THE EU-GCC COOPERATION ON GREEN TRANSITION PROJECT

Funded by the European Union

EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour

Antwerp – Rotterdam – Brussels | 18–22 May 2026

Summary Report

EXECTIVE SUMMARY

The EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour took place from 18 to 22 May 2026, bringing together representatives from GCC ministries, authorities, research institutions and energy-related entities for a focused programme in Belgium and the Netherlands. Organised under the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project, the study tour aimed to deepen technical understanding, exchange policy dialogue and strengthen practical cooperation around renewable hydrogen, hydrogen and derivatives, certification, infrastructure, ports, clean energy corridors and future EU-GCC market opportunities.

Over the course of the programme, participants visited the Port of Antwerp-Bruges and the Port of Rotterdam, also attended the World Hydrogen Summit & Exhibition, joined a dedicated Holland Hydrogen Hub GCC session, held a side meeting with UNIDO and a joint dinner with the Indian delegation, and had a number of important meetings with European Commission representatives in Brussels. The programme combined site visits, technical briefings, policy discussions and stakeholder exchanges, giving participants a full value-chain perspective on how Europe is preparing for the implementation of its hydrogen planning and H2 imports from third countries, and how the Gulf region can position itself as a strategic partner in the emerging global hydrogen economy.

The port visits demonstrated the central role that Antwerp-Bruges and Rotterdam are expected to play as future gateways for renewable molecules, hydrogen carriers, ammonia, methanol, sustainable aviation fuels and CO_2 infrastructure. The World Hydrogen Summit discussions highlighted the strong supply ambition in the GCC, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE, while also underlining the need for clearer demand signals, long-term offtake, regulatory certainty and bankable corridor models in Europe.

The European Commission sessions provided participants with direct insight into the EU's hydrogen policy framework, renewable hydrogen certification rules, the Hydrogen Mechanism, market development tools, and future cooperation opportunities. The discussions reinforced that successful EU-GCC hydrogen cooperation will require more than production capacity. It will depend on aligned regulation, credible certification, port and transport infrastructure, financing, industrial demand, safety standards, research cooperation and long-term strategic partnership.

The study tour created a valuable platform for dialogue between GCC stakeholders, European institutions, ports, industry representatives and international organisations. It also identified practical follow-up areas, including certification readiness, clean energy corridors, liquid hydrogen and ammonia logistics, EU-GCC technical seminars, research and innovation cooperation, and continued engagement through the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project.

1. Background and Purpose of the Study Tour

The EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour was organised under the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project to support knowledge exchange and practical cooperation on renewable hydrogen and clean energy corridors between the Gulf and Europe.

Hydrogen is increasingly seen as a key energy carrier for decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors, including heavy industry, chemicals, maritime transport, aviation and long-term energy storage. For the GCC, renewable hydrogen and its derivatives represent an opportunity to diversify energy systems, support industrial transformation, develop new export markets and strengthen long-term cooperation with Europe.

For the EU, hydrogen is central to achieving climate neutrality, strengthening energy security, diversifying supply and supporting the decarbonisation of industry and transport. The EU's future hydrogen market will require both domestic production and imports, making cooperation with international partners, including the GCC, increasingly important.

The study tour was designed to give participants a practical and policy-oriented understanding of the full hydrogen value chain, from production and export potential in the Gulf to import infrastructure, certification requirements, market development and industrial demand in Europe.

Main Objectives

The study tour aimed to:

- Strengthen EU-GCC dialogue on renewable hydrogen and hydrogen derivatives.
- Introduce GCC participants to European port infrastructure and hydrogen import readiness.
- Explore clean energy corridors linking GCC supply to European demand.
- Deepen understanding of EU hydrogen policy, certification and market rules.
- Identify cooperation opportunities in infrastructure, finance, offtake, research and innovation.
- Support continued technical exchange under the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project.

2. Programme Overview

The study tour followed a chronological route from Brussels to Antwerp, Rotterdam and back to Brussels.

Programme at a Glance

Date	Location	Main focus	What to expect
Sun 17 May	Brussels / Antwerp	Arrivals and individual transfer	Participants arrive in Brussels and travel independently by train to Antwerp hotel. Overnight in Antwerp.
Mon 18 May	Antwerp → Rotterdam	Port of Antwerp-Bruges visit	Port House visit, energy transition presentation, light lunch, guided port tour by bus, transfer to Rotterdam, dinner meeting.
Tue 19 May	Rotterdam	H3 GCC session and Port of Rotterdam	Holland Hydrogen Hub GCC session at World Hydrogen Summit; Port of Rotterdam technical visit; group dinner.
Wed 20 May	Rotterdam → Brussels	World Hydrogen Summit full day	World Hydrogen Summit exhibition/side sessions; optional Indian delegation side event; evening transfer to Brussels.
Thu 21 May	Brussels	European Commission programme	DG ENER morning session; lunch near DG ENER; MED-GEM session; DG MENA EU-GCC cooperation session.
Fri 22 May	Brussels	Departures / optional follow-up	Optional individual meetings and departures according to participants' travel schedules.

Core Themes

The programme focused on five interconnected themes:

Theme	Focus
EU Policy	Hydrogen policy, market development and import requirements
Certification	Renewable hydrogen sustainability rules and RFNBO compliance
Ports	Antwerp and Rotterdam as future clean energy gateways
Markets	Clean energy corridors linking GCC supply to European demand
Cooperation	EU-GCC technical dialogue, follow-up opportunities and next steps

3. Monday 18 May 2026

Port of Antwerp-Bruges Visit
Antwerp, Belgium

The first substantive day of the EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour opened in Antwerp with a dedicated visit to the **Port of Antwerp-Bruges**, one of Europe's most important maritime, industrial, logistics and energy hubs.

The delegation was welcomed at the iconic Port House in Antwerp, designed by Zaha Hadid, before receiving a detailed presentation by Tom Monballiu, Global Partnerships Director, and Kirsten Raeymaekers, Manager MENA, Port of Antwerp-Bruges International. The presentation introduced the port's strategic role, its energy transition roadmap, and its international partnerships, with particular relevance to the GCC and the development of future hydrogen and clean energy corridors.

