owns 14% of gas reserves globally (Gulf Exporting Country Forum, 2015).

After this brief description, we refer to an increase in political-diplomatic ties with these countries. During the Fernandez governments there was a substantial increase in presidential trips, ministerial visits and high-level contacts with representatives of those countries and there was even opening of new embassies. So much so that, without being exhaustive, in 2009 Argentina received the visit of the UAE Foreign Minister, in 2010 the Emir and Prime Minister of Qatar, and the Prime Minister of Kuwait. In addition, in 2011, President Fernandez began a visit that took her to Kuwait and Qatar.

With regard to Fernandez's second government, in 2012 the Argentine Vice President Amado Boudou received the ambassador of Kuwait on a visit in which the latter expressed his country's manifest support for Argentina's claim to sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, as stipulated in UN resolutions (Ministry of Communication, 03/05/2012).

Later the Vice President travelled to Qatar to participate in the XIII Doha Forum on issues related to democracy, social development and free trade in the Middle East. Likewise, also in 2012, the UAE ambassador was received by our President; in 2013 Fernandez made the first visit by an Argentine head of state to that country, a gesture of high political impact that was followed by a visit of the UAE Vice President to Buenos Aires the following year.



Regarding Saudi Arabia, and comparing with the rest of the Gulf monarchies, relations with Riyadh go back longer, particularly if we consider that the kingdom was among the first Arab countries with which Argentina established diplomatic relations, which in this case date back to 1946. Argentina opened its first embassy in the Gulf in the city of Jeddah in 1948, becoming the first Latin American country to have a diplomatic representation in that country. Similarly, traditionally trade relations with this state have been smoother, but it was only in 2014, for the first time in the history of bilateral relations with the kingdom, that an Argentine Foreign Minister led the visit of a delegation to that country (Telam, 19.2.2014). Also in line with the strengthening of ties between the aforementioned actors, in 2008 the UAE opened its embassy in Buenos Aires, while in the framework of the visit of Fernandez to Qatar in 2011, a commitment to open an Argentine embassy in Qatar and a Qatar embassy in Buenos Aires was made, which materialised in 2013 when both states appointed their first ambassadors.

Thus, Argentina currently has embassies in four of the six Gulf monarchies, as in the case of Oman and Bahrain there is a concurrent representation in the Saudi kingdom.

Albeit with a lower weight, another indicator of that approach between the parties lies in the arrival of Qatar Airways and Emirates to Argentina. The Doha-Buenos Aires and the Dubai-Buenos Aires routes were initiated in 2010 and 2011 respectively, both with a stop in Brazil.

However, it is noteworthy that the momentum in the relations with the four actors studied here has not had the same drive as regards the link with Oman and Bahrain. As for contacts with the latter, we can only mention that in 2011, at the invitation of the provincial government, the Crown Prince of Bahrain visited Santiago del Estero accompanied by a delegation of investors and entrepreneurs (official site of the Province of Santiago del Estero, 22/06/2011). Meanwhile, a year later, the Argentine ambassador to that country, based in Saudi Arabia, was received by the Bahraini Vice Prime Minister and by the Minister of Electricity and Water, in October 2012, in two meetings where the parties manifested their willingness to deepen bilateral ties. Nevertheless, we were unable to collect data that account for higher level official visits either to or from Oman and Bahrain during this period. Moreover, it is noteworthy that during his visit to the country, the Crown Prince of Bahrain has not been received by senior government officials, particularly if we consider that neither a Bahraini prince nor a sultan of Oman have ever visited Argentina. It is also true that there is no record of a visit by an Argentine president to these nations.

Either way, even despite the incipient contacts with these two actors, our survey data show that in recent years the political and diplomatic relations with the other four Gulf monarchies have become increasingly more important.

As for the the government's view of these links, Foreign Minister Timerman stated: "We have to create a channel for direct dialogue with the Arab countries, as they are part of the G-77 we now preside to, and we need to make alliances. We have to realize that the things are happening today in other places, and that countries that 20 years ago had no relevance increasingly begin to have greater importance" (Page 12, 16/01/2011). Moreover, in another speech, he said that Argentina appreciates the opportunities for dialogue with these actors given that it has enabled coordinating positions on various agenda items, as well as providing new forms of South-South



cooperation (Ministry of Communication, 01/12/2010). Since the first meeting ASPA Summit, Arab countries have supported Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, calling on the parties to resume negotiations to find a definitive solution to the dispute, a position that also has been endorsed by senior officials from the Gulf monarchies within the framework of various bilateral meetings.

