

THE EU-GCC DIALOGUE ON  
ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION



Funded by  
the European Union

Co-hosted by:

وزارة التجارة والصناعة  
Ministry of Commerce and Industry  
دولة قطر • State of Qatar



8<sup>TH</sup> 2024  
EU  
GCC  
QATAR  
BUSINESS  
FORUM

# Strengthening EU-GCC Connectivity for a Sustainable Future

8TH EU-GCC BUSINESS FORUM  
SUMMARY REPORT  
NOVEMBER 2024

A project implemented by  
GFA Consulting Group GmbH  
Centre for European Policy Studies  
DMI Associates



## Project Background

The EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification project initiated its activities in April 2018. Its overall objective is to contribute to a stronger EU-GCC relationship by supporting the GCC countries' ongoing process of economic diversification, away from hydrocarbon-dependent sectors as well as by identifying new business opportunities to utilise and barriers to overcome in bilateral trade and investment relations. The project seeks to consolidate the EU's position as a partner of choice for the GCC countries for cooperation on economic diversification strategies, macroeconomic stability, trade and investment, and research and innovation.

The specific objective of the project is to promote climate-friendly trade, investment, and economic affairs-related policy analysis, dialogue, and cooperation between stakeholders from the EU and the GCC at both regional and country levels in the context of the GCC economic diversification process. Furthermore, the project addresses a number of key issues to support and enhance trade and investment links between the EU and GCC member countries. The promotion of GCC Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and networking with their European counterparts is a particular focus for project activities as is encouraging and supporting the participation of women business stakeholders from both the EU and GCC across all project activities.

The 8th EU-GCC Business Forum was held as the flagship event of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification. It worked towards the fulfilment of the project's objectives by both facilitating dialogues on policy issues of relevance to economic diversification and by facilitating public-to-private and private-to-private sector networking opportunities and information exchange.

## Executive Summary

The 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, themed "**Strengthening EU-GCC Connectivity for a Sustainable Future**," convened on **28 November 2024** at the Four Seasons Hotel in Doha, Qatar. Organised in collaboration with **Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, the Forum brought together policymakers, industry experts, and business leaders to enhance economic relations between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Established as part of the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification project, the EU-GCC Business Forum has been instrumental since 2018 in supporting the GCC's shift towards diversified, non-hydrocarbon-based economies, promoting sustainable growth and identifying new opportunities in bilateral trade and investment.

The event provided a platform for exploring the intersections of innovation, sustainability, and connectivity across key EU and GCC sectors. Each panel illuminated existing and possible collaboration dimensions, highlighting the transformative potential of shared expertise and aligned strategies. Together, these discussions painted a picture of a future shaped by cutting-edge technology, sustainable practices, and deeper regional integration.

The opening panel on transport and logistics emphasised the GCC's strategic advantage as a global trade hub, showcasing advancements like Qatar's Hamad Port and the potential of integrating IoT, automation, and AI to drive efficiency and sustainability. Addressing workforce challenges, including gender inclusivity and upskilling, emerged as crucial to realising the full potential of these technologies.

These themes connected to the second panel focusing on the green transition, where the GCC's dual expertise in renewable and traditional energy sources positioned it as a pivotal partner for the EU. Based on EU experience and best practices, the panel explored harmonising regulatory frameworks in aviation and hydrogen while promoting human capital investments to scale green technologies.

The third panel on tourism and cultural exchange provided a lens through which modernity and heritage preservation intersect, emphasising the role of technology in enhancing accessibility while maintaining cultural authenticity. The sector's human-centric nature was lauded for its capacity to drive inclusivity and gender equality, with a focus on the important role of entrepreneurship. Discussions also revealed practical approaches and solutions, such as a unified GCC visa, to deepen regional tourism integration and enhance cross-border connectivity.

The rapid digital transformation in the GCC took centre stage in the fourth panel on ICT and AI. Programs like Qatar's Digital Academy underscored the region's commitment to fostering digital literacy and workforce readiness. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) were presented as critical drivers of infrastructure development. Examples discussed for accelerating digitalisation were Estonia's digital ecosystem and Qatar's TASMU Accelerator, providing roadmaps for success. However, cybersecurity and data sharing emerged as challenges requiring harmonised regulatory frameworks and ethical safeguards.

This theme was carried forward into the fifth panel, which focused on business opportunities in healthcare, where personalised medicine, driven by AI and genomic data, was deliberated. Furthermore, it was discussed how the GCC had demonstrated agility during COVID-19, particularly in adapting emergency plans and scaling digital services. Moreover, medical tourism was identified as a significant growth area, leveraging world-class facilities and the GCC's strategic location.

A common thread emerged through these discussions: the EU's regulatory expertise and the GCC's implementation agility create a powerful synergy. Public-private partnerships, capacity building, and harmonising policies are essential to unlocking the full potential at the intersections of both regions. Together, these efforts chart a path toward a sustainable, inclusive, and interconnected future, reflecting the shared aspirations of the EU and GCC.

This year's event, attended by over 230 guests with contributions from 28 distinguished speakers, was the first to be hosted in Qatar, following previous Forums in the other GCC countries, including Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Kuwait. Two editions was also held in Brussels, Belgium.