The session was structured around three main themes: the Port of Antwerp-Bruges as a European port and industrial platform, its energy transition strategy, and the work of Port of Antwerp-Bruges International in supporting port development and partnerships abroad.

A strategic European gateway
The Port of Antwerp-Bruges was presented as a future-proof European maritime, multimodal, industrial, logistics, trade and energy platform. Its location places it at the centre of Europe's major production and consumption hubs, with around 60% of European purchasing power within a 500 km radius.

The merger between Antwerp and Zeebrugge has created "one port with two platforms", combining Antwerp's strengths in deep-sea cargo, containers, chemicals and industrial activity with Zeebrugge's coastal position, short-sea expertise, RoRo activities and important role in energy imports.

The port's central location, strong hinterland connections and proximity to major European markets make it a key gateway between global supply chains and European industrial demand.

3. Monday 18 May 2026

Port scale and industrial relevance
Participants were introduced to the scale and complexity of the Port of Antwerp-Bruges ecosystem. The port handles approximately 267 million tonnes of cargo per year and is one of Europe's leading ports for containers, liquid bulk, RoRo, dry bulk and conventional general cargo.

The presentation highlighted several key figures that demonstrate the port's strategic importance:

- Around 14,322 hectares of port area
- More than 1,400 companies operating in the port ecosystem
- Around 164,000 direct and indirect jobs
- Approximately 20,000 seagoing vessels and 48,000 barges per year
- Around 42,000 loaded cargo trains per year
- Direct maritime connections to more than 1,200 destinations
- Around €20.8 billion in added value

The port is also home to Europe's largest integrated chemical cluster, supported by strong pipeline connectivity, tank storage, product handling and industrial infrastructure. This is particularly relevant to the future hydrogen economy, as many future users of renewable hydrogen, ammonia, methanol and other low-carbon molecules are already located within or connected to the port ecosystem.

Governance and operating model
The governance and operating model of the Port of Antwerp-Bruges was presented as a useful reference point for GCC participants. The port authority operates as a publicly owned company, with Antwerp and Bruges as city shareholders, while functioning with a commercially driven approach.

Its role goes beyond traditional port management. The port authority acts as regulator, operator, landlord and community builder. This enables it to guide long-term infrastructure planning, support investment, coordinate stakeholders and create the conditions needed for industrial transformation.

The presentation also introduced the wider Port of Antwerp-Bruges Group, including activities linked to port investment, international development, rail, pipeline infrastructure, digital platforms and port training.

Multimodal connectivity
Connectivity was presented as one of the port's major competitive strengths. The Port of Antwerp-Bruges connects global maritime flows with the European hinterland through rail, road, inland navigation, short-sea shipping and pipelines.

This multimodal connectivity is central to the port's role as a gateway for future energy carriers. The port's pipeline network, inland waterway access, rail links and maritime connections all support the movement of cargo, fuels and industrial inputs across Europe.

For future hydrogen and renewable molecule trade, this connectivity will be essential. It allows imported molecules and derivatives to be connected not only to local industrial users, but also to wider demand centres in Belgium, Germany and neighbouring markets.

Energy transition and hydrogen readiness
A central theme of the visit was the Port of Antwerp-Bruges' roadmap towards becoming a climate-neutral port by 2050.

The port presented a multi-pillar strategy focused on:
- More efficient use of energy
- Transition to renewable energy
- Capture, transport and storage of CO_2
- Circular feedstocks for industry

The port is positioning itself as a future hub for hydrogen carriers and renewable molecules. This includes the development of infrastructure for ammonia, hydrogen, CO_2, steam and other industrial networks, as well as open-access systems that can support multiple users.

Particular attention was given to the port's future hydrogen and ammonia infrastructure. The presentation highlighted plans for ammonia import terminals, cracking capacity, hydrogen pipelines, ammonia pipelines and connections to wider European demand centres, including Germany. These developments show how ports are preparing to receive, process and distribute renewable molecules at scale.

For the GCC delegation, this discussion was especially relevant. The port highlighted the importance of connecting future supply regions, including the Gulf, with European industrial demand. Oman and Saudi Arabia were referenced in the context of emerging hydrogen cooperation and the need to build reliable, scalable and bankable value chains between producing and consuming regions.

Maritime decarbonisation and new fuels
The visit also addressed the decarbonisation of shipping. As a major maritime and bunkering hub, Antwerp-Bruges is preparing for a multifuel future that includes LNG, biofuels, methanol, ammonia, hydrogen and shore power.

Participants were introduced to practical initiatives within the port authority's own fleet, including hybrid patrol vessels, methanol-powered tugboats, hydrogen tugboats and electric tug developments. These examples showed how the port is testing and applying low-carbon technologies in its own operations while preparing the wider maritime sector for alternative fuels.

This part of the discussion reinforced the message that the future hydrogen economy will involve several carriers and fuels, depending on safety, infrastructure readiness, cost, end-use and regulatory requirements.

Circular economy and CO_2 infrastructure
The presentation also linked hydrogen and renewable molecules to the wider circular economy. The port is developing activities around circular feedstocks, including sustainable biomass, recycled plastics and synthetic renewable raw materials such as hydrogen derivatives.

CO_2 capture, transport and storage was also presented as an important climate lever for the port and its industrial cluster. The development of CO_2 pipeline and export infrastructure is intended to support industrial decarbonisation while allowing hard-to-abate sectors to remain competitive.

This part of the discussion showed that ports will play a central role not only in importing renewable molecules, but also in supporting circular industry, CO_2 infrastructure and low-carbon industrial transformation.

Port of Antwerp-Bruges International and the Port of Duqm
The delegation also received an overview of Port of Antwerp-Bruges International, which supports global port development through advisory services, investment, management support and capacity building.

The Port of Duqm in Oman was presented as a particularly relevant GCC example. Port of Antwerp-Bruges International is involved in the development of the Port of Duqm through a partnership with ASYAD, Oman's state-owned logistics group. The presentation described Duqm as a greenfield seaport and Special Economic Zone with strong potential to become an industrial cluster, energy hub and strategic gateway to regional and global markets.