In order to explain the deepening of political contacts with the four Gulf monarchies, it is necessary to understand the context in which they began to take place, marked by the international financial crisis, and to examine the main lines of the foreign trade policy of the Fernandez's governments which, in continuity with the Kirchner administration, aimed at diversifying trading partners, attract investment and increase the volume of trade.

In fact, in our view, economic and commercial interests have played a central role in advancing the political and diplomatic relations between Argentina and the Gulf countries, in line with the said economist imprint that characterised foreign policy during this period. Moreover, it appears that Argentina's expectations in terms of business deals with these potential partners have even led the country to avoid criticising the regimes in those nations.

In this regard, although Gandini and Lambert state (2011: 1) that ideology and pragmatism are integral components of foreign policy - indeed of all political activity in the broadest sense – which are in continuous tension, with regard to the ties between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies the second prevails. Human rights are part of the internal and external agendas of the Kirchner and Fernández governments and they have preached in defence of democracy. However, Argentina has not committed to these principles at meetings with the Gulf countries, whether in the context of bilateral encounters or at ASPA summits, despite the characteristics of these regimes, which are often referred to as absolute monarchies (Levins: 2013, 388) due to the broad prerogatives held by the king, and the few opportunities for political participation of their citizens, in countries that do not even allow the formation of political parties. Not to mention other practices conducted by these states that have been condemned by organizations such as Amnesty International for violating human rights. The Argentine government's attitude allows us to conclude that with respect to the link with these actors there has been no consistency between official rhetoric and practice. On the contrary, we emphasize once again that in this case pragmatism has prevailed, and these principles that appear again and again in official speeches have been replaced by an approach to the Arab counterparts that aims to deepen a bond that is expected to result in increased economic and commercial benefits.

The promotion of economic and trade relations

The analysis of the visits, meetings and high-level contacts between Argentine representatives and the Gulf monarchies during the governments of Cristina Fernandez clearly shows that their ultimate goals were to do business and promote investment. This in line with a series of "strategic objectives" of her administrations aimed at:

"growth and diversification of our sales to the world; creating a strong export culture within the national productive sector; and



generating genuine resources to ensure the sustainable growth of our economy, boosting production and creating quality jobs, with the aim of achieving an increasingly equitable distribution of income" (Ministry of Communication, 21 / 12/2011).

These objectives are consistent with the

"economic accumulation model with diversified sources and social inclusion" (Fernandez, 2007).

To this end, Foreign Minister Timerman said:

"the growth of our sales to the world recognizes as one of its pillars the strategy of diversifying our exports and a trade policy that gives priority to opening new markets for Argentine exports, aiming at positioning domestic production in less traditional markets like Africa - particularly the Maghreb region -, the Middle East, India and Southeast Asia, among others" (Ministry of Communication, 21/12/2011);

there are areas the government has come closer to, basically after the 2008 crisis. Indeed, after the outbreak of the crisis, which particularly affected developed countries and, among them, some of the largest economies in the world, they tended to react by increasing their protectionist policies. In this context, Argentina chose to redouble its efforts by promoting exports of products with higher added value and also by diversifying export destinations, with emphasis on the opening of new markets in emerging countries with high growth rates. With regard to the aforementioned non-traditional partners, a press release of the Argentina Foreign Ministry of 14 February 2014 stressed that the Gulf monarchies are strategic destinations for many reasons.

"These include their prominent role in the oil and gas markets and the high current account surpluses that allow them to accumulate surpluses to spend on consumption and investment. Of these three destinations, Saudi Arabia is the largest economy. Like us, it is a member of the G20, a forum where we hold similar positions on many issues of the international agenda. In addition to the potential of bilateral relations, Saudi Arabia is an important trading partner of our country, given that in 2013 it joined the list of destinations to which we export over 1,000 million dollars annually. Qatar has the world's third largest gas reserves and is the world's largest exporter of liquefied gas. Because of this it is interesting to promote cooperation in technologies for the use of CNG. In this field, there are opportunities for both countries to



benefit from technological development and accumulated experience, either commercially or through investments. The UAE has one of the highest per capita income in the region and is a hub from which products are re-exported from around the world to Asia and the Middle East". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Press Release No. 028/14).

This official communication illustrates Argentina's interest in deepening ties with the Gulf states, hoping to benefit from economic and commercial opportunities.