# Key Metrics



Thursday, 28 NOVEMBER 2024



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL  
DOHA

4

OPENING SPEECHES



5

PANEL DISCUSSIONS



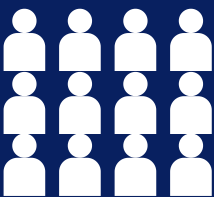
28

SPEAKERS



230

PARTICIPANTS





**H.E. Dr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sayed**  
Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs



**H.E. Mr Hamad Almulla**  
Head of Negotiations and Strategic Dialogue Affairs Division, Gulf Cooperation Council General Secretariat



**H.E. Mr Luigi Di Maio**  
EU Special Representative for the Gulf



**H.E. Dr. Cristian Tudor**  
Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Qatar



**Dr. Muhammad Mustafa**  
Regional Director – Mobility & Planning Middle East & South Asia, Egis Group



**Mr Jean-Baptiste Djebbari**  
Former Minister for Transport in France, Managing Partner at Magellim Infrastructure



**Ms Sue Donoghue**  
CEO, DHL Global Forwarding Saudi Arabia



**Mr Manuel Heredia Ortiz**  
CEO, Crisalion Mobility



**Mr Abdulaziz Nasser Alyafe**  
Executive Vice President, Mwani Qatar



**Dr. Raha Hakimdavar**  
Professor and Senior Advisor to the Deans of Georgetown University in Qatar and the Earth Commons Institute, Georgetown University



**Mr Spyros Kouvelis**  
Team Leader, EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project



**Mr Ville Skinnari**  
Member of the Finnish Parliament, Chairman of GCC parliamentary friendship group and former Minister of Trade of the Republic of Finland



**Mr Alexandros Kosmas**  
Head of International Cooperation, Airbus Middle East & Africa



**Eng Yaqub Almatouq**  
Acting Director of Air Monitoring Department, Head of Climate Change Negotiations Team, Kuwait Environment Public Authority



**Dr. Sheikha Al-Anoud Al-Sabah**  
Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Islamic Monuments at Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL)



**Sheikha Hessa Jassim Al-Thani**  
Head of Marketing Planning Section, Qatar Tourism



**Ms Yulia Stark**  
President, European Women's Association



**Mr Damien Rizzi**  
Regional Director – Advisory, Egis Group



**Mr Fahad Ali Al Kuwari**  
Sr Manager of Investor Relations, Invest Qatar



**Mr Elkhair Balla**  
Sr Executive – Investor Relations, Invest Qatar



**Ms Eman Al-Kuwari**  
Director of Digital Innovation, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Qatar



**Mr Mikko Lavanti**  
Senior Vice President, Nokia Mobile Networks Market for the Middle East and Africa



**Ms Erika Piirmets**  
Business Development Director, Digital Nation



**Dr. Wadha A. Al-Muftah**  
Senior Director, Genome Program, Qatar Precision Health Institute (Member of Qatar Foundation)



**Mr Jaffar Bin Jaffar**  
Director - Sales & Leasing Operations, Dubai Healthcare City Authority



**Dr Verdiana Morando**  
General Manager GKSD Healthcare Saudi Arabia, MENA Chief Operating Officer GKSD Healthcare



**Mr Emil Syundyukov**  
CEO and Co-founder, Longensis

## Event Highlights

### OPENING CEREMONY



#### Opening Remarks by H.E. Dr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade Affairs

H.E. Dr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Sayed welcomed participants to Qatar for the 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, emphasizing its significance as a platform for dialogue to strengthen economic, commercial, and investment cooperation between the GCC and the EU. He highlighted the event's alignment with the outcomes of the recent first EU-GCC Summit, which called for advancing strategic trade and investment partnerships, leveraging opportunities in digital and green transformations, and driving sectoral cooperation to achieve economic diversification and resilience.

Dr. Al Sayed underscored the robust economic ties between the EU and the GCC, noting that the EU is the GCC's second-largest trading partner, with trade volume rising by 69% to over \$196 billion in 2023. He reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to expediting negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement to enhance mutual investments and deepen cooperation.

He spotlighted Qatar's investments in technological infrastructure and its alignment with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, emphasizing how these advancements fostered economic diversification. The forum was positioned as a pivotal opportunity to explore new avenues for collaboration in emerging sectors like advanced technology, digital innovation, and renewable energy.

Dr. Al Sayed detailed Qatar's progress under its National Vision 2030, highlighting its transition towards a sustainable digital economy. He also referenced the expansion of the North Field project, which will increase Qatar's liquefied natural gas production by 85%, reinforcing its role in securing reliable clean energy supplies globally.

Closing his remarks, Dr. Al Sayed reaffirmed Qatar's deep-rooted relations with EU countries, grounded in constructive cooperation across various sectors. He expressed confidence that the forum's discussions would deepen economic and commercial partnerships, advancing shared goals between the two regions.



## Event Highlights

### OPENING CEREMONY



#### Opening Remarks by Mr. Luigi Di Maio, European Union Special Representative for the Gulf Region

H.E. Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf, inaugurated the 8th EU-GCC Business Forum by welcoming distinguished guests, dignitaries, and business leaders. He framed the forum as a pivotal moment in advancing the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), building on the outcomes of the historic EU-GCC Summit held in Brussels the previous month.

Highlighting the summit as a landmark in EU-GCC relations, H.E. Di Maio emphasized its theme, "Partnership for Peace and Prosperity," as a testament to the mutual commitment to addressing global challenges and fostering political, security, and economic collaboration. He underscored the strategic importance of connectivity, sustainability, and economic diversification as core principles driving the partnership.

The forum was presented as one of the initial steps toward operationalizing the commitments made at the summit, with H.E. Di Maio citing the impressive €170 billion in EU-GCC trade in 2023 and €216 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) from the EU to the GCC. These figures, he noted, underscore the depth of the economic ties and the vast potential for further collaboration.

