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EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification II

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Message from the Team Leader

Team Leader
Dr. Rade Glomazić

Dear partners and colleagues,

this edition of our newsletter reflects the strong momentum of EU-GCC economic cooperation and the increasingly important role of structured business dialogue in translating our shared priorities into practical opportunities for companies, institutions and investors across both regions.

A central priority for the period ahead will be to strengthen the visibility, accessibility and impact of the EU's business support structures in the Gulf. In particular, we will promote the EU Business Forum in the United Arab Emirates (EUBF) and the European Chamber of Commerce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (ECCKSA) as principal gateways for European businesses seeking information, connections and practical support in the region.

The EUBF is particularly important in bringing together EU Business Councils, the EU Delegation and European trade representatives around shared priorities. Through its business-led Task Forces, stakeholder discussions and coordinated engagement, it provides European companies with a stronger collective voice and a practical channel to contribute to the development of EU-UAE economic relations.

The recent inauguration of ECCKSA's new offices in Riyadh marks an important milestone in building a strong and sustainable European business presence in Saudi Arabia. We will also continue supporting emerging and established EU business structures across Bahrain, Qatar and the wider GCC, while encouraging closer cooperation with the Enterprise Europe Network and relevant national institutions.

Our work extends beyond institutional development. The recent dialogues on safe and resilient food trade in Qatar and Kuwait demonstrated the value of bringing together governments, businesses and experts to address shared challenges related to food security, regulatory cooperation, sustainable supply chains and innovation. Upcoming activities on cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, aviation, customs, fintech and investment will further broaden the scope of EU-GCC engagement and create new avenues for collaboration.

Preparations are also advancing for the upcoming EU-GCC Business Forum, supported by a series of thematic webinars covering trade and investment, digital transformation and AI, SMEs and skills development, and new areas of cooperation. Together with our policy analysis, technical assistance and institutional support, these activities are designed to ensure that dialogue leads to concrete outcomes and that European and GCC businesses are placed at the centre of our partnership.

I would like to thank our partners, experts and business communities for their continued engagement. By reinforcing our regional support structures and connecting policy dialogue with the practical needs of companies, we are building a stronger foundation for sustainable trade, investment, innovation and long-term EU-GCC economic cooperation.

EUBF

EU Business Forum

EU Business Forum (EUBF) - Bringing the European Business Community Together in the UAE

Author: Helene Daniel
Key Expert - Advisor on Trade, Economics and Investment

The European Union (EU) is the largest investor in the UAE and one of its top trading partners. Despite its very important economic presence in the UAE covering a wide range of sectors including trade, tourism, defense, old and new energy, healthcare, food security, climate change, water, fintech, AI and transport, there has never been a single forum bringing together the different European business organisations operating in the country.

The EU Business Forum (EUBF) was designed to fill this gap. It offers the European Union business community in the UAE a simple and informal setting in which to discuss and solve specific economic issues.
The Forum brings together EU representatives of Business Councils, the EU Delegation, and EU trade offices to discuss common business challenges, identify shared priorities and develop coordinated positions where a collective European voice can make a difference.

Rather than creating another organisation, the EUBF complements the work of national business organisations by focusing on issues that matter to businesses from several EU members.
The Forum has already demonstrated its value. Just weeks after its launch, it organised a Business Roundtable alongside the EU–UAE Free Trade Agreement negotiations, bringing together the EU Ambassador, the EU Chief Negotiator, senior European Commission officials and Chairs of EU Business Councils. The discussion gave companies the opportunity to share practical feedback from the field and contribute to the dialogue on the future EU–UAE economic partnership.

The EUBF is also building its activities around Task Forces led by the business community. Current groups focus on Energy and Food & Beverages, bringing together companies to identify regulatory barriers, exchange best practices and formulate practical recommendations for both EU and UAE authorities. New Task Forces will be launched as new priorities emerge, ensuring that the Forum remains driven by the needs of its members rather than by a fixed agenda.

Another example is that the EUBF helped bring together companies from its community to organize the EU Defense Tech Forum. The same applies to the EU's participation in the Quantum and Innovation Summit, which will take place in September.

With regular plenary meetings, expert discussions, participation to strategic Business Forums, meetings with key stakeholders, and collaborative projects, the EUBF is creating a practical forum for EU companies to learn from each other, coordinate advocacy efforts and contribute to a stronger EU–UAE economic partnership.
The ambition is to ensure that this more connected EU business community helps shape the future of EU–UAE economic cooperation.

EU - Qatar Dialogue on Safe and Resilient Food Trade

The EU-Qatar Dialogue on Safe and Resilient Food Trade, held on 22 June 2026 in Doha, strengthened EU-Qatar cooperation on food security, food safety, resilient supply chains and sustainable trade. The dialogue confirmed a strong alignment between European and Qatari priorities on strengthening resilient, safe and sustainable food systems. Both sides recognised that food security requires a balanced approach combining local production, strategic reserves, diversified international trade and trusted international partnerships. The discussions also reaffirmed the European Union's role as a strategic partner for Qatar in food safety, regulatory excellence, sustainable agriculture, research, innovation and advanced agri-food technologies.