The Duqm case study was especially relevant to the study tour because of its connection to green hydrogen development, industrial land, common infrastructure, project cargo, export terminals, green bunkering and future clean energy value chains.

The presentation highlighted how port platforms can support sustainable and inclusive development by combining port infrastructure, logistics, industry, regional economic development and energy transition. For GCC participants, the Duqm example demonstrated how port partnerships can contribute to economic diversification, industrial development and future hydrogen export infrastructure.

Guided Port Tour by Bus

Following the presentation and lunch at the Port House, the delegation joined a guided bus tour through the Port of Antwerp area. The tour provided participants with a practical understanding of the port's physical layout, historical development, logistics infrastructure and operational diversity.

The guide introduced the evolution of the port from its earlier city-based operations to the much larger modern port area. Participants learned how the old port, once closely linked to Antwerp's city canals, is now mainly used for recreational purposes, while the contemporary port expanded northwards into a larger industrial and logistics zone.
The tour also highlighted the historical importance of locks and docks in overcoming tidal challenges, with Napoleon's early role in ordering dock and lock construction referenced as a key moment in the port's development.

A central message of the tour was that Antwerp's strength lies in the combination of transshipment, logistics and industry. The delegation saw how cargo handling, warehousing, processing, value-added logistics and industrial operations are physically connected across the port area.

Participants were also introduced to specialised cargo handling activities, including Antwerp's role as a major fruit port and its large-scale banana handling, cold storage and automated refrigerated facilities. The guide also explained the historical concept of "nations" — specialised handling and logistics companies that originally focused on particular commodities and have since evolved into broader logistics and value-added service providers.

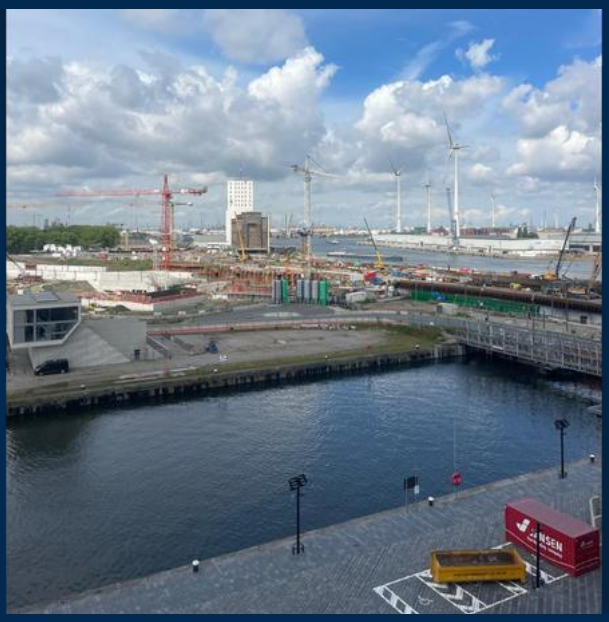
The tour touched on the social and environmental dimensions of port expansion, including the transformation of former farmland and village areas, as well as the port's obligation to maintain part of its area as nature preserve.
Overall, the guided tour helped participants connect the strategic messages presented at the Port House with the realities of port operations on the ground.

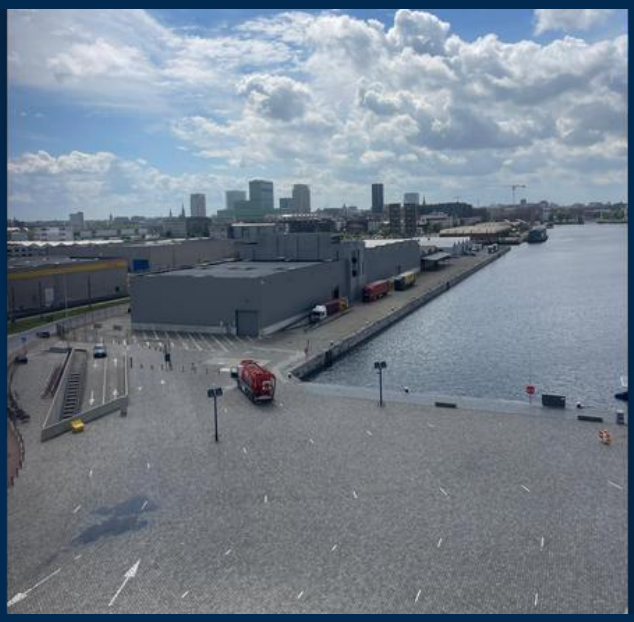
Overall relevance for the EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour

The Port of Antwerp-Bruges visit provided a strong opening to the study tour by showing how a major European port is preparing for the future hydrogen economy.

The session demonstrated that hydrogen cooperation between the EU and GCC will require far more than production capacity. It will depend on port readiness, industrial demand, import terminals, pipelines, cracking capacity, certification, maritime logistics, CO_2 infrastructure, safety standards and long-term partnerships.

For GCC participants, the visit offered a practical example of how European ports are positioning themselves as gateways for renewable molecules and as strategic enablers of clean energy corridors between producing regions and European demand centres.





Key takeaways from the Port of Antwerp-Bruges visit

- Ports are becoming energy transition platforms, not only logistics hubs.
- Antwerp-Bruges is preparing for a future built around hydrogen carriers, renewable molecules, CO_2 infrastructure and circular feedstocks.
- The port's chemical cluster and pipeline connectivity make it highly relevant for future hydrogen and ammonia imports.
- GCC-Europe hydrogen corridors will require infrastructure, certification, offtake, safety standards and long-term coordination.
- The Port of Duqm case study provided a direct GCC link and showed how port partnerships can support industrial development and hydrogen export readiness.

The Port of Antwerp-Bruges Presentation can be downloaded here.

4. Tuesday 19 May 2026

Holland Hydrogen Hub GCC Session
World Hydrogen Summit 2026, Rotterdam

The second day of the study tour continued in Rotterdam with the delegation's participation in a dedicated Holland Hydrogen Hub GCC session at the World Hydrogen Summit 2026.

The session, titled "**Connecting Supply and Demand: Advancing Clean Energy Corridors between the Gulf and Europe**," brought together Dutch government representatives, Gulf policymakers, hydrogen project developers, infrastructure experts and industry stakeholders.