He outlined the forum's focus on five critical sectors: green innovation, digital transformation, healthcare, transport, and tourism. Each of these sectors represents key opportunities for collaboration to build resilient, sustainable economies, enhance cross-border connectivity, integrate healthcare systems, and promote cultural and tourism exchanges.

H.E. Di Maio concluded by emphasizing the forum's role in fostering dialogue, supporting innovation, and strengthening bonds between entrepreneurs, investors, and businesses from the EU and GCC. He expressed confidence that the discussions would lead to actionable outcomes, further powering the EU-GCC strategic partnership and driving sustainable growth across both regions.

## Event Highlights

### OPENING CEREMONY

#### Opening Remarks by H.E. Mr Hamad Almulla, Head of Negotiations and Strategic Dialogue Affairs Division, Gulf Cooperation Council General Secretariat

H.E. Hamad Almulla delivered an opening speech at the 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, emphasizing the importance of this event as a platform to strengthen the economic partnership between the EU and GCC. He extended his gratitude to H.E. Dr. Ahmad bin Mohammed Al-Sayed, Minister of State for Foreign Trade, for hosting the forum, and acknowledged the efforts of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Qatar, as well as the contributions of H.E. Mr. Luigi Di Maio and H.E. Mr. Cristian Tudor in facilitating the event.

H.E. Almulla outlined the strategic importance of EU-GCC collaboration amidst global economic challenges, noting that both regions are committed to adopting innovative solutions to achieve sustainable growth and diversification. He highlighted the GCC's ambitious strategies to diversify income sources through investments in renewable energy, technology, artificial intelligence, and financial services.

Economic data demonstrated the strength of the EU-GCC partnership, with bilateral trade reaching \$204 billion in 2022, alongside \$233 billion in EU foreign direct investment in the GCC and \$177 billion in GCC investments in the EU. These figures underscore the growing economic interdependence between the regions.



He referred to the EU-GCC Joint Statement from the October 2024 Brussels Summit, emphasizing its focus on trade, innovation, sustainability, and human capital development under the Joint Action Programme (2022-2027). This framework reflects both sides' commitment to achieving mutual goals through collaboration in areas such as climate change, digital transformation, and energy transition.

H.E. Almulla also emphasized the strategic importance of aligning EU-GCC visions to foster opportunities in sectors like transportation, logistics, ICT, artificial intelligence, healthcare, and tourism. He expressed confidence that continued cooperation would bring shared prosperity to both regions, setting a global example of partnership-driven sustainable development.

In closing, he thanked all organizers and participants, expressing hope that the forum would serve as a constructive platform for advancing EU-GCC ties and achieving long-term shared objectives.

## Welcome remarks by H.E. Dr. Cristian Tudor, Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Qatar

H.E. Cristian Tudor, Ambassador of the European Union to the State of Qatar, warmly welcomed attendees to the 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, extending gratitude to Qatar's Ministry of Commerce and Industry for their valuable partnership in hosting the event. He highlighted the forum's significance, particularly as it was hosted in Qatar, a nation lauded for its visionary economic diversification efforts and leadership in sustainable growth within the Gulf region.

H.E. Tudor underscored the robust and growing relationship between the EU and Qatar. In 2023, bilateral trade reached €21 billion, with the EU standing as Qatar's second-largest trading partner and leading source of imports, accounting for 29% of Qatar's total imports. The Ambassador also noted the significant contributions of EU companies in Qatar's economic diversification journey, particularly in sectors like technology, renewable energy, and tourism. The forum's agenda was outlined as a platform for exploring critical themes such as renewable energy, digital health innovation, infrastructure development, and cultural connectivity. He emphasized the alignment between Qatar's sustainability efforts and the EU's Green Deal, showcasing shared ambitions to reduce carbon emissions and promote environmentally responsible policies.



Digital transformation was highlighted as another key area of collaboration, with both regions recognizing the potential of advancing technologies to revolutionize healthcare, trade, and logistics. H.E. Tudor praised the role of innovation in enhancing connectivity, security, and accessibility for both regions.

Tourism and cultural exchange were also spotlighted as vital collaboration areas, with Qatar's success as a dynamic tourist destination—exemplified by hosting events like the Formula 1 Grand Prix—demonstrating its ability to attract international visitors, drive economic diversification, and strengthen cultural ties.

H.E. Tudor concluded by affirming the strength of the EU-Qatar relationship and the broader EU-GCC partnership, expressing confidence that the forum's discussions would spark new opportunities, partnerships, and innovative solutions, driving mutual prosperity for both regions.



## Panel Discussions

### Session 1: Driving Growth: Innovations in Transport & Logistics

Panellists:

- **Ms Sue Donoghue**, CEO, DHL Global Forwarding Saudi Arabia
- **Mr Jean-Baptiste Djebbari**, Former Minister for Transport in France, Managing Partner at Magellim Infrastructure
- **Mr Manuel Heredia Ortiz**, CEO, Crisalion Mobility
- **Mr Abdulaziz Nasser Alyafe**, Executive Vice President, Mwani Qatar

Moderator: **Dr. Muhammad Mustafa**, Regional Director – Mobility & Planning Middle East & South Asia, Egis Group



### KEY MESSAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The first session of the 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, moderated by Dr. Muhammad Mustafa, Regional Director – Mobility & Planning Middle East & South Asia at Egis Group, brought together a distinguished panel to explore the transformative role of technology, innovation, and sustainability in transport and logistics. Here are the key takeaways:

