

Saudi Arabia in Focus

The monthly update from the Saudi mission to the European Union



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From the ambassador

It was a great honour and pleasure this month to welcome to Brussels His Excellency Mr Adel Al-Jubeir, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The minister came to Brussels, at the heart of the European institutions, to co-chair the annual joint ministerial meeting of the EU and Gulf Cooperation Council. The meeting will help strengthen ties between the Gulf countries and the European Union.

Mr Al-Jubeir also took the opportunity to lead a conference at Egmont Palace, where he tackled some of the most salient challenges and issues for the Kingdom on the regional and global stage, and detailed how he sees a bright future for Saudi Arabia driven by the implementation of the Vision 2030 economic roadmap.



Abdulrahman S. Alahmed
Ambassador and Head of the Mission to the European Union

Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir in Brussels EU & GCC determined to strengthen cooperation



The 25th Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting of EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council took place in Brussels on 18 July. After a fruitful exchange, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Adel Al-Jubeir and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini expressed “a firm determination to expand and strengthen bilateral political, economic, cultural and social cooperation and relations” between the two blocs at a press conference.

On Yemen, all parties welcomed the resumption of the UN-mediated peace talks in Kuwait and reiterated support to the UN Special Envoy for Yemen. Federica Mogherini stressed the need “to work together to help the parties find common ground. [...] We agreed there is only a political solution to the conflicts in Yemen and we’re trying to join forces to facilitate this process.” Both sides emphasised that the settlement must be based on “the GCC initiative, the outcome of the Yemeni national dialogue and the UN Security Council resolution 2216.”

Al-Jubeir underlined that Saudi Arabia

and its partners are working “to encourage the parties [in Yemen] to sign agreements and implement measures so that we can move Yemen from a state of war to a state of development, reconstruction and prosperity.” Much of the meeting was dedicated to tackling the issue of terrorism. EU and GCC countries voiced their determination to it and its financing, and to defeat Da’esh and other terrorist organisations. They stressed the need to reach a solution to the Syrian crisis and called for immediate country-wide humanitarian access allowing the delivery of aid to all besieged areas, emphasizing the importance of adherence to the cessation of hostilities arrangements.

Ministers also reviewed progress in the EU-GCC strategic relationship and “expressed their willingness to address together common political, social, economic, and security challenges, as well as macroeconomic stability and support for diversification strategies,” such as Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. It was noted that the GCC is now the EU’s fourth biggest trade partner, equivalent to over €155 bn. in 2015, 55% more than in 2010.



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Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir on Saudi's past, present and bright future

During his visit to Brussels, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir, joined by Ambassador Abdulrahman Alahmed, led a conference at Egmont Institute for International Relations in Brussels on 19 July. Speaking at length about the role of the Kingdom in the Gulf region and in world affairs, he gave an honest, optimistic vision on the country's bright future driven forward by Vision 2030, the economic roadmap approved by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques HRH King Salman in April this year.

Mr Al-Jubeir began by sketching out the situation in Saudi Arabia today. "Saudi Arabia is strategically located between Africa, Asia and Europe. It acts as a hub and critical player in the world's energy market and by extension in the world's economic system." He also emphasised that the Kingdom is a "status quo power" with no ambitions beyond its borders and promotes the values of "stability, security and peace" in order to focus on building the country, developing its people, improving their lives and those of people in the Gulf.

The Foreign Minister also underlined the progress made by the Kingdom in recent decades. "We went from a tribal society to a modern nation in less than two generations," he explained, highlighting the rapid improvements the Kingdom has undergone in terms of doubling life expectancy, achieving universal education, increasing women's participation in higher education to 55% and developing some of the world's most sophisticated infrastructure. Even with the huge groundswell of change that Saudi Arabia has undertaken, the minister noted that there is still room for improvement in education, the creation of a culture of innovation and loosening social restrictions on women. "We will succeed [...] because we are not ideologically driven – it's about pragmatism."

This pragmatism and common sense, Mr Al-Jubeir said, this sense of proportion and balance, is reflected in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and its ability to resist the political turmoil of Arab radicalism and Soviet expansionism over the course of the 20th century that so many of the other countries in the region underwent.

"The challenge we face today is extremism and terrorism," the Minister asserted. "We are working with our religious scholars, with our security people, our allies, our friends and with the global community to push back against extremism and terrorism." Al-Jubeir signalled he was confident that the terrorist scourge will be overcome:



"We just have to be practical, pragmatic, determined and we have to make sure that we know what our objective is and mobilise the world towards it. It is inconceivable to me that countries that have tremendous resources cannot defeat a bunch of thugs."

Mr Al-Jubeir reiterated that EU-GCC negotiations had been "very productive and very positive," adding his hope that the relationship could be elevated to an even stronger level. He noted that Saudi Arabia's relationship with the EU is very strong. "We are historic and geographic neighbours, and we have tremendous bilateral trade," worth 116 billion euros a year. "We have a lot of interaction between our citizens. We see many of the problems and the challenges eye-to-eye and we work very closely together to deal with those issues."