The session examined how clean energy corridors between the Gulf and Europe can move from ambition to practical implementation.

From MoUs to Execution
The session opened with welcome remarks from the Dutch side, highlighting the importance of Netherlands-Gulf cooperation in the emerging hydrogen economy. The Netherlands was positioned as a strategic gateway for future hydrogen and hydrogen-derivative imports into Northwest Europe, supported by its port infrastructure, industrial demand centres and wider connectivity to European markets.

Marcel Kooter, Founding Partner of Holland Hydrogen Hub, framed the session around the need to move from memoranda of understanding and high-level announcements towards execution. He emphasised that clean hydrogen corridors will only become bankable if the full value chain is addressed: production, transport, import infrastructure, certification, financing, offtake and end-use demand.

GCC Supply Ambition
The Gulf speakers presented a clear picture of rapid progress across the region.

From **Saudi Arabia, NEOM Green Hydrogen Company** outlined the development of one of the world's largest integrated green hydrogen and ammonia projects, designed to connect large-scale renewable energy production with global export markets. The discussion highlighted the importance of international standards, export readiness and infrastructure development in creating a hydrogen bridge between Saudi Arabia and global demand centres.

ACWA provided further insight into the scale of hydrogen deployment in Saudi Arabia, including the development of new hydrogen hubs and the financing and structuring required for giga-scale projects.

The **UAE perspective** delivered by the Ministry of Energy of the UAE, focused on integrated future energy systems and cross-sector decarbonisation, including the role of hydrogen and clean electricity clusters in supporting industry, aviation, maritime transport and other hard-to-abate sectors.

Oman's contribution was particularly important within the context of the study tour. **H.E. Salim Al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman**, presented Oman's strategic vision for hydrogen corridors and the country's role as a future supplier of renewable hydrogen and its derivatives.

Hydrom then presented Oman's implementation platform, including project pipeline development, ecosystem building and the integration of international partners.

NoorBridge and Corridor Development
A key technical contribution came through the presentation of NoorBridge, introduced as a corridor-enabling initiative connecting Oman and Europe.

The approach was described as carrier-agnostic, meaning that it does not start by assuming one preferred hydrogen carrier. Instead, it assesses the most practical and bankable options across production, logistics, import infrastructure, certification and end-use.

This approach was highly relevant to the wider study tour theme, as it showed that hydrogen corridors must be designed around practical implementation, not only strategic ambition.

What Will Unlock Bankable Hydrogen Corridors?

The panel discussion focused on the conditions needed to unlock bankable hydrogen corridors between the Gulf and Europe.

Several recurring messages emerged:

- The Gulf region is moving quickly and has the renewable resources, land, industrial ambition and government support needed to develop large-scale hydrogen supply.
- Europe has significant decarbonisation needs, particularly in industry, maritime transport and chemicals, but demand must become more concrete.
- Policy stability and regulatory clarity are essential, especially around certification, import requirements, tariffs, public support mechanisms and long-term offtake structures.
- Hydrogen corridors require coordination across producers, governments, ports, financiers, certification bodies, infrastructure operators and industrial users.

A major point raised during the discussion was the gap between supply ambition and firm demand. Several speakers noted that large hydrogen and ammonia projects require long-term purchase commitments to reach final investment decision and financial close.

The session concluded with a clear message: the next phase of EU-GCC hydrogen cooperation should focus on demand creation, implementation, bankability and corridor development.

Key Takeaways from the H3 GCC Session

- The GCC is developing large-scale hydrogen supply capacity at speed.
- Europe needs to translate policy ambition into bankable demand.
- Long-term offtake remains one of the most important missing pieces.
- Clean energy corridors need practical work on infrastructure, logistics, certification, finance and policy alignment.
- The Netherlands is positioning itself as a system partner and gateway for Gulf hydrogen and derivatives into Northwest Europe.

5. Tuesday 19 May 2026

Port of Rotterdam Technical Visit
Rotterdam, the Netherlands

Following the Holland Hydrogen Hub GCC session, the delegation continued the programme with a technical visit to the Port of Rotterdam.

The visit provided participants with a first-hand view of one of Europe's most important maritime, industrial and energy hubs, with particular attention to its role in enabling hydrogen imports, low-carbon fuels, CO_2 infrastructure, multimodal logistics and future clean energy corridors.

Governance and Long-Term Planning
The guided tour introduced the Port of Rotterdam's governance and operating model. The Port of Rotterdam Authority was described as a publicly owned company, with the City of Rotterdam and the Dutch State as shareholders.

Its mandate combines economic value creation with the safe and secure management of shipping, supported by an integrated Harbour Master's organisation. Participants were briefed on the Port Authority's responsibility for core infrastructure, including quay walls, jetties, dredging, site preparation, road networks and basic port infrastructure.

From City Basins to Maasvlakte
The visit followed the port's westward development from the city-side basins towards Botlek, Europoort and Maasvlakte.

This route allowed participants to understand the historical expansion of the port and the strategic importance of land reclamation in creating new industrial and logistics space.

The tour highlighted how Maasvlakte 1 and Maasvlakte 2 transformed former coastline and sea areas into major port and industrial platforms, supporting deep-sea access, large-scale container handling, energy infrastructure and new industrial developments.

Multimodal Connectivity

A major focus of the visit was Rotterdam's multimodal connectivity.

Participants learned how the port connects sea-going vessels with inland waterways, rail, road and pipelines, enabling cargo and energy products to move into the European hinterland. Deep-water access allows very large vessels to call at Rotterdam, while inland waterways connect the port to the Rhine corridor and onward to Germany, Switzerland and other European markets.

Rail links, including dedicated freight connections to Germany, complement road, barge and pipeline infrastructure, reinforcing Rotterdam's role as a key gateway to Northwest Europe.

Hydrogen, CO_2 and Clean Fuels

Hydrogen was a central theme throughout the visit. The delegation was briefed on existing and planned hydrogen production and infrastructure, including large-scale hydrogen projects, pipeline development and the role of high-voltage electricity infrastructure in supporting future electrolysis and electrification.