However, despite Argentina's intention to deepen ties with these countries, the volume of trade both between Argentina and the twenty-two Arab States and between the former and the Gulf monarchies is still low. In this regard, we find that in 2013 Argentine exports to the Arab world totalled US\$ 5,992,475,840 FOB (Argentine Arab Chamber of Commerce, 2015th). Regarding the group of states we are interested in, Saudi Arabia was the third export destination within the group of Arab countries and the first among the Gulf monarchies. In 2013 Argentina exported to Riyadh US\$ 1,162,995,137 FOB (Argentine Arab Chamber of Commerce, 2015b). Meanwhile, in 2013, total imports from the Arab world totalled US\$ 1,334,538,665 CIF (Argentine Arab Chamber of Commerce, 2015th), making Qatar the country in the region from which Argentina imported the most, with a total of US\$ 1,060,504,730 CIF, followed far behind by the UAE, with US\$ 49,494,161 CIF, and by Saudi Arabia, with a total of US\$ 19,659,555 CIF, in the third and fifth places, respectively (Argentine Arab Chamber of Commerce, 2015b).

Regarding the composition of exports, while products sold to each of these countries are varied, it is important to note that approximately 60% of Argentine exports to the Middle East are foodstuffs (Poggi, 2011: 2). The sales of grain (mostly maize), fats and oils, oilseeds and fruits and meats stand out. In line with the above statistics, the manager of the Argentine Arab Chamber of Commerce, Pablo Foudaro², says that although cereals and oils are the main export to Arab countries, Argentine food sales include more produces, such as dairy products, honey, vegetables, dried fruit and fish. Besides foodstuffs, Argentina also exports car parts, steel pipes, working machines, tools, and medicines for human and veterinary use.

Argentina's imports from the Arab countries are lean. The analysis of what is bought from these countries shows there is a huge diversity of products, ranging from food imports, such as cookies, dates and packaged products, to clothing, gas and fuel³.

On the other hand, exports to the Gulf countries under analysis are in line with exports to other countries, as foodstuffs are the main products of Argentina's exports to those markets, while gas, fuel and petroleum products⁴ are the main imported products. 98%

² Interview by the author to Paul Foudaro, manager of the Argentine Arabic Chamber of Commerce, Buenos Aires, 12/03/2013.

³ Ibid.

⁴ In this regard it is interesting that, broadly speaking, Argentine exports and imports are in line with the main items exported and imported by member countries of MERCOSUR. A fact to be taken into consideration is that the MERCOSUR and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), comprising Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the UAE block, in 2004 signed a Framework Agreement on Economic cooperation to promote cooperation in economic, commercial, technical and investment, and created a Joint Committee with the task of working towards concluding a Free Trade Agreement. Still, negotiations towards achieving that goal have slowed down since 2007. Moreover, it should be emphasized that among



of total imports from Qatar in 2013 was petroleum gas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, 2013b), while about 40% of imports from the UAE in the same year was aviation fuel (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, 2013b)⁵.

Considering that the Gulf monarchies are among the countries with the largest proven oil reserves globally, the potential of exchanges with them present opportunities for those who manufacture machinery and accessories that may be needed for that industry. Furthermore, given their soil and climate characteristics, plus the population growth expected in these countries, there are possibilities for increased Argentine exports of raw materials and processed food, particularly considering that, according to recent estimates, the population of these countries will double by 2030, which would coincide with a downward trend in local agricultural production, which is already visible today (Moya Mena, 2011: 4).

Indeed, Saudi Arabia, a large consumer of wheat, in 2008 announced it would begin decreasing its production of this and other grains due to the water shortage in its territory (Blas, England, 2008), announcing it should be reserved only to meet the basic consumption of the population. Since then, Saudi wheat production has been reduced by two thirds (Lakis, 2011).

On this, Foudaro⁶ notes that the Arab countries' need for food is expected to grow and stresses that Argentina has conditions to increase trade with those countries in the field of agribusiness. He adds that since 2010 Argentina has hosted delegations, particularly from Saudi Arabia, who arrived in the country to sign joint venture agreements. These agreements provide that the Arab side contributes to the sowing process with capital and then has a part of the production. Moreover, it has also been reported that Qatari authorities have held talks with their Argentine counterparts to finalize the purchase of land that would later be used for agricultural activity.