**Impactful Innovations in Transport and Logistics**

- Mr. Abdulaziz Nasser Alyafe, Executive Vice President at Mwani Qatar, highlighted the role of technologies like IoT, automation, and digitalization in revolutionizing supply chains, enabling better tracking and tracing, and enhancing operational efficiency. He emphasized the adoption of smart technologies at Hamad Port, which has become a key driver of Qatar's connectivity and trade growth.
- Mr. Jean-Baptiste Djebbari, Former French Minister of Transport and Managing Partner at Magellim Infrastructure, discussed the evolution of regulations and policies in response to global challenges such as supply chain disruptions and geopolitical fragmentation. He underscored the importance of long-term industrial planning to drive impactful changes in the transport sector, citing hydrogen-powered systems and blockchain as transformative innovations.
- Ms. Sue Donoghue, CEO of DHL Global Forwarding Saudi Arabia, shared examples of DHL's integration of greener technologies, such as EV fleets and solar-powered warehouses, to reduce carbon emissions and optimize logistics operations. She also highlighted the challenges of scaling green technologies in the GCC due to environmental factors and infrastructure gaps.

- Mr. Manuel Heredia Ortiz, CEO of Crisalion Mobility, emphasized the need for ecosystem-based approaches to implement transformative technologies like flying cars and self-driving vehicles. He outlined the importance of maturing technology, gaining public acceptance, and securing regulatory trust to unlock the potential of innovative mobility solutions.

### Challenges and Opportunities in Sustainable Logistics

- Green Logistics Solutions: Ms. Donoghue elaborated on DHL's use of eco-friendly packaging, AI-driven route optimization, and real-time tracking to reduce unnecessary trips and minimize environmental impacts. She highlighted partnerships with local governments and technology providers as essential for advancing green logistics infrastructure.
- Collaboration as a Driver: Panelists emphasized that partnerships between governments, private entities, and technology providers are critical to overcoming regulatory and operational challenges. Mr. Alyafe highlighted the need for harmonized international regulations to streamline operations and drive global trade efficiency.

### Advancements in Transportation Infrastructure

- Qatar's Strategic Role: Mr. Alyafe showcased Hamad Port as a vital hub for trade connectivity, supporting over 7 million tons of cargo annually and directly connecting to Europe with multiple weekly shipping lines. The port's state-of-the-art technology underpins its role in Qatar's economic diversification strategy.

### Advanced Mobility Technologies

- Emerging Innovations: Mr. Heredia Ortiz discussed groundbreaking technologies such as hybrids between helicopters and planes, which offer low-cost, emission-free urban mobility solutions. He also outlined the transformative potential of satellite connectivity in enabling real-time logistics operations and deeper EU-GCC collaboration in space programs.
- Drone Technology: Ms. Donoghue addressed the potential of drones in last-mile delivery, citing their ability to reduce trips and increase efficiency. However, she noted that regulatory barriers remain a challenge for wider implementation.

### Skilled Labor Development

- Talent Strategies: Ms. Donoghue highlighted DHL's initiatives, such as partnerships with universities, mentorship programs, and leadership development efforts, to attract and retain skilled talent in logistics. She also stressed the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion, particularly through increasing women's participation in the sector.
- Future Talent Needs: Mr. Heredia Ortiz emphasized the need for long-term planning to address gaps in skilled labor, particularly in emerging fields like autonomous systems and aviation, which will create high-value local jobs.

### Energy Transition and Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Sustainable Investments: Panelists discussed the integration of logistics with the energy transition, with Ms. Donoghue highlighting partnerships in hydrogen technologies and CO2 optimization to achieve carbon neutrality.
- Cross-Sector Synergies: Mr. Djebbari stressed the importance of aligning logistics infrastructure development with renewable energy initiatives, noting that cross-sector collaborations are critical to achieving commercially viable and sustainable solutions.





## Session 2: Building a Green Future: New Approaches for a Sustainable Economy

Panellists:

- **Mr Spyros Kouvelis**, Team Leader, EU-GCC Cooperation on Green Transition Project
- **Mr Ville Skinnari**, Former Minister of Trade and Development 2019-2023, Member of Parliament, Finland
- **Mr Alexandros Kosmas**, Head of International Cooperation, Airbus Middle East & Africa
- **Eng Yaquob Almatouq**, Acting Director of Air Monitoring Department, Head of Climate Change Negotiations Team, Kuwait Environment Public Authority

Moderator: **Dr Raha Hakimdavar**, Professor and Senior Advisor to the Deans of Georgetown University in Qatar and the Earth Commons Institute, Georgetown University



### KEY MESSAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

#### Green Transition and Technology Collaboration

- Spyros Kouvelis highlighted the GCC's pivotal role in the global green transition due to its expertise in energy management and infrastructure for renewable energy like solar, hydrogen, and wind. He emphasized the importance of collaboration to scale up initiatives, such as Oman's ambitious \$120 billion hydrogen strategy, to become a global leader in green hydrogen production.
- Ville Skinnari stressed the need for pragmatic, cross-sector collaboration to drive green innovation and ensure effective implementation. He pointed out that EU-GCC cooperation must evolve beyond agreements to include trust-building, regulation alignment, and shared investment in renewable energy.
- Alexandros Kosmas shared Airbus' perspective on achieving net-zero aviation, emphasizing investments in fleet renewal, next-generation technologies, and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). He underlined that partnerships between the EU and GCC are vital for enabling greener aviation ecosystems.
- Eng. Yaquob Almatouq from Kuwait's Environment Public Authority called for moving from competition to "completion" between the GCC and EU to share knowledge and resources. He stressed the GCC's adaptability in addressing climate challenges and its increasing focus on renewable energy.

