

# Saudi Arabia in Focus

The monthly update from the Saudi mission to the European Union



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## From the ambassador

It's with a sense of hope and optimism that I wish you all the very best for this new year 2017. With a tumultuous year in international relations behind us, I am looking forward to embarking on new challenges in the next twelve months, and further strengthening the close ties between the Kingdom and our European partners. 2017 will also see Saudi Arabia forging ahead with its ambitious Vision 2030 plan to re-energise our economy.

The new year has already brought new faces with it. We greet Mr Antonio Tajani as the new President of the European Parliament and David McAllister MEP who takes over the chairmanship of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. I am also delighted to welcome Michele Cervone d'Urso to his new post in Riyadh as the European Union's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and the other GCC countries. I wish them all great success in their new roles and look forward to constructive cooperation in the future.



**Abdulrahman S. Alahmed**

Ambassador and Head of the Mission to the European Union

## Counterterrorism

### Saudi Arabia continues to advance its counterterrorism strategy and cross-border cooperation



**Saudi Arabia exerts significant efforts to combat the men, money, and mindset that fuel extremism. By initiating public awareness campaigns against the poisonous ideology of radicalism and instituting strict financial controls over its spread, the government of Saudi Arabia has taken a zero-tolerance stance against violent extremism.**

The security of all residents and citizens of Saudi Arabia remains a priority of the Kingdom's leadership. Citizens pledging allegiance to a terrorist organization are held fully accountable according to the rule of law and established judicial processes put in place to ensure public safety and protect national security from all foreign and domestic threats.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia conducted eight operations to combat acts of terrorism and neutralize extremist currents, according to newly-compiled data released by the Ministry of Interior. Though 34 attacks occurred or were organised against Saudi installations and personnel last year, the Kingdom's security forces identified 12 active terror organisations and foiled numerous attempts to destabilise national security.

The Kingdom's counterterrorism strategy relies on international cooperation. These links were reaffirmed this month when the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz met with the EU's Counterterrorism Coordinator Gilles De Kerchove to review aspects of cooperation between the Kingdom and the European Union and international efforts being advanced to combat terrorism.



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## Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir supports efforts to forge peace in Syria



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**Speaking in Paris on Monday 16 January 2017, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir expressed support for the efforts being made to advance the peace process in Syria. Mr Al-Jubeir met with French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault on the sidelines of the Middle East Peace Conference that took place in the French capital. At the session it was announced that the EU will host a conference on Syria and the region in Brussels in Spring 2017 focussing on the political process towards a political transition. The aims of the conference are to take stock of the state of play of UN talks in Geneva; humanitarian work and support for resilience and stabilisation, to assess progress in implementing commitments made at last year's conference in London and to identify possible gaps and how to address them, and possible support to post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation once a credible political transition is firmly underway.**

Minister Al-Jubeir's comments were also reflected in the UN Security Council meeting of 17 January, where the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations Abdallah Y. Al-Mouallimi said the Kingdom would continue to participate in all

resolution to the Syrian crisis. He reiterated support for Council resolution 2336 (2016), which called for a peaceful transition for Syria, as well as several General Assembly resolutions, including one which had called for the establishment of a mechanism to gather and document evidence and hold to account those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity. He underlined that the oppression by the Syrian regime, with the support of the Russian Federation, Iran, Hezbollah and other community militias, must come to an end, and the people of Syria must be able to determine their own political future.

Russia, Iran and Turkey's talks on the situation in Syria took place in the Kazakh capital Astana at the end of January, and worked towards extending the shaky ceasefire settled at the end of 2016. Mr Al-Jubeir said that these talks were worth testing, but should not be construed as Riyadh abandoning moderate opposition groups fighting to topple President Bashar Assad. "The objective is to arrive at a cease-fire and move on to the political process. Let us test it. So far it has not succeeded," he said. "If it does, then we go down the political path, but that does not mean we abandon the moderate opposition."