The tour also covered sustainable aviation fuel and e-fuel developments, including the potential use of existing fuel distribution infrastructure to supply airports and wider European markets.

Another important part of the visit was the explanation of CO_2 capture, transport and storage infrastructure, including the Porthos project. Participants were briefed on how CO_2 captured from industrial sites can be transported through shared pipeline infrastructure to a compressor station and then stored offshore in depleted North Sea gas fields.

The tour also highlighted Rotterdam's role in preparing for a multifuel future, including ammonia, methanol, ethanol, biofuels and other alternative fuels. This reinforced the idea that future clean energy corridors may involve different carriers and derivatives depending on cost, safety, infrastructure readiness, end-use requirements and certification.

Infrastructure as the Backbone of the Hydrogen Economy

The visit showed that hydrogen development in Rotterdam is not treated as a standalone sector. It is part of a wider energy system involving ports, power networks, industrial users, pipelines, import terminals, CO_2 infrastructure and European demand centres.

Participants also learned about the importance of power infrastructure, offshore wind connections, substations, concession structures, container terminal expansion, underground utilities and long-term planning.

Overall, the Port of Rotterdam visit demonstrated how a major European port is positioning itself for the next phase of the energy transition.

Key Takeaways from Rotterdam

- Rotterdam is positioning itself as a system hub for hydrogen, CO_2 infrastructure, clean fuels, ports, pipelines and industrial demand.
- Clean energy corridors require integrated infrastructure, not only hydrogen production projects.
- Multimodal connectivity is essential to move hydrogen, derivatives and clean fuels into European markets.
- CO_2 infrastructure and hydrogen infrastructure are developing side by side as part of industrial decarbonisation.
- Rotterdam and Antwerp together offered participants a strong practical picture of Europe's future renewable molecule gateway infrastructure.

6. Wednesday 20 May 2026

World Hydrogen Summit & Exhibition and UNIDO Side Meeting
Rotterdam, the Netherlands

The third day of the study tour was dedicated to participation in the World Hydrogen Summit & Exhibition in Rotterdam.

The day provided delegates with the opportunity to explore the international hydrogen ecosystem at their own pace, attend selected conference sessions, visit the trade exhibition, engage with technology providers and project developers, and hold bilateral meetings with relevant stakeholders.

This flexible format allowed participants to tailor the day according to their institutional priorities and technical interests. Delegates were able to follow discussions on hydrogen production, transport, certification, finance, industrial demand, clean fuels, infrastructure and international trade.

The day also complemented the previous programme elements by situating the EU-GCC study tour within the broader global hydrogen dialogue taking place at the Summit.

EU-GCC Green Transition Project Side Meeting with UNIDO
On the sidelines of the World Hydrogen Summit, representatives of the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project held a dedicated meeting with UNIDO to discuss possible synergies between the EU-GCC project and UNIDO's Global Hydrogen Industry Programme.

The discussion opened with an introduction to the EU-GCC Green Transition Project as an EU-funded initiative covering all six GCC countries and focusing not only on hydrogen, but also on wider green transition themes such as energy efficiency, renewable energy and green finance.

UNIDO presented its Global Hydrogen Industry Programme, which works with partner countries across Africa and Asia and focuses on the role of hydrogen in supporting domestic industrial development, rather than viewing hydrogen solely as an export commodity.

This approach was discussed as increasingly important for producer countries seeking to ensure that hydrogen development contributes to wider economic diversification, industrial value creation, skills development and local impact.

Aligning Supply, Demand and Industrial Development

A central theme of the discussion was the challenge of aligning hydrogen supply with demand. UNIDO highlighted the importance of building enabling frameworks around finance, innovation, standards and capacity building.

The meeting also explored how hydrogen can support country-specific industrialisation pathways. Bahrain's future energy options were discussed in light of its gas-dependent energy mix and energy-intensive industries, such as aluminium. Kuwait's hydrogen potential was also discussed, with attention to the financial viability of large-scale hydrogen investment and the need to connect any future hydrogen strategy to broader industrial development.

Low-Emission Ammonia and Fertilisers

Another important topic was the role of low-emission ammonia and fertilisers. The discussion introduced the idea of distributing the green premium across the value chain, helping create demand for low-emission ammonia by linking cleaner fertiliser production to downstream agricultural and food value chains.

This discussion also connected hydrogen to food security, fertiliser security and decentralised production.

Sustainability Guidelines

UNIDO introduced its sustainability guidelines for hydrogen-related projects, based on the principles of People, Planet and Prosperity.

These guidelines are designed to help governments, financial institutions and development banks assess large-scale hydrogen projects not only in terms of technical and financial performance, but also in relation to social value, environmental impact, local development and contribution to economic diversification.

Key Takeaways from the UNIDO Meeting

- Hydrogen should be treated not only as an export opportunity, but as a driver of industrial development.
- GCC hydrogen strategies should be linked to local value creation, skills, industry and diversification.
- Low-emission ammonia and fertilisers offer a practical pathway to build demand and distribute the green premium.
- Sustainability guidelines can help governments and financiers assess project impact more holistically.
- Further dialogue with Bahrain and Kuwait could help explore country-specific hydrogen pathways.

7. Thursday 21 May 2026

European Commission Programme
Brussels, Belgium

The final substantive day of the EU-GCC Hydrogen Study Tour took place in Brussels and focused on the European Union's hydrogen policy framework, market development tools, certification requirements and opportunities for deeper EU-GCC cooperation.

Following the port and industry-focused visits in Antwerp and Rotterdam, the Brussels programme provided participants with a policy-level understanding of how the EU is shaping the future hydrogen market and how international partners, including GCC countries, can engage with the European hydrogen economy.

DG ENER Session: EU Hydrogen Policy and Market Development
The delegation attended a morning session with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy. Participants were introduced to the EU's hydrogen policy priorities and the role of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen in the wider energy transition.

The discussion highlighted hydrogen as an important energy carrier for sectors that are difficult to electrify directly, including heavy industry, chemicals, steel, maritime transport, aviation and long-term energy storage.

The EU side also underlined that hydrogen is linked not only to decarbonisation, but also to energy security, diversification of supply, industrial competitiveness and the development of new global clean energy value chains.