In addition, Gulf countries have shown interest in deepening technological cooperation with Argentina, for example, in terms of technology applied to agribusiness. These countries have expressed the need to gain knowledge regarding technology for intensive and extensive livestock breeding, animal genetics, industrial processing of agricultural products, sowing and soil management, irrigation and seed genetic improvement. Moreover, they have also expressed their desire to become familiar with CNG technology. Some of these countries are also interested in becoming familiar with

the members of the South American bloc it is Brazil that is fostering trade with the GCC. So much so that in 2012 Brasilia was responsible for 86% of exports and 89% of imports from that area, followed by Argentina with 13% of exports and 10% of imports. The other members of MERCOSUR have little commercial presence in the Gulf monarchies. Furthermore, in diplomatic terms Brazil has a major presence in the area, since it has embassies in the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia, followed by Argentina, with diplomatic presence in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. Uruguay has embassies in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and Paraguay has no diplomatic presence in the region, (Bartasaghi, Manghana, 2014: 17).

⁵ Considering Qatar's significant natural gas reserves, already referred above, during the visit of Fernandez to this country in 2011 the Argentine Planning Minister, along with the Qatar's Energy Minister signed the Framework Convention Development and Implementation of Energy Integration Projects, which foresees the conduction of studies for the building of a regasification plant in the Gulf of San Matias, in the Río Negro, allowing Argentina to import 20 million cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per day. Meanwhile, on the occasion of the presidential visit to Saudi Arabia in 2013, the two governments signed an agreement enabling the UAE to supply LNG to Energía Argentina Sociedad Anónima (ENARSA), from 2014 onwards for a period of 20 years. Specifically, this agreement foresees the provision of 5 million tons of LNG a year, making it the first long-term agreement that the Emirates signed with a country in South America. Reference is made to these agreements as it is considered that their accomplishment could bring with it a significant increase in Argentine imports from the above destinations.

⁶ Interview by the author to Paul Foudaro, manager of the Argentine Arabic Chamber of Commerce, Op. Cit.



Argentine advances in nuclear energy and learning about its peaceful uses. This is mainly a result of increased energy demand in these countries due to the need to carry forward the process of desalination of sea water and the increasing consumption of water for refrigeration purposes. One must not forget that these countries tend to have temperatures above 45 degrees and have limited freshwater supplies, as in the particularly worrying cases of Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar, which face absolute water scarcity

(Luomi, 2011: 252)⁷. As a result, these states have chosen to overcome the difficult situation they are facing by resorting to desalination, which is an energy intensive process. The consumption of resources these processes entail, the environmental and opportunity costs that they involve with regard to the export of hydrocarbons or their use on an industrial level, makes the need for change in the energy mix of these countries evident. This explains their interest in developing nuclear energy and their approach to Argentina, a country that has made substantial advancements in this field. In any case, the links in this area between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies are at different stages, Saudi Arabia and the UAE being the countries with which Argentina has made the biggest advances⁸.

Considering the above, in recent years the Fernandez governments have fostered actions to enhance business opportunities with the Gulf monarchies, including official visits, participation in international fairs and trade missions. To this effect, in 2010 a delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Argentina visited Riyadh. Then, in 2012 senior officials of the Ministry returned to Saudi Arabia on a tour that also took them to the UAE. In early 2013 the head of the agricultural affairs returned to the UAE. This last visit took place as part of the tour made by President Fernandez, which was characterized by placing the emphasis on economic relations, evidenced by the fact that she travelled with a large number of entrepreneurs who were part of a multi-sector trade mission. Also towards this end, the first multi-sector trade mission in the framework of the Growth and Diversification of Exports Programme (PADEX)⁹ was held in 2014 in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, demonstrating Argentina's interest in penetrating those markets. Although a trade mission to Oman was planned for October of that year, it ended up being postponed (Centro de Despachantes de Aduana de la República Argentina, 09.08.2014).

Regarding the efforts of the Argentine Ministry of Agriculture to foster ties with the Gulf monarchies, it should be mentioned that, due to the importance of agriculture and livestock, the Argentine government sees them as keys to penetrate markets in the area (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, 09.10.2013). Still, these are other areas Buenos Aires wishes to deepen exchanges and cooperation with these non-traditional partners. In several meetings with officials from Qatar, Argentine authorities

⁷ Countries that have less than 500 m3 of renewable fresh water per person per year face absolute water scarcity.

