



EU – GCC DIALOGUE ON ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION PHASE II

A Project funded by the European Union

1. ACTIVITY REPORT

EU CUSTOMS BREAKFAST DIALOGUE IN BAHRAIN

A project implemented by DAI
in consortium with AHK and
ICCS



German Emirati Joint Council
for Industry and Commerce
المجلس الألماني الإماراتي
المشترك للصناعة والتجارة

Activity Report

EU Customs Breakfast Dialogue in Bahrain

29 January 2026

I. Summary

Table 1: Summary of EU Customs Breakfast Dialogue 2026

cat	Description
<i>Theme</i>	Customs Dialogue, focusing on trade, customs and economic cooperation between the European Union and the GC
<i>Purpose</i>	- Provide a high-level platform for informal discussion on customs cooperation, trade facilitation and economic partnership - Enhance mutual understanding of customs frameworks and identify practical ways to support growing trade and investment flow between the EU and GCC member states
<i>Date and time</i>	29 January 2026
<i>Venue</i>	Hilton Garden Inn – Bahrain Bay
<i>Organized by</i>	- DAI - German-Saudi Arabian Liaison Office for Economic Affairs
<i>Supported by</i>	EU Delegation to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman
<i>Format</i>	In-person
<i>Language</i>	English
<i>Main Target Audience</i>	Logistics and trading local companies and Customs affairs
<i>Number of Participant</i>	25 participants

II. Performance Reporting

1. Forum Delivery

1-1. Opening Remarks

Time	10:30 am – 10:35 am
Speaker	- Yasmin Schneider - Market Entry Consultant, DEinternational Consultant - Timo Hammaren - Minister Counsellor and Head of Trade at the EU Delegation to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the GCC

The business dialogue started off with a welcome note and introduction by Yasmin Schneider from the German-Saudi Arabian Liaison Office for Economic Affairs (GESALO) who stated the purpose of the event and introduced the programme of the day, introducing all guest speakers as well as relevant partners who organised this event. Further, Ms Schneider used this opportunity to introduce the EU Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dialogue on Economic Diversification highlighting that the dialogue is aimed at strengthening EU-GCC relations by enhancing trade and investment links between the EU and GCC member countries. This was followed by an introduction by Mr Timo Hammaren who gave more background on the purpose and set up of the EU Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Dialogue on Economic Diversification.

1-2. Customs Priorities for Future EU-BH FTA

Time	10:35 am – 10:45 am
Speaker	Gabriella Francis – European Commission (DG TACUD)

Ms Francis addressed the evolving role of EU customs authorities, emphasizing that modern customs administrations balance trade facilitation with safety and security. She highlighted that EU customs enforce over 370 regulatory standards, ensuring secure, predictable, and efficient access to the EU market for companies established in Bahrain and other trading partners.

She further presented the Import Control System 2 (ICS2) as a core element of the EU's data driven customs modernization. By requiring advance cargo information and applying real time risk analysis before goods reach the EU boarder, ICS2 helps reduce delays for compliant operators while strengthening supply chain security.

She outlined the ongoing reform of the union Custom Code, built around enhanced partnerships with trusted traders, smarter risk management supported by a central EU Customs Data Hub, and a modernized e-commerce framework. She noted that these reforms aim to provide greater predictability, efficiency, and legal certainty for businesses established in Bahrain trading with the EU.

She also emphasized the importance of EU-Bahrain cooperation in promoting transparency, risk-based controls, and smoother trade flows, underlining that closer collaboration can further facilitate market access while safeguarding supply chains.

1-3. Bahrain Customs Affairs

Time	10:45 am – 11:00 am
Speaker	Dr. Nada Ebrahim – Head of Post Audit and Compliance Assessment Division at the Ministry of Interior of Bahrain

Dr. Nada Ebrahim, Head of Post Audit and Compliance Assessment Division, presented the strategic direction and ongoing modernisation efforts of Bahrain Customs within the framework of the Customs Affairs Strategic Plan (2024-2027). She highlighted the alignment of Bahrain's customs strategy within the national development goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the World Customs Organization standards, reinforcing Bahrain's role as a regional logistics hub.