Participants were briefed on the EU's comprehensive hydrogen policy framework, which has developed significantly since the EU Hydrogen Strategy was launched in 2020. The session covered key legislative and policy instruments, including the revised Renewable Energy Directive, rules for Renewable Fuels of Non-Biological Origin, FuelEU Maritime, ReFuelEU Aviation, the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure framework, the Gas and Hydrogen internal market package, and infrastructure planning through Projects of Common Interest and Projects of Mutual Interest.

A major focus of the discussion was the EU's approach to demand creation. Participants learned that EU hydrogen targets and sector-specific rules are intended to create market pull in industry and transport, including maritime and aviation.

The Commission also explained that while domestic EU production remains an important objective, imports will be essential to meet future demand and diversify supply. This was particularly relevant for the GCC delegation, given the region's growing hydrogen and ammonia project pipeline and its potential role as a future supplier to European markets.

EU Hydrogen Mechanism

The EU Hydrogen Mechanism was presented as a practical tool to help accelerate market creation.

The mechanism is a voluntary, web-based platform designed to connect future hydrogen supply and demand, support infrastructure planning, and link projects with potential financial support. The platform covers hydrogen and derivatives such as ammonia, methanol and eSAF, and allows both EU and non-EU suppliers to engage where the offtake is intended for the EU market.

The discussion on the Hydrogen Mechanism was particularly relevant to the study tour's broader theme of clean energy corridors. The platform offers a structured way to identify potential matches between producers, buyers, infrastructure operators and financiers.

For GCC participants, it provided insight into how future hydrogen and derivative exports could be connected to European demand, while also highlighting the importance of project visibility, certification readiness, credible pricing, infrastructure availability and long-term offtake structures.

EU Sustainability Rules and Certification Framework

A substantial part of the DG ENER session was dedicated to EU sustainability rules and the certification framework for renewable hydrogen.

The Commission explained that for hydrogen to count towards EU renewable energy targets, it must meet specific criteria designed to ensure that it is genuinely renewable and delivers effective greenhouse gas emission savings.

Participants were introduced to the core requirements of additionality, temporal correlation and geographical correlation. These requirements are intended to ensure that renewable hydrogen production contributes to additional renewable electricity deployment, takes place when renewable electricity is available, and avoids creating negative impacts on electricity systems.

The certification discussion was highly relevant for non-EU producers. The Commission explained that hydrogen and derivatives imported into the EU must comply with EU sustainability and greenhouse gas calculation rules if they are to be recognised under the EU renewable energy framework.

Certification schemes must be recognised at EU level, and the system relies on traceability, mass balancing, independent auditing and robust protection against fraud. The discussion also clarified that Guarantees of Origin alone are not sufficient for compliance, as the EU system requires detailed sustainability information to flow through the supply chain until final consumption and accounting.

Participants raised questions around regulatory certainty, investor protection and the treatment of early movers. The Commission acknowledged that developers need confidence that investments made under existing rules will not be undermined by future changes.

This discussion was particularly relevant for GCC project developers and policymakers seeking to understand how EU rules may affect project bankability, certification planning and export readiness.

Key Takeaways from the DG ENER Session

- The EU has moved from broad hydrogen ambition to a comprehensive policy and regulatory framework.
- Imports will be essential, but they must meet EU sustainability and certification rules.
- The Hydrogen Mechanism can help connect supply, demand, infrastructure and finance.
- GCC producers need to plan early for RFNBO compliance, certification, traceability and offtake requirements.
- EU-GCC cooperation should continue around certification alignment, port corridors, safety standards, market development and long-term demand creation.

DG ENER's Session Presentation can be downloaded here.

8. Thursday 21 May 2026

MED-GEM, DG MENA and EU-GCC Cooperation Session
European Commission, Brussels

Following the morning session with DG ENER, the delegation continued the European Commission programme with an afternoon session focused on regional cooperation, hydrogen market development, certification, technology, industrial applications and future opportunities for EU-GCC engagement.

The afternoon discussions brought together European Commission representatives, the MED-GEM network, technical experts, industry representatives and GCC participants to explore how hydrogen cooperation can be positioned within wider EU-Gulf, EU-Mediterranean and regional green transition frameworks.

EU-Gulf Cooperation and Regional Context
The session opened with a broader reflection on EU-Gulf relations and the strategic importance of deepening cooperation in the current geopolitical and energy context.

Participants were briefed on the EU's strengthened institutional focus on the MENA region and the Gulf, including dedicated structures to support more coordinated engagement. The discussion highlighted shared priorities between the EU and Gulf partners, including energy security, resilient supply chains, economic diversification, connectivity, regional stability and the clean energy transition.

The study tour itself was presented as a practical example of how policy dialogue, technical exchange and site visits can help align priorities and identify concrete areas for future cooperation.

T-MED, MED-GEM and Regional Hydrogen Cooperation

The discussion situated hydrogen cooperation within the EU's wider regional agenda, including the Pact for the Mediterranean and the T-MED initiative.

These frameworks aim to accelerate renewable energy and clean technology investments, support regulatory convergence, strengthen electricity infrastructure and develop corridors for renewable hydrogen and clean molecules.

A key theme was the potential for triangular cooperation, where the EU and Gulf partners could jointly support transformative projects in North Africa and the wider Middle East.
The MED-GEM network was presented as a practical platform for green hydrogen and clean molecule cooperation in the Southern Mediterranean region. Funded by the European Union and implemented by GIZ, MED-GEM supports green electrons and molecules across nine Southern Mediterranean countries.

Its work is organised around policy and regulation, finance and investment, technology and industry, infrastructure, and awareness raising and capacity building.

Participants were introduced to several MED-GEM activities with potential relevance for the GCC, including a pre-certification pilot based on EU voluntary schemes, a certification and EU regulation helpdesk, CBAM-related support, national roadmap work, infrastructure gap analyses, green energy financing workshops and capacity-building activities.

Siemens Energy: Hydrogen and the Power Sector

A dedicated industry perspective was provided by Siemens Energy, which presented the role of hydrogen in the power sector.