**Comparative Regulatory Landscapes and Global Standards**

- Misaligned regulations between regions pose a significant challenge, particularly in aviation and hydrogen markets. Kosmas highlighted the need for a global system to regulate sustainable fuels and carbon markets to enable seamless cross-border trade and operations.
- Skinnari noted that the EU's robust regulatory frameworks provide transparency and predictability, making it an ideal model for collaboration with the GCC.

**Human Capital Development**

- Kouvelis stressed the socio-economic challenges of transitioning from traditional fossil fuel economies to renewable energy systems. He advocated for investments in education and skill-building to prepare GCC citizens for emerging green industries.
- Almatouq emphasized the need for GCC education systems to adapt to new technological demands, with a focus on fostering entrepreneurial mindsets and resilience.

**Sustainable Investment and Incentives**

- Financial incentives, such as subsidies for first movers, were deemed crucial for scaling green technologies. Examples discussed included:
  - \$2.9 billion raised for solar energy projects in Saudi Arabia.
  - Oman's integrated hydrogen production and storage strategy.
- Kosmas highlighted the GCC's rapid adaptability and access to capital as unique advantages in driving green innovation.

**Role of Innovation and Startups**

- Startups were recognized as pivotal drivers of innovation, with Skinnari sharing examples of Finnish startups integrating into Qatar's ecosystem. He stressed the importance of linking SMEs with large corporations to build competitive supply chains.
- Kouvelis called for stronger connections between research institutions in the EU and GCC to foster applied research and entrepreneurship in renewable energy.

**Digital Divide and Equity**

- Ensuring equitable access to data and technology was highlighted as essential for inclusive growth. Kouvelis stressed the need to democratize access to green technologies to empower SMEs and smaller nations.

**Building Sustainable Partnerships**

- Trust and transparency were emphasized as foundational for effective EU-GCC collaboration. Almatouq urged for mutual learning and shared accountability in tackling climate challenges.
- Kosmas highlighted successful models of multinational collaboration, such as Airbus' partnerships with GCC stakeholders, as benchmarks for scaling cooperative efforts.

**Overcoming Structural and Systemic Challenges**

- Addressing gaps in multilateral systems, such as the absence of global standards for sustainable value chains, was identified as a priority. Skinnari stressed that without cohesive global systems, scaling the green transition would remain slow and fragmented.
- Panelists agreed that private-public partnerships and practical implementation strategies are vital to overcoming systemic barriers and ensuring meaningful progress.



## Session 3: Bridging Continents: Unlocking Opportunities in Tourism & Cultural Exchange

Panellists:

- **Sheikha Hessa Jassim Al-Thani**, Head of Marketing Planning Section, Qatar Tourism
- **Ms Yulia Stark**, President, European Women's Association
- **Mr Damien Rizzi**, Regional Director – Advisory, Egis Group
- **Dr. Sheikha Al-Anoud Al-Sabah**, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Islamic Monuments at Kuwait's National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL)

Moderator: **Mr Fahad Ali Al Kuwari**, Sr Manager of Investor Relations, Invest Qatar



### KEY MESSAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

#### Building Bridges

- Yulia Stark, President of the European Women's Association, highlighted the collaborative potential between the EU and GCC in tourism and culture, emphasizing tourism's role in bridging gaps and fostering mutual understanding. She noted the increased participation of women in the tourism sector as a positive outcome of these collaborations.
- Sheikha Hessa Jassim Al-Thani, Head of Marketing Planning Section, Qatar Tourism, elaborated on Qatar's approach to integrating modern infrastructure with cultural preservation to create a unique and accessible tourism experience.

#### Modernity, Heritage Preservation, and Digital Solutions

- Sheikha Hessa Jassim Al-Thani discussed Qatar's innovative use of AI, including chatbots on its tourism website, to streamline travel planning and break down language barriers. This initiative reflects Qatar's blend of modernity with cultural authenticity.
- Dr. Sheikha Al-Anoud Al-Sabah, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Islamic Monuments, Kuwait National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters (NCCAL), shared Kuwait's focus on cultural heritage preservation and cross-border collaborations, such as excavation practices and museum management.



### Challenges for Women-Led Businesses

- Yulia Stark emphasized the vulnerability of women-led businesses during crises and highlighted the importance of AI and automation in scaling up these businesses, improving their resilience and competitiveness.

### Tourism as an Economic Diversification Strategy

- Sheikha Hessa Jassim Al-Thani shared Qatar's success in leveraging high-profile events like the FIFA World Cup to enhance its tourism sector. She emphasized using these experiences to diversify tourism offerings, including cultural and eco-tourism.
- Dr. Sheikha Al-Anoud Al-Sabah explained Kuwait's emphasis on creative industries and cultural heritage tourism as part of its strategy to diversify its economy.

### Cultural Heritage and Local Authenticity

- Damien Rizzi, Regional Director – Advisory, Egis Group, highlighted the importance of preserving local authenticity in tourism offerings. He pointed to initiatives in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that focus on cultural preservation and eco-tourism.
- Panelists agreed that reconnecting with ancestral cultures offers an alternative to urban, high-rise tourism and provides unique, authentic experiences.