Her presentation focused on the development of the Customs Single Window System, emphasizing pre-clearance procedures, risk-based shipment classification, electronic connectivity with key stakeholders, and the use of advanced x-ray systems. She further explained how Artificial Intelligence and data analytics are integrated into the customs risk engine to enhance inspection accuracy, detect irregularities, and support valuation processes.

She also introduced the GCC Authorized economic Operator (AEO) program, which provides facilitation benefits to compliant economic operators under the WCO SAFE framework. She concluded by outlining Bahrain's ongoing cooperation within the GCC Customs union, including electronic data linkage and harmonized risk management practices, all of which contribute to reducing clearance times, strengthening compliance, and facilitating trade and investment.

1-4. Business Needs in EU–Bahrain Customs Cooperation

Time	11:00 am – 11:45 am
Moderator	Yasmin Schneider
Speaker	- François-Xavier Depireux (EU industry representative) - Gabriella Francis – European Commission (DG TACUD)
Group discussion	- The moderated discussion was opened by Ms. Yasmin Schneider, who guided an in-depth and practical exchange with Mr. François-Xavier Depireux, CEO of LD Export, together with previous keynote speakers Ms. Gabrielle Francis and Dr. Nada Ebrahim. The conversation centered on advancing customs cooperation between the European Union and the GCC. Key themes included Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) mutual recognition, customs data exchange, digitalization, risk management, and practical trade facilitation measures. - Ms. Schneider began by raising questions on the current state of AEO mutual recognition processes and the feasibility of closer alignment between EU and Bahraini systems. The conversation highlighted the importance of transparency in validation procedures, clarity in compliance requirements and the need for structured technical dialogue to bridge remaining regulatory gaps.



- Dr. Nada Ebrahim elaborated on the specific facilitations offered by Bahrain to AEO-certified companies. She outlined measures such as priority clearance and access to advanced electronic clearance channels. The discussion explored how these incentives could further attract EU-certified companies and encourage broader participation in AEO schemes.
- Ms. Gabrielle Francis focused on the regulatory differences between EU customs standards and those applied in Bahrain. The speakers discussed practical steps to overcome these gaps, including enhanced technical cooperation and improved communication channels between customs authorities and the private sector.
- Mr. François-Xavier Depireux provided valuable industry insight into challenges faced by EU-certified companies exporting to or operating in Bahrain.
- The session concluded with an open and interactive discussion, during which speakers and guests were invited to raise questions and share perspectives. This segment proved particularly dynamic, with strong engagement from private-sector representatives. Some of these had been approached prior by GESALO to ensure their active participation. Overall, the session fostered a constructive exchange between policymakers, customs experts, and business leaders highlighting key opportunities to strengthen EU-Bahrain cooperation in AEO mutual recognition, digital customs and risk-based trade facilitation.

Lesson Learned

The recent cooperation provided valuable experience and demonstrated commitment from all sides. At the same time, several lessons emerged that can help optimise future joint events.

First, a clearer purpose needs to be defined from the beginning of the project. The overall objective and expected outcomes should be jointly defined in a short concept note before planning begins. This will ensure better alignment of speakers, format and communication.

Second, responsibilities must be more clearly divided. A written allocation of tasks, including speaker outreach, logistics and agenda setting would improve efficiency and avoid overlaps or delays.

Third, dates should be fixed earlier and sufficient notice provided. This is especially important when involving Bahraini government representatives, as verbal notes require approval.

With clearer objectives, defined roles and more effective communication, future collaboration can be delivered more strategically and effectively.



Annexes

Annex 1: program

Session title /Time	Agenda
10:00 am	Registration and Welcome Coffee
10:25 – 10:35 am	Welcome and Introduction • Yasmin Schneider - DEinternational Consultant • Timo Hammaren - Minister Counsellor and Head of Trade at the EU Delegation to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the GCC
10:35 – 10:45 am	Customs Priorities for Future EU-BH • Gabriella Francis – European Commission (DG TACUD)
10:45 – 11:00 am	Bahrain Customs Affairs • Dr. Nada Ebrahim – Head of post Audit and Compliance Assessment Division
11:00 – 11:30 am	Business Needs in EU–Bahrain Customs Cooperation • Yasmin Schneider - DEinternational Consultant • François-Xavier Depireux (EU industry representative) • Gabriella Francis – European Commission (DG TACUD) Q&A
11:30	Networking Breakfast