The discussions highlighted the importance of moving beyond a traditional buyer-supplier relationship towards a long-term strategic partnership between the EU and Qatar, with increasing focus on research and development, technology transfer, artificial intelligence, digital solutions, sustainable agriculture, food safety and innovation. Participants also agreed that digitalisation, artificial intelligence, predictive analytics and real-time data will play an increasingly important role in strengthening food system resilience, improving supply-chain visibility, anticipating disruptions and supporting evidence-based decision-making.

Finally, the dialogue reinforced the importance of public-private collaboration in accelerating innovation, strengthening food safety, promoting sustainable agricultural practices and building resilient food value chains capable of responding to future global challenges.

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Main outputs and country focus

Building Resilient Food Systems - Insights from the European Union Experience

Author: Daniela Stratulativ
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Recent shocks, such as geopolitical conflicts and disruptions to global shipping and commodity markets have highlighted the vulnerability of food systems to external pressures and accelerated the shift from securing food supplies towards building resilience. For the GCC countries, this challenge is particularly significant given limited arable land, water scarcity, heavy reliance on food imports and exposure to global supply chain disruptions.

The European Union's evolving food security framework illustrates how governments are adapting their policies to address increasingly complex risks across the food system, with a growing emphasis on preparedness, coordination and supply chain resilience.
One of the EU's most significant policy shifts has been moving from reactive crisis management to proactive preparedness. Through its Contingency Plan for Ensuring Food Supply and Food Security, the European Commission encourages Member States to anticipate potential disruptions through contingency planning, coordinated governance and scenario-based preparedness rather than responding only when crises emerge.

A cornerstone of the EU's approach is the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism (EFSCM), established following the COVID-19 pandemic. The EFSCM aims to strengthen long-term food system resilience by bringing together public authorities and stakeholders across the food value chain to improve preparedness, share information, identify vulnerabilities and coordinate responses to supply chain disruptions.

The European Commission also emphasizes the importance of timely, reliable data for effective decision-making. Its EU Food Supply and Security Dashboard provides near real-time monitoring of food availability, supply chains and agricultural markets, giving policymakers early warning of emerging risks and supporting proactive responses to potential disruptions.

Another defining feature of the EU framework is its recognition that food security extends well beyond agriculture. It requires coordinated action across trade, transport, energy, labor, public health, emergency management and finance. The EU approach therefore emphasizes coordination across these policy areas, recognizing that effective food security requires alignment among multiple government functions and stakeholders.

The EU's contingency planning framework emphasizes maintaining the continuity of food supply chains during crises by protecting transport and logistics networks, maintaining domestic and international trade flows, ensuring the availability of essential workers across the food system and avoiding unnecessary trade restrictions.

Many elements of the EU's evolving framework reflect broader global trends in food security governance. The experience highlights the growing importance of preparedness, institutional coordination, public-private collaboration, real-time monitoring and resilient supply chains as essential components of food system resilience in an environment characterized by growing geopolitical, economic and climate-related uncertainty.

ECCKSA Highlights

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ECCKSA Strengthens Its Platform for EU-Saudi Business Cooperation

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The European Chamber of Commerce in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (ECCKSA), was initiated by the EU Commission and established by leading European companies as the first European chamber in the region, with the goal of fostering strong EU-Saudi economic cooperation.

The organisation provides a platform dedicated to advancing the interests of European businesses in the Kingdom, offering comprehensive support to help navigate the local market, with opportunities for high-level networking, industry events, and direct engagement with key decision makers. With the support of the EU, ECCKSA is committed to ensuring European companies succeed in Saudi Arabia's evolving market, while shaping its agenda through the active participation and contributions of its members.

June marked a significant step in ECCKSA's development, capping two years of steady organisation building with the official inauguration of its new offices in Riyadh on 22 June, in the presence of H.E. Christophe Farnaud, EU Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, senior officials from the Ministry of Investment, Economic and Commercial Counsellors from EU Member State Embassies, and ECCKSA members.

The occasion reaffirmed ECCKSA's position as a structured platform for EU-Saudi dialogue at a time when the strategic relevance of this partnership continues to grow. The inauguration was marked by addresses from H.E. Christophe Farnaud and Dr. Khalid Al Sheddi, General Manager of Investor Relations at the Ministry of Investment, whose remarks underscored the strategic importance of ECCKSA as a bridge between European business and the Saudi market. They were joined by Mr. Timo Hammarén, Minister-Counsellor and Head of Trade at the EU Delegation, Economic and Commercial Counsellors from EU Member State Embassies, and ECCKSA's Board members, members, and partners. Having a dedicated space is more than a symbolic step. It signals ECCKSA's long-term commitment to the Kingdom and its readiness to grow as a structured platform for EU-Saudi private sector dialogue, policy advocacy, and business development across sectors. ECCKSA was not built for its members, it was built by them. That is what makes all the difference.