### Cross-Regional Collaboration

- Dr. Sheikha Al-Anoud Al-Sabah emphasized the role of initiatives like Kuwait's Darb Al Athar in fostering cross-border knowledge sharing and excavation practices. She advocated for greater collaboration between the EU and GCC in heritage preservation and creative industries.
- The proposal for a single GCC visa was highlighted as a practical step to simplify regional travel, enhancing integration and tourism growth.
- Yulia Stark shared examples of cross-regional exhibitions and programs, noting the importance of cultural exchanges in building trust and mutual understanding between the EU and GCC.





## Session 4: Next-Gen Connectivity: Advances in ICT & AI

Panellists:

- **Ms Erika Piirmets**, Business Development Director, Digital Nation
- **Mr Mikko Lavanti**, Senior Vice President, Nokia Mobile Networks Market for the Middle East and Africa
- **Ms Eman Al-Kuwari**, Director of Digital Innovation, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Qatar

Moderator: **Mr Elkhair Balla**, Sr Executive – Investor Relations, Invest Qatar



### KEY MESSAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

#### Rapid Transformation through ICT and AI

- Eman Al-Kuwari, Director of Digital Innovation at Qatar's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, highlighted Qatar's success in leveraging AI and ICT, including the use of advanced digital solutions during the FIFA World Cup for crowd management and operational efficiency.
- Mikko Lavanti, Senior Vice President of Nokia Mobile Networks, emphasized the transformative impact of 5G in the region, enabling innovative applications in sectors like tourism, oil and gas, and healthcare.
- Erika Piirmets, Business Development Director at Digital Nation, shared Estonia's journey as a digital pioneer, demonstrating how small nations can lead in global digital transformation.

#### Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) for Digital Transformation

- Eman Al-Kuwari discussed Qatar's TASMU Accelerator, which fosters innovation through public-private collaborations, generating \$36M in funding within six months.
- Erika Piirmets emphasized Estonia's success in using government partnerships with local startups to build digital infrastructure, showcasing the role of PPPs in accelerating innovation.

**Training and Upskilling for a Digital Future**

- Qatar has trained over 1,000 government employees in AI and aims to upskill 50,000 individuals by 2025, focusing on digital literacy across various demographics.
- Female participation in STEM fields is notably high in Qatar, with many IT departments led by women, reflecting a broader regional trend toward inclusivity in tech leadership.

**Support for SMEs and Startups**

- Estonia's startup ecosystem emphasizes collaboration over competition, with initiatives fostering global outreach.
- GCC countries, particularly Qatar, are creating strategic hubs for startups to access regional and international markets.

**Infrastructure Development and Cybersecurity**

- The rollout of 5G is transforming industries across the GCC, with Saudi Arabia poised to lead globally in bandwidth availability.
- Unified cybersecurity regulations and frameworks are critical to safeguarding digital infrastructure and fostering trust.

**Data Quality and Cross-Border Sharing**

- Panelists stressed the importance of interoperability and regulatory alignment for cross-border data sharing, especially in sectors like healthcare.

**Regulatory Frameworks and Standards**

- The EU's GDPR serves as a model for fostering trust and clarity in digital ecosystems, with the potential for adaptation in GCC-EU collaborations.
- Emerging AI regulations in the EU aim to ensure ethical and practical applications of AI.

**AI in Sustainable Development**

- AI applications in healthcare, such as predictive medicine and diagnostics, were highlighted as transformative tools for addressing workforce shortages.
- Estonia's approach to evaluating the environmental impact of digital technologies demonstrates the importance of sustainable innovation.

**Leadership in Digital Transformation**

- Strong leadership and a clear vision are essential for successful digital transformation, focusing on practical outcomes and long-term sustainability.

**Collaboration Between GCC and EU**

- The panel emphasized the shared technological maturity and appetite for innovation between the GCC and EU, with partnerships focusing on aligning standards and fostering ecosystems.
- Initiatives like Nokia's API open platform facilitate global collaboration, enabling startups to access international markets and develop cutting-edge solutions.





## Session 5: Exploring Business Opportunities in Healthcare

Panellists:

- **Mr Emil Syundyukov**, CEO and Co-founder, Longenesis
- **Dr Verdiana Morando**, General Manager GKSD Healthcare Saudi Arabia, MENA Chief Operating Officer GKSD Healthcare
- **Mr Jaffar Bin Jaffar**, Director - Sales & Leasing Operations, Dubai Healthcare City Authority

Moderator: **Dr. Wadha A. Al-Muftah**, Senior Director, Genome Program, Qatar Precision Health Institute (Member of Qatar Foundation)



## KEY MESSAGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS

### Emerging Trends and Opportunities

- **GCC Governments' Adaptability:**
  - **Dr. Verdiana Morando:** Highlighted that GCC governments are highly agile in adopting healthcare programs and establishing regulations, making the region attractive for investment and collaboration. She emphasized the region's readiness for predictive and personalized medicine, supported by strong governmental and societal backing.
  - **Mr. Jaffar Bin Jaffar:** Stated that the GCC offers unparalleled speed in implementation compared to Europe and possesses significant expertise that can be exported globally.
- **Collaboration as a Necessity:**
  - **Mr. Emil Syundyukov:** Argued that EU-GCC collaboration is not optional but mandatory for healthcare advancements. He emphasized the need for joint researcher exchanges, co-publications, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

### Genome Data Utilization

- **Turning Data into Solutions:**
  - **Mr. Emil Syundyukov:** Discussed the need for genomic data to be actionable, moving from data collection to impactful healthcare applications such as population health management, personalized treatments, and preventive medicine.
  - **Dr. Wadha AL-Muftah:** Highlighted the importance of genomic data in attracting global biotech companies, stating that clear frameworks for data sharing can unlock greater value.