The presentation introduced Siemens Energy's global energy technology portfolio, including gas turbines, grids, industrial electrification, offshore wind and electrolyser-related solutions.

The company explained that decarbonising power generation will require a combination of efficiency improvements, fuel switching, carbon capture and the gradual use of hydrogen in gas turbines.

The Siemens Energy presentation highlighted the potential of hydrogen combustion in gas turbines to provide low-carbon or carbon-free dispatchable power, particularly as renewable electricity shares increase and power systems require flexibility.

For GCC participants, this discussion was particularly relevant because several GCC countries are considering how hydrogen may fit into future power systems, industrial clusters and energy export strategies.

The discussion showed that hydrogen in the power sector may be most relevant where it supports grid flexibility, residual load, energy storage or decarbonisation of existing gas-fired assets.

Hinicio: RFNBO Pre-Certification Pilot

The session then moved to hydrogen certification, with Hinicio presenting the results of a MED-GEM green hydrogen pre-certification pilot.

The presentation explained why certification is essential for distinguishing renewable or low-carbon hydrogen from conventional hydrogen and for allowing clean molecules to access premium markets, voluntary targets and mandatory EU compliance schemes.
The Hinicio presentation focused on an RFNBO pre-certification pilot for a green ammonia project in Morocco, designed to assess readiness for compliance with EU renewable hydrogen requirements.

The project case involved the production of renewable hydrogen and ammonia using renewable electricity, seawater desalination, electrolysis, air separation, ammonia synthesis, storage and shipping to Europe, followed by cracking back into hydrogen for end use.

The pre-certification methodology assessed the project against core RFNBO requirements, including renewability of energy inputs, lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions reduction, traceability, mass balancing, data management and certification readiness.

One important lesson from the Morocco pilot was that emissions do not only arise at the production site. The carbon footprint of shipping, storage, cracking, compression and downstream transport must also be considered.

This point was particularly relevant to the GCC, where future hydrogen exports to Europe are likely to involve long-distance transport by ship and the use of carriers such as ammonia, methanol or liquid hydrogen.

Research, Innovation and Skills

Research and innovation cooperation was another important theme.

The session introduced the EU's hydrogen research and innovation ecosystem, including the Clean Hydrogen Joint Undertaking, Horizon Europe, Hydrogen Valleys and Mission Innovation.

Participants were informed that EU programmes support research, demonstration and deployment across hydrogen production, storage, distribution, end uses, safety, skills and cross-cutting innovation.

The GCC side expressed interest in increasing participation in EU research and innovation opportunities. The discussion proposed future coordination through DG MENA, targeted sector engagement and possible research-focused roadshows to help institutions and companies from the Gulf identify concrete project ideas and build consortia with European partners.

Key Takeaways from the Afternoon Session

- MED-GEM can serve as a practical bridge between EU-GCC and wider EU-MENA hydrogen cooperation.
- Certification readiness is essential for any GCC hydrogen or ammonia project targeting the EU market.
- The Morocco pre-certification pilot is a useful reference case for GCC countries planning RFNBO-compliant export projects.
- Hydrogen in the power sector is technically advancing, but commercial viability depends on hydrogen availability, cost and infrastructure.
- Future cooperation should include research, skills, certification, infrastructure and industrial value creation, not only hydrogen exports.

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MED-GEM Pre-Certification Pilot Results Session Presentation can be downloaded here.
MED-GEM Presentation and white paper can be downloaded here.
GCC Siemens Presentation Session can be downloaded here.

9. Bilateral Focus

EU–Oman Hydrogen Cooperation

On the margins of the European Commission programme, a bilateral follow-up discussion was held with representatives of the Sultanate of Oman to explore concrete areas for EU–Oman cooperation on hydrogen and the wider green transition.

The meeting built on the study tour's earlier discussions on hydrogen corridors, port infrastructure, certification and EU market access, while focusing specifically on Oman's role as an emerging renewable hydrogen producer and potential strategic partner for Europe.

The EU side recognised Oman's substantial investment in renewable energy and hydrogen development, as well as its constructive engagement in international climate discussions. It was noted that while the European Commission cannot guarantee public-sector offtake for hydrogen, it can support cooperation through regulatory dialogue, technical exchanges, seminars, market development tools and connections with relevant European stakeholders.

The Omani side provided an update on the country's hydrogen ambitions and project pipeline. One project is already under construction and targeting European markets, while several additional projects are active but remain at pre-final investment decision stage.

A key issue raised during the meeting was regulatory predictability. Omani stakeholders noted that investors and developers require clarity and consistency on EU standards, certification rules and treatment of early movers.

The discussion also explored Oman's sectoral transition plans, particularly in relation to green steel. Oman is developing sector-level approaches to create local hydrogen demand, beginning with steel and gradually increasing the share of green inputs over time.

Another important theme was the development of a potential liquid hydrogen corridor from Oman to Europe. The discussion referred to ongoing cooperation involving Oman, the Netherlands and Germany, including production in Oman, receiving infrastructure at the Port of Rotterdam and onward delivery to Northwest Germany.

Participants noted that while corridor planning is progressing, several challenges remain, including regulatory frameworks for transporting liquid hydrogen through European inland waterways, safety standards, last-mile logistics and the economic gap between early hydrogen supply chains and conventional fuels.

The meeting also reviewed opportunities for Omani participation in EU research and innovation frameworks, including Horizon Europe, the Clean Hydrogen Joint Undertaking and Mission Innovation.

Overall, the bilateral discussion demonstrated Oman's strong interest in moving from strategic ambition to practical cooperation with the EU. It also reinforced several cross-cutting messages from the study tour: the importance of certification readiness, regulatory certainty, long-term offtake, port and transport infrastructure, industrial demand creation and targeted technical cooperation.

10. Cross-Cutting Themes and Overall Takeaways

Across the study tour, several cross-cutting messages emerged.

1. **Ports are central to the future hydrogen economy**
The visits to Antwerp-Bruges and Rotterdam showed that ports are no longer only logistics hubs. They are becoming energy transition platforms that connect production, import terminals, storage, pipelines, industrial users, clean fuels and CO_2 infrastructure.
For GCC hydrogen exporters, European port readiness will be essential to future market access.