Looking ahead, ECCKSA will continue strengthening its platform for European businesses, expanding its sectoral committees, and deepening cooperation with Saudi and European institutions. EU-Saudi economic relations have never been more strategically important, and ECCKSA is here to ensure European business remains at the centre of that partnership.

The month also brought a series of high-level engagements that reflect this momentum, including a dinner hosted by Ambassador Farnaud for visiting EU officials from Brussels, an exclusive visit to Aramco's exhibition at Aramco Tower in KAFD, and an exchange with the World Bank Group on the operating environment for European businesses in the Kingdom. The discussion with the World Bank team provided an opportunity to share insights and experiences on what it means to operate as a European business in the Kingdom today, from the opportunities emerging across key sectors to the evolving regulatory and investment landscape. These kinds of exchanges are at the heart of what ECCKSA does, and that is connecting the European business community with the right partners and fostering dialogue that supports a stronger, more dynamic EU-Saudi economic relationship.

Implemented and Planned Activities

The project continues to deliver its activities designed to foster economic integration and diversification. In June and the 1st of July 2026 the project organised the Dialogues on Safe and Resilient Food Trade in both Qatar and Kuwait (online). The project continued to focus on the organisation of several events in the region including Digital Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Resilience Dialogue event organised with Digital Cooperation Organization – DCO in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (moved to September 2026) as well as the EU-GCC Business Forum.

The Dialogues on Safe and Resilient Food trade brought together high political actors as well as the business community. The Dialogues were honoured to include H.E. Dr. Cristian Tudor, Ambassador of the European Union to Qatar and H.E. Anne Koistinen, EU Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. The dialogue in Qatar confirmed a strong alignment between European and Qatari priorities on strengthening resilient, safe and sustainable food systems. The Kuwait dialogue confirmed a strong alignment between European and Kuwaiti priorities on food security, food safety and supply chain resilience. At both dialogues, all sides recognised that resilient food systems require a balanced combination of reliable international trade partnerships, transparent regulatory frameworks, and long-term strategic planning.

In terms of policy analysis and institutional support, the project finalised policy papers on Sanitary and Phytosanitary measure as well as GSO Standards and is working on a paper on performance requirements.
Significant technical assistance continues to be extended to EU Chambers of Commerce and the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. This support includes strategic business planning, legal advisory, and the development of concept notes for new institutional initiatives, such as the establishment of the EU Business Forum in the UAE.

For the period ahead, the project is preparing for a series of planned activities including the Digital Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Resilience Dialogue event organised with Digital Cooperation Organization – DCO in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia the launch of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce (September 2026) as well as the upcoming EU-GCC Business Forum towards the end of the year. In relation to the Business Forum, the project will be organising webinars on topics related to Trade and Investment, Digital Transformation and AI, SMEs and skills development as well as New Avenues for Cooperation. These initiatives are designed to facilitate the exchange of best practices and align regulatory standards with international benchmarks as well as enhance bilateral business opportunities for both EU and GCC actors.

Planned Activities

KSA Digital Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Resilience Dialogue

🗓️ September 2026

📍 Saudi Arabia

EU–Oman Aviation Dialogue

🗓️ TBD 2026

📍 Oman

Participation in EU-KSA Foresight Dialogue event

🗓️ 30th Sep -1st Oct 2026

📍 Saudi Arabia

Fintech & Digital Banking & Innovation (MISA)

🗓️ TBD 2026

📍 Saudi Arabia

Online events in preparation to the 10th EU-GCC Business Forum

🗓️ August - September 2026

📍 Online

Customs Dialogue - Qatar

🗓️ TBD 2026

📍 Qatar

Official Launch Event of the Chamber of Commerce Bahrain

🗓️ TBD 2026

📍 Bahrain

EUBF next monthly meeting

🗓️ 18th September 2026

Participation in Quantum and New - Tech Summit

🗓️ 28–30 September 2026

📍 UAE

Public Procurement Dialogue

🗓️ TBD 2026

📍 Kuwait

10th EU-GCC Business Forum

2026

EU-GCC Defence Technology and AI Forum

🗓️ December 2026

📍 Qatar

Contacts

ABOUT US

The EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification II is a project funded by the European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments under the Partnership Instrument. The project contributes to stronger EU-GCC relations by supporting the GCC countries in the ongoing process of economic diversification away from hydrocarbon-dependent sectors, including by funding regular EU-GCC Business Fora.

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If you found this newsletter valuable, we encourage you to share it within your network to strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the GCC. By fostering economic diversification, digital transformation, regulatory covergence, and private sector engagement, we can advance sustainable growth, trade, and investment opportunities across both regions.

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