- Challenges in Data Sharing:
  - Mr. Emil Syundyukov: Noted that regulatory barriers often delay access to critical genomic data, which could otherwise accelerate drug discovery and development.

### **Social and Cultural Dimensions**

- Building Centers of Excellence:
  - Dr. Verdiana Morando: Advocated for the GCC to establish Centers of Excellence for healthcare research and skill-building, modelled on the EU Reference Networks, which focus on rare diseases and advanced care.
- Addressing Workforce Challenges:
  - Mr. Emil Syundyukov: Stressed the importance of investing in long-term workforce development to address labour shortages and maintain world-class healthcare systems in the region.

### **Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)**

- Lessons and Best Practices:
  - Mr. Jaffar Bin Jaffar: Explained that PPPs must address foundational issues such as licensing and regulatory frameworks. He highlighted Dubai Healthcare City's ecosystem as an example of successful collaboration, combining infrastructure with supportive policies.
  - Dr. Verdiana Morando: Pointed out that PPPs require long-term partnerships, clear financial risk assessments, and active private-sector engagement to succeed.

### **Data and Innovation**

- Enabling Cross-Border Collaboration:
  - Mr. Emil Syundyukov: Advocated for sandbox environments to test AI and digital health solutions while ensuring ethical use and societal benefit.
  - Dr. Wadha AL-Muftah: Emphasized the need for transparency in regulatory frameworks to enable seamless data exchange between the EU and GCC.

### **Post-Pandemic Reflections**

- Rapid Adaptation During COVID-19:
  - Mr. Jaffar Bin Jaffar: Praised the GCC's swift transition to digital healthcare solutions and emergency plans, showcasing the region's capability to outperform other global regions during crises.
  - Dr. Verdiana Morando: Noted the GCC's exceptional supply chain management and adaptability, which outpaced European counterparts.

### **Medical Tourism**

- Current Leadership:
  - Mr. Jaffar Bin Jaffar: Highlighted the GCC's existing strength in medical tourism, with world-class facilities and healthcare professionals catering to global patients.
  - Dr. Verdiana Morando: Suggested further specialization in areas like oncology and telemedicine to enhance the GCC's competitive edge.
- Strategic Positioning:
  - Mr. Emil Syundyukov: Stressed the importance of highlighting the region's unique capabilities, including its central location and advanced healthcare infrastructure.



## KEY MESSAGES

### Essential Collaboration:

- EU-GCC cooperation is vital for tackling global and regional challenges in healthcare, digital transformation, and sustainable development.
- Balanced partnerships leveraging the EU's regulatory expertise and the GCC's rapid implementation capabilities are critical.

### Advanced Technology Integration:

- Ensure AI, ICT, and digital solutions prioritize ethics, data privacy, and interoperability to deliver inclusive and effective outcomes.

### Joint Action on Shared Goals:

- Focus on healthcare innovation, climate change mitigation, and digital transformation with co-developed strategies tailored to regional needs.

### Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):

- PPPs are crucial for financing, expertise, and implementation. Transparent regulations and mutual risk-sharing can drive successful collaborations.

### Workforce and Capacity Building:

- Address skills gaps with capacity-building programs, cross-regional knowledge exchange, and investment in education for emerging fields like AI and renewable energy.

### Institutional and Academic Exchanges:

- Promote professional and academic exchanges, joint research, and intellectual property co-development to deepen innovation and collaboration.

### Shared Global Leadership:

- EU and GCC can pioneer joint responses to climate change, health crises, and data governance challenges, setting global benchmarks.

### People-Centered Strategies:

- Place equity, accessibility, gender equality, and workforce development at the core of efforts to ensure meaningful and inclusive outcomes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Strengthen Collaboration Platforms:**

- Establish EU-GCC policy alignment platforms for healthcare, digital transformation, and climate resilience.
- Share regulatory best practices to streamline cross-border initiatives.

### **Enhance Connectivity:**

- Invest in joint programs to improve digital infrastructure and data interoperability.
- Position the GCC as a strategic hub for accessing Middle East, African, and European markets.

### **Scale Public-Private Partnerships:**

- Provide incentives and co-investment opportunities for private-sector engagement.
- Replicate successful PPP models in healthcare, energy, and digitalization.

### **Develop Education Initiatives:**

- Launch training programs for professionals in AI, cybersecurity, and green energy.
- Foster academic ties through scholarships and exchange programs.

### **Innovate for Sustainability:**

- Collaborate on green urban planning and infrastructure projects.
- Align healthcare and digital efforts with long-term sustainability goals.