## Humanitarian Aid

# HRH King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud launches major fundraising campaign for displaced Syrians

Amidst the backdrop of Syria's civil war, Saudi Arabia's Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques has launched a new effort to aid refugees beset by Syria's ongoing five-year conflict. In response, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud has launched a major fundraising drive aimed at building refugee camps and providing resources for displaced Syrians. The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques contributed 20 million riyals (€5 million) of his own money to a campaign expected to raise some 100 million riyals (€25 million).

Royal support has not ended there. Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef donated 10 million riyals (€2.5 million); Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman contributed 8 million (€2 million). These efforts are on top of the significant contributions made to Syrian brother in need by the King Salman Center for Relief and Humanitarian Aid, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of Syrians welcomed into the Kingdom as equals. Saudi Arabia provides its Syrian guests with work permits and access to the housing, education and health services required to ensure a basic level of dignity in such challenging times.

The latest fundraising drive follows the onset of winter, with the seasonal change hindering refugees' access to food, water, electricity and heat. For Saudi Arabia, extending support reflects the Kingdom's commitment to relieving "innocent victims" of Syria's ongoing conflict. The Kingdom has long been at the forefront in supporting humanitarian aid in the region and around the world.



Photo Credit: © KSRelief

In 2016, the Saudi Fund for Development contributed around €6 million to provide life-saving food assistance to Syrian refugees, according to the United Nations World Food Programme. In 2015, Saudi Arabia ranked as one of the top 10 global donors, contributing US\$799 billion to international development and humanitarian aid initiatives.

## Women in the workforce

**"I am proud to be one of the first Saudi girls in a new field entirely for women in the aviation industry."**

**In a tangible step towards one of the key Vision 2030 goals, Saudi women are being employed as customer service representatives in airports, further developing the participation of females in Saudi Arabia's workforce.**

"The company is keen on empowering female employees," said Samer Abdul Salam Al-Majali, CEO of Arabia Gulf Air. Women are now in charge of data input, passenger information verification, boarding passengers and providing services to first-class passengers, families and people with special needs.

"I am proud to be one of the first Saudi girls in a new field entirely for women in the aviation industry, and specifically in the airport," said Asrar Mushee of her experience.

This new development testifies to the progress already

being made under the Saudi Vision 2030 plan. Under the strategy, the Saudi economy will provide opportunities for everyone – men and women, young and old – to contribute to the best of their ability. The Kingdom will place a renewed emphasis on lifelong training and seek to make the most of the potential of its workforce by encouraging a culture of high performance. These efforts will be coordinated by the established Job Creation and Anti-Unemployment Commission.

Saudi women are one of the Kingdom's most significant assets and account for over 50 percent of university graduates. The Kingdom will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of the Saudi society and economy. Vision 2030 also includes measures to empower youth and individuals with disabilities in the workforce.



## Vision 2030

# “Riyadh Metro will reshape the Saudi capital,” says EU Transport Commissioner Violetta Bulc



The Riyadh Metro is an impressive project, which will change the lifestyle of the people in the city, said EU Commissioner for Transport Violetta Bulc this month. “The timeframe is very demanding, but so far they’re keeping to the deadlines well,” she told the media on the sidelines of the forum. Her comments followed her tour of the ongoing SR 85 billion (€21.2 billion) project in Riyadh.

Describing the metro as the largest investment project in the field of transport in Saudi Arabia, Ms Bulc said that she was happy to note that those involved in the project are using state-of-the-art equipment and services for the convenience of commuters. Bulc described the metro, scheduled for completion in 2019, as “the biggest global project in urban mobility.” The metro is an urban rail and bus system, and the project is on track according to the project’s coordinators.

Earlier in her visit, she inaugurated the second EU-GCC Business Forum in Riyadh. During her opening address at the press briefing, the EU commissioner said that the purpose of her mission is to focus on a new investment plan with Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries, which took 18 months of preparation by the EU.

Commending Saudi Vision 2030, Ms Bulc said it is an integrated action plan, which covers the implementation of a vast range of projects with the participation of local businessmen. She added that she was touched by the hospitality of the people, who were cooperating with free and frank discussions. Her talks with government officials focused on transport and digitization of these projects.