Adel Al-Jubeir hailed the implementation of the Vision 2030 roadmap a "new phase in our history [...] where we are transforming our country and diversifying our sources of income." Encouraging foreign investment, instilling a culture of innovation and competitiveness and unleashing the potential of Saudi youth are all important aspects of the plan, the minister explained. He noted that the ambitious long-term plan will involve empowering women and "making the government more transparent and more accountable." The aim is to change "the mind-set of the country from an oil producer that earns income and spends it, to an innovative, competitive, efficient society".

The minister spoke optimistically about the plan, declaring that "when we are done, our country and our society will be so much the better for it, in terms of our wealth, our economic competitiveness, our jobs, our social stability and our political stability." The full video of the conference can be viewed online at www.ksamission.eu.net/en/video/

Saudi Arabia welcomes the release of the full US Congressional Joint Inquiry Report on 9/11



Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir said Saudi Arabia welcomed the release of the 28 pages redacted from the Congressional Joint Inquiry into 9/11, and reiterated the Kingdom's commitment to crushing terrorism at home and abroad. "Since the tragic events of 9/11, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has embarked on a series of major steps in confronting terrorism," Minister Al-Jubeir said at a press conference at the Saudi Embassy in Washington following the release of the 28 pages.

"We have put in place financial control mechanisms that are unprecedented for any other country. We have shut down institutions that use fundraising in order to support extremist causes and terrorism. We have put in place laws to criminalize terror financing. We have detained a large number of people. We have prosecuted a large number of people. We have jailed a large number of people. We have put in place better systems in terms of looking at cash couriers," said Minister Al-Jubeir. "Saudi Arabia is in the forefront of countries when it comes to fighting terrorism."

The Foreign Minister said that redacted pages exonerate the Saudi government from involvement in

the events of 9/11, as the 28 pages were reviewed by U.S. intelligence agencies who said there is no involvement of the Saudi government or Saudi officials in the events of 9/11.

"We hope with the release of these pages, the aspersions that have been cast against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the past 14 years will come to an end. And we hope that we can focus on moving forward in a cooperative way in order to go after the men, the money and the mindset that represents a threat to your people and ours."

Minister Al-Jubeir said Saudi Arabia is a victim of terrorism, and works with its allies in going after terrorists and their supporters.

"Terrorism has no religion, it has no nationality, it has no ethnicity, it has no humanity. It is incumbent upon all of us to do everything in our power to defeat it," said Minister Al-Jubeir.

"The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is determined to go after the terrorists, those who finance them, and those who justify their actions."

Cultural Heritage

HRH the Deputy Crown Prince meets with UNESCO Director-General in Paris



HRH the Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud made an official visit to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris last week. The Deputy Crown Prince and the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, highlighted the need to support the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage damaged by conflicts, especially in Yemen.

His Royal Highness pledged support for the country's recovery plans, notably for the restoration and conservation of cultural heritage, including three World Heritage sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Both also stressed the importance of renewed initiatives for citizenship education, intercultural dialogue at a time marked by extremism, intolerance and violence.

The Director-General emphasized the imperative need to fight youth radicalization through quality education and invited Saudi Arabia to attend UNESCO's second conference on the Internet and Youth Radicalisation, to take place in Quebec later this year.

The Director-General expressed appreciation of Saudi Arabia's support to the Organization, notably the Kingdom's contribution to strengthening the Organization's Arabic language capacity and key UNESCO activities. She also highlighted the importance of Saudi heritage, to be promoted as a force for dialogue and mutual understanding. Saudi Arabia has four sites inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, ten sites included on its national Tentative List and considerations are under way to provide more focus on the protection of natural heritage in view of potential nominations and future inscriptions.

Following the meeting, the Kingdom's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Dr. Ziad Al-Driss said UNESCO is committed to cooperating with the Kingdom to see it achieve the goals of its Saudi Vision 2030. Irina Bokova has reportedly praised the Saudi strategy, and affirmed that the organisation is ready to cooperate with the Kingdom in the fields pertaining to UNESCO, particularly those related to education, culture and human heritage, in order to help it realize the vision.

They said...

>> "Western companies play a key role in our economic transformation [...] we can achieve our goals much faster and at a lower cost if we partner with foreign corporations."

Khalid Al-Falih, Saudi Energy Minister

In Brief

>> Saudi Arabia condemns Daesh murder of priest in France

KSA has condemned the vile terrorist act that killed a priest in Normandy on 26 July. The crime is rejected by the Islamic religion, which enjoined the protection of places of worship and forbade its desecration. The act is also rejected by all other religions, values, humanitarian principles and international norms and conventions, read a statement from Riyadh.

>> Saudi Arabia to launch Entrepreneurship University

As part of the Kingdom's sweeping Vision 2030 reforms, plans have been announced to establish the Prince Mohammed bin Salman College of Business and Entrepreneurship under the auspices of the King Abdullah Economic City. The Mohammed bin Salman Foundation has signed a cooperative agreement with Babson College and Lockheed Martin to develop the first under- and postgraduate degrees in entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia.

>> Saudi's Private Sector Workforce Sees 10% Boost

The number of Saudis employed in the private sector rose in 2015 by over 10 percent compared to the previous year's total. The annual statistics of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) show that the number of Saudi workers in the private sector reached approximately 1.74 million male and female workers, almost 200,000 more than the 2014 figure. The statistics also highlighted that the number of female employees surpassed 499,000, meaning women now account for 29 percent of the total of private sector employees.