⁸ For additional information see: KRAKOWIAK, Fernando (2014). "La exportación de tecnología nuclear al mundo". *Tecnología nuclear para el desarrollo Edit U-238*. Año 2, No 18, 2014

⁹ This export promotion programme is intended to "improve Argentine exports in quantitative and qualitative terms". Its specific objectives include: "increase traditional exports, contribute to export development of regional economies, increase the number of exporting companies, diversify export destinations and the export basket" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship). In order to achieve those goals twenty-four countries have been chosen as a focus of the shipments to be sent abroad: nine Latin American and fifteen emerging destinations. Among the latter are countries that meet the criteria of being BRICS and other large emerging and/or extra-regional emerging nations with large import capacity; Of these, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs chose: Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.



have referred to the associative potential between the two countries, given the compressed natural gas (CNG) technology developed in Argentina for cars and Qatar's plans to use part of its major gas production fuel for public transport.

Finally, the frequency of these visits is unprecedented, as not even during the Kirchner administration did so many visits take place. They indicate the interest of the Fernandez administrations to boost bilateral relations with potential benefits for all these states, particularly given the complementarity of their economies. This interest is also reflected in the negotiation and signing of agreements that were facilitated by the aforementioned high-level contacts¹⁰.

Outside the purely commercial level, the actions taken to promote links between the parties also aimed at attracting investment from the Gulf countries. In fact, contacts fostered by Argentine representatives are also part of the government's strategy to deepen its ties with countries holding surplus capital. In the 2011 official tour, Argentina submitted twenty five projects to the Kuwait Investment Authority and twenty one projects to the Qatar Investment Authority. It is worth mentioning that at that time both nations declared Argentina to be a "strategic investment destination" (Cibeira, 2011), a decision that is expected to pave the way for capital inflows, particularly at a time when Buenos Aires aims to raise funds, taking advantage of the current situation after the crisis of 2008, which took these funds away from financial assets¹¹.

Conclusion

In this article we have seen that during the governments of Cristina Fernandez there has been a boost in the political and diplomatic ties between Argentina and the Gulf monarchies, particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, attested by the multiplication of high-level contacts, presidential visits, the opening of diplomatic

¹⁰ Just to cite a few examples, in 2009 the negotiations for trade cooperation agreements with Bahrain and Qatar (Head of Cabinet of Ministers, 2009) were completed, while in 2010, progress was made in negotiations on economic-trade agreements with Oman and Kuwait (Head of Cabinet of Ministers, 2010). A posteriori, in 2011, as a result of Fernandez's Middle East tour, several agreements were signed, including the Agreement between Argentina and the State of Kuwait on Economic and Technical Cooperation, the Trade Agreement between the government of Argentina and the government of the State of Kuwait and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries of Argentina and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture of the State of Kuwait. As a result of the presidential visit to the UAE in 2013, a cooperation and technological exchange agreement in food safety, biotechnology and food supply was signed. It should be noted that this document provides for the exchange of technology and the possibility of selling through the establishment of a sales office in the UAE. Moreover, according to official declarations, Argentina would enable a small stand in the free zone of Dubai, where there would be a permanent exhibition centre for Argentine products (Ministry of Communication, 02/06/2013). The importance of this agreement is that the Emirate is a strategic point for the placement of products in the region, particularly considering that it has the biggest logistics centre that reaches all Gulf countries. Finally, in 2015, three new agreements with the UAE have been signed, this time in biotechnology, animal health and agricultural conformity assessment. There was also a memorandum signed between the INTA and the UAE Ministry of Environment and Water comprising issues related to biotechnology, animal and plant health, among other topics, through mutual assistance in the areas of education, research, development and technology transfer.

¹¹ An interesting thing to mention is that, although Argentina has to date not received funds from the above agencies, it has received a loan from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development. This fund, originally intended for the development of Arab countries, has long been open to other emerging destinations, mainly in Latin America. In this framework, the Province of Santa Fe was the recipient of a loan to improve its rail network (Cibeira, 2011).



missions, and the signing of agreements, among other indicators. Moreover, according to data from official documents, such as the Proceedings of the State of the Nation, the ties initiated during this period have no precedent in the history of bilateral relations with these actors. This approach must be understood in the light of Argentina's interest in strengthening its economic and trade ties with those countries, in line with the foreign trade policy guidelines of Fernandez's government. In fact, although the volume of trade with these countries is still low, in recent years Qatar and the UAE have become part of the countries Argentina imports the most from and currently there are several projects that, if they materialize, would enable Argentina to increase its oil purchases in these markets. Thus, we can conclude that although the depth and characteristics of the link with each of these six actors differs, Argentina has been making a major effort to approach this group of states, perceived to be potential partners, in response to the need to diversify its markets, attract investment and increase the volume of trade, combined with those states' urgency to ensure food security and advance technological cooperation, in a context that has been marked by the impact of the international financial crisis.

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