2. Clean energy corridors must be bankable
The study tour repeatedly highlighted that hydrogen corridors require more than production capacity. They need long-term offtake, financing, certification, logistics, infrastructure, regulatory alignment and credible demand.

Without bankable demand and clear risk allocation, large-scale projects may face delays even where supply potential is strong.

3. Certification readiness is essential
EU sustainability rules and RFNBO certification requirements will shape access to the EU renewable hydrogen market.

GCC countries and project developers will need to plan early for traceability, lifecycle emissions accounting, mass balancing, data systems, renewable electricity sourcing and independent verification.

4. Demand creation is the missing link
Several discussions highlighted the gap between supply ambition and firm demand. The Gulf is moving quickly on hydrogen production and derivatives, while Europe is still developing the market mechanisms and industrial demand needed to support long-term offtake.

Tools such as the EU Hydrogen Mechanism can help connect supply and demand, but deeper market-building efforts will be needed.

5. Green hydrogen should support industrial transformation
The UNIDO discussion and the Oman bilateral meeting reinforced that hydrogen should not be viewed only as an export commodity. It can also support domestic industrial development, green steel, fertilisers, power system flexibility, skills development and wider economic diversification.

6. EU-GCC cooperation should move from dialogue to implementation
The tour created a strong foundation for continued cooperation. The next phase should focus on practical follow-up, including technical sessions, certification exchange, corridor planning, research cooperation, port partnerships and targeted seminars in the GCC.

11. Possible Follow-Up Areas

The study tour identified several possible areas for continued EU-GCC cooperation:

Hydrogen Certification and EU Market Access

- Organise technical sessions on RFNBO compliance and EU sustainability rules.
- Share lessons from the MED-GEM Morocco pre-certification pilot.
- Support GCC stakeholders in understanding data, traceability, lifecycle emissions and certification requirements.

Clean Energy Corridors and Port Cooperation

- Continue dialogue with European ports on hydrogen, ammonia, methanol and liquid hydrogen corridors.
- Explore GCC-Europe corridor models involving production, shipping, import terminals, cracking, storage and inland transport.
- Support engagement between GCC entities and port/infrastructure operators in Europe.

Demand, Offtake and Finance

- Explore how GCC projects can engage with the EU Hydrogen Mechanism.
- Support dialogue between GCC producers, European offtakers, financiers and infrastructure operators.
- Discuss mechanisms to support early movers and bridge the cost gap during market ramp-up.

Research, Innovation and Skills

- Facilitate GCC participation in EU research and innovation opportunities, including Horizon Europe and the Clean Hydrogen Joint Undertaking.
- Encourage nomination of national contact points or focal points for hydrogen R&I.
- Develop targeted workshops or roadshows for GCC research institutions and companies.

Industrial Development and Local Value Creation

- Explore hydrogen use in green steel, fertilisers, power generation, industrial clusters and clean fuels.
- Link hydrogen strategies to economic diversification and domestic industrial development.
- Support knowledge exchange on hydrogen valleys, local demand creation and skills development.

Future EU-GCC Activities

- Organise follow-up seminars in the GCC on hydrogen regulation, certification, infrastructure and finance.
- Use upcoming EU-GCC platforms and summits to showcase practical cooperation progress.
- Continue collaboration with MED-GEM, UNIDO and relevant European partners.

12. Delegation and Participants

The study tour brought together representatives from GCC ministries, authorities, research institutions and energy-related entities, together with the EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project team and MED-GEM representation.

Full Name	Title / Position	Organisation / Ministry / Company	Country / Nationality
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Majid Hamed Rashid Alhousni	Director of Follow-up and Evaluation of Oil and Gas Sectors	Ministry of Finance	Oman
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Muhannad Alkhattab Al Hinai	Director of Hydrogen Policies and Strategies	Ministry of Energy and Minerals	Oman
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Franciscus Petrus Hendrikus Wouters	Director	MED-GEM Network	Dutch

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Their collective efforts, hospitality and expertise were instrumental in creating a rich and meaningful programme that connected policy, infrastructure, industry, certification and cooperation perspectives. The study tour would not have been possible without their support and commitment.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

THE EU-GCC COOPERATION ON GREEN TRANSITION PROJECT

Launched in August 2023, this project funded by the European Union marks a significant milestone in the long partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). By addressing critical global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development, the project builds upon the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement Document signed in 1989. The Joint Action Programme for 2022-2027 endorsed in February 2022 outlines the strategic framework for cooperation, emphasizing the need to join forces in addressing climate change and make progress on green transition. This project reflects the shared commitment to leveraging EU expertise to deepen cooperation and engagement, promote green policies and technologies, and create a conducive business environment for collaboration among energy- related and green tech companies in the Gulf.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The project aims to strengthen political and technical relationships at regional and bilateral levels by:

- Deepening engagement towards green transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Promoting the uptake of green transition policies and technologies by the GCC countries.
- Facilitating a conducive business environment between EU and GCC green tech companies in the Gulf region.

IMPACT

- Enhanced knowledge exchange on climate action and green transition.
- Raised awareness on climate change, sustainable practices and circular economy.
- Strengthened network for collaboration in green solutions and energy transition.
- Proactive EU Climate Diplomacy in the region.

STAKEHOLDERS

- State and non-state institutions, business community, & environmental NGOs.
- Researchers, academia, youth groups, & media outlets.
- EU and GCC businesses, particularly SMEs.
- EU Member States present in the GCC.

FOCUS AREAS

GREEN TRANSITION
Promote transformative change for green transition policies & practices within the GCC.

NET ZERO CARBON
Implement solutions for reducing carbon emissions in industrial & public sectors.

HYDROGEN MARKET
Support the development of a renewable hydrogen market in the Gulf region.

CLEAN-TECH SOLUTIONS
Foster innovations in renewable energy technologies & clean-tech industries.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION
Strengthen resilience & adaptive capacities to climate-related hazards.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Launch initiatives to preserve biodiversity & natural habitats, including marine protection.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY
Encourage the adoption of sustainable waste management & resource efficiency.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCE
Engage financial institutions in channelling investment & finance in support of green transition.

Funded by the European Union

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