

Key Questions

CAN GOVERNMENTS ADVANCE TRADE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD?

*The UAE-Ukraine CEPA as a
Model for Strategic Partnership*

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to the United Arab Emirates*

In today's world, global trade faces growing turbulence. Tariffs, sanctions, and technological rivalries are reshaping traditional alliances and creating new economic divides. Yet even in such a fragmented environment, forward-looking governments can craft partnerships that foster cooperation, resilience, and shared prosperity.

The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ukraine on 17 February 2025, during President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's official visit to the UAE, is a vivid example of this vision. It demonstrates that pragmatic diplomacy and long-term strategy can deliver tangible results despite geopolitical uncertainty.

A FRAMEWORK FOR GROWTH AND RECOVERY

The CEPA is more than a trade deal – it is a strategic roadmap. By liberalizing trade, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and creating a predictable business environment, the agreement paves the way for dynamic bilateral growth between Ukraine and the UAE.

Before the Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, total trade between Ukraine and the UAE reached USD 1.15 billion (goods and services). In 2024, the trade turnover between the two countries amounted to around USD 415 million. With the CEPA's implementation, Ukraine's ambitious goal is to reach USD 5 billion in the next five years through agricultural and food exports, IT and logistics cooperation, joint industrial ventures, and investment in green and high-tech sectors.

Experts forecast that, once the CEPA takes effect, bilateral trade could grow by 30–40% within three years. For the UAE, this partnership fits perfectly into its diversification strategy. For Ukraine, it is a powerful instrument for export recovery and integration into the Gulf's fast-developing markets.

PROMOTING UKRAINE'S EXPORT POTENTIAL

Ukraine actively uses every available tool to promote its export and investment capabilities, particularly through participation in leading trade fairs, exhibitions, and international events held in the UAE. The UAE serves as a natural platform to showcase Ukrainian innovation and connect with partners from the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

The Embassy of Ukraine in the UAE also closely cooperates with the Ukraine Business Council Dubai, which brings together Ukrainian companies in the UAE. This organization has become an effective partner in promoting exports, organizing business events, and facilitating trade missions and delegations. Together, we are building a strong network that helps Ukrainian enterprises establish a firm presence on this

dynamic market.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH CULTURE AND INNOVATION

The UAE serves not only as a trade and investment hub but also as a bridge for cultural and educational cooperation. To build on this synergy, the Embassy of Ukraine in the UAE will launch “Ukraine Month in the UAE” – an unprecedented initiative to be held from 15 January to 15 February 2026.

This large-scale project will feature cultural, educational, sports, and business events aimed at promoting bilateral cooperation, showcasing modern Ukrainian culture, and highlighting the country’s technological and creative potential. It will also encourage stronger academic and cultural links between institutions of both nations.

As part of this initiative, the Embassy is proud to announce the first national online exhibition “Bridge to the Emirates: Ukraine Global Online Expo 2026”, developed in partnership with ATexpo Online. This digital platform will serve as a permanent virtual space for Ukrainian exporters, supporting the practical implementation of the UAE-Ukraine CEPA.

The exhibition offers a unique opportunity for Ukrainian companies to present their products, technologies, and services to the UAE market free of charge and without physical barriers. Participants will be able to create personalized virtual stands featuring company profiles, presentations, and video materials; introduce innovative and competitive Ukrainian goods; and attract foreign investment into the country’s manufacturing and technology sectors.

The initiative will also promote new business connections between Ukrainian and Emirati enterprises, strengthen Ukraine’s image as a modern, reliable trading nation, and establish a sustainable digital platform for ongoing communication and cooperation. It offers a blueprint for how to leverage innovative tools to advance trade in a volatile international environment.

BEYOND ECONOMICS: A STRATEGIC MESSAGE

In a world increasingly divided into regional blocs, the UAE-Ukraine CEPA sends a clear signal that economic cooperation can rise above politics. For the UAE, it reaffirms its role as a bridge-builder connecting regions, ideas, and people. For Ukraine, it strengthens engagement with the Middle East, diversifies markets, and supports reconstruction through sustainable international partnerships.

Ultimately, the UAE-Ukraine CEPA embodies a shared belief: that openness and

collaboration can transform fragmentation into opportunity. Guided by trust, foresight, and innovation, both nations are turning partnership into long-term prosperity.

About the Author



HE Dr Oleksandr Balanutsa has been the Ambassador of Ukraine to the United Arab Emirates since 2025. Previously, he served as the Deputy Defense Minister of Ukraine. From 2003 to 2012, he worked at the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, and the National University of the State Tax Authority of Ukraine. Between 2016 and 2019, he served as consul-general at the Consulate of Ukraine in Dubai and from 2019 to 2024, he was the Ambassador of Ukraine to Kuwait. Dr Balanutsa holds a doctorate in pedagogics from the Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University and teaches at the West Ukrainian National University.

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