Research and innovation in transport projects and urban mobility, crowd congestion and pollution, were also taken up during the talks. In the field of aviation, she said it was agreed to sign trade deals between the two parties. Bulc said she had the opportunity of meeting a group of local women and praised the tremendous improvements in their lifestyle. Bulc said that the literacy rate among women has

greatly improved and she was happy to see a large number of women graduates completing their respective degrees at local and foreign universities.

Whilst in Saudi Arabia, Ms Bulc also welcomed a new deal signed between Saudi airline Flynas and European aircraft-building consortium Airbus. The €8 million deal to sell more than 60 civilian jets to Flynas was hailed by Ms Bulc as example of the potential of successful business deals between the EU and the Kingdom.

Writing about her time in the Kingdom on her blog, Ms Bulc summarised the outcomes of her trip. She stated that the delegation had established a strong partnership with HRH King Salman and had laid the foundation for the EU to work more closely with Saudi Arabia on the implementation of the Saudi Vision 2030, which will in turn provide opportunities for promoting further trade, business and investment exchanges. She also underlined the aim of establishing working groups to discuss the projects planned under the ambitious economic roadmap and highlighted the need for more regular engagement with the private sector via an EU private sector platform in the region.



# Al-Jubeir: Strengthening US ties & holding Iran to account are Kingdom's priorities



**Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos this month, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir underscored the strength of Saudi-US relations, addressing continued and expanded areas of cooperation.**

"The US and Saudi Arabia have had a historic strategic partnership, if not alliance, since World War II; that relationship continues. We expect it to broaden and deepen and grow stronger. Our interests are aligned when it comes to the issues of the region," said Minister Al-Jubeir. "We have very, very strong people-to-people relationships with the US, and I expect that this will continue."

Minister Al-Jubeir said that Iran must be held accountable for its support of terrorism, violation of ballistic missile arrangements and for its interference in the affairs of the countries of the region. "Iran has been single-handedly the most important supporter of terrorism in the region. Iran has created and supported Hezbollah. Iran has harboured terrorists," said the foreign minister. "Virtually every country in the world has been attacked by Al-Qaeda and Daesh (ISIS) except Iran. Why?"

On the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, Minister Al-Jubeir stressed that the Arab Peace Initiative remains on the table. "Our hope is that there will be enough courage and enough political will on both sides to be able to move to settling this, the longest conflict in our region," he said.

In response to a question about the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), Minister Al-Jubeir noted the legislation has undercut the foundation of sovereign immunity, turning "the international order into the law of the jungle."

"Our hope is that wisdom will prevail and the Congress will do the right thing and make the adjustments," the foreign minister added. "The country that has the most to lose from dilution of sovereign immunities is the United States itself. And American officials know this. Because America has the largest footprint in the world, they operate all over the world. They're fighting wars all over the world. They provide weapons to countries all over the world. If that principle is eroded, then the US could be sued in virtually every country in the world."

## They said...

>>"Europe understands the transformation process in the Kingdom, and we hope to strengthen relations with key entities such as the Shura Council and the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority"

Michele Cervone d'Urso,  
Head of EU delegation to the GCC in Riyadh

## In Brief

### Saudi Arabia Backs Two-State Solution for Israel and Palestine

King Salman's cabinet discussed the outcome of the International Conference for Peace in the Middle East earlier this month. Minister of Foreign Affairs HE Adel Al-Jubeir represented the Kingdom at the conference in Paris, which concluded its activities with a joint statement. The cabinet reiterated that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's stance on the Palestinian issue is that there must be a two-state solution and that United Nations Security Council's relevant resolutions are the only basis for resolving the conflict which was adopted by Arab Peace Initiative and has received the support of the international community.

### Commission Vice-President Katainen to advance EU-KSA cooperation in Riyadh

Jyrki Katainen, the European Commission's Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment & Competitiveness, is due to travel to Riyadh later this month to deepen economic cooperation between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the 28 EU countries.

The visiting delegation is due to hold talks with senior officials from the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA) to explore new areas of cooperation in the economic sector under Vision 2030.