### **Create Innovation Hubs:**

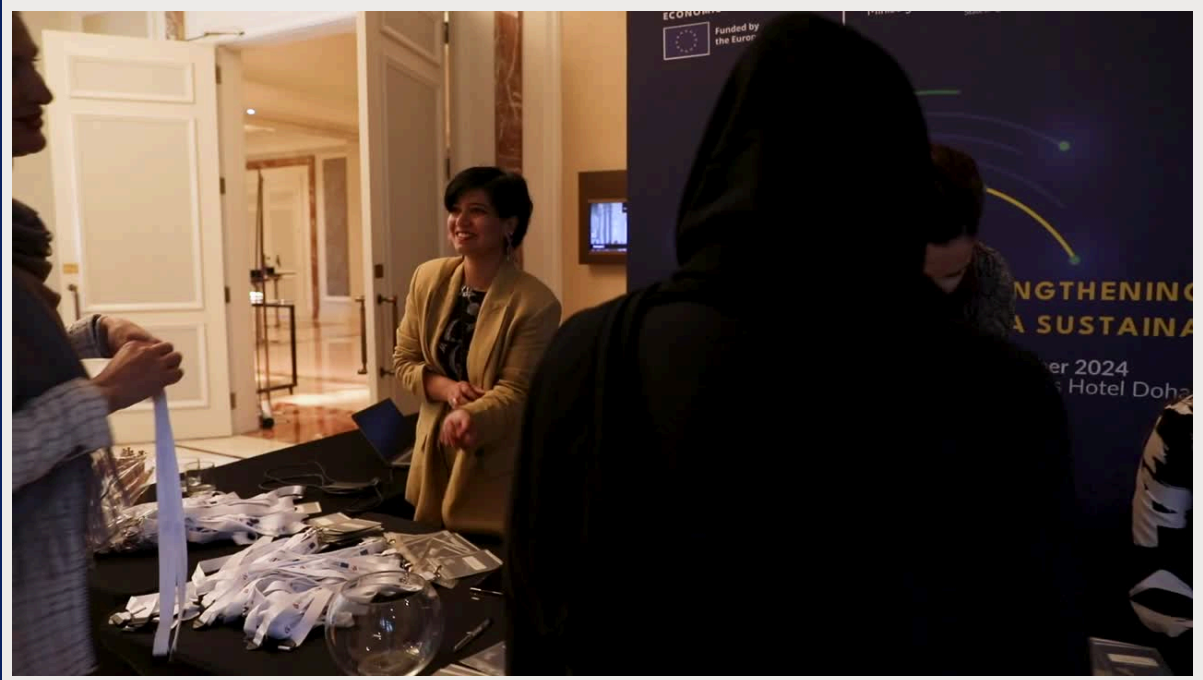
- Build hubs to connect startups, SMEs, and research institutions across regions.
- Use sandbox environments to test scalable solutions in healthcare and AI.

### **Focus on Measurable Impact:**

- Define clear, short-term, and medium-term goals for joint projects.
- Ensure transparency, accountability, and equitable results in all initiatives.



## SUMMARY VIDEO



[Click here to view](#)

## MEDIA COVERAGE

The 8th EU-GCC Business Forum, held on November 28, 2024, in Doha, Qatar, garnered attention from various media outlets. Below is a curated list of notable coverage:

### English Media Coverage:

- [Kuwait News Agency \(KUNA\): "Eighth EU-GCC Business Forum kicks off in Doha"](#)
- [Gulf Times: "Qatar pitches for expediting GCC-EU FTA negotiations"](#)
- [MENAFN: "Eighth EU-GCC Business Forum Kicks Off In Doha"](#)
- [Bilaterals.org: "Qatar pitches for expediting GCC-EU FTA negotiations"](#)

### Arabic Media Coverage:

- وكالة الأنباء الكويتية (كونا): "انطلاق المنتدى الثامن للأعمال بين الاتحاد الأوروبي ودول مجلس التعاون في قطر"
- جريدة الراية: "الاتحاد الأوروبي ثاني أكبر شريك تجاري للخليج"
- جريدة الشرق: "القمة الخليجية - الأوروبية تؤكد الالتزام بتعزيز الشراكة الاستراتيجية بين الجانبين"
- وكالة الأنباء القطرية (قنا): "انطلاق المنتدى الثامن للأعمال بين الاتحاد الأوروبي ودول مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية في الدوحة"
- قناة الأخبار على يوتيوب: "انطلاق المنتدى الثامن للأعمال بين الاتحاد الأوروبي ودول مجلس التعاون لدول الخليج العربية"

# PHOTO GALLERY



[Click here to view & download photos](#)



# Team Support



**Douglas Aitkenhead**

Team Leader

E-mail: [daitkenhead@eugcc.eu](mailto:daitkenhead@eugcc.eu)



**Rania Nseir**

Event Management &

Communications Expert

E-mail: [rnseir@eugcc.eu](mailto:rnseir@eugcc.eu)



**Dana Masoud**

Operations Manager

E-mail: [Dana.Masoud@gfa-group.de](mailto:Dana.Masoud@gfa-group.de)



**Sofia Seed**

Consultant/Project Manager

GFA Consulting Group GMBH

E-mail: [Sofia.Saeed@gfa-group.de](mailto:Sofia.Saeed@gfa-group.de)



**Tamara Kohl**

Consultant

GFA Consulting Group GMBH

E-mail: [tamara.kohl@gfa-group.de](mailto:tamara.kohl@gfa-group.de)

**Project Address:**

MBC Makateb, Tourist Club  
Makeen Tower, 15th floor  
P.O. Box 35243, Abu Dhabi  
United Arab Emirates

**THE EU-GCC DIALOGUE ON  
ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION**



Funded by  
the European Union

## About the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification Project

The EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification 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.

The purpose of this project is to promote climate-friendly trade, investment and economic affairs-related policy analysis, dialogue, and cooperation between stakeholders from EU and GCC at both regional and country levels in the context of the GCC economic diversification process.

**For more information on the EU-GCC Dialogue Project, and to download research reports and other publications, please visit:**

<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/EUintheGCC>

**To learn more about our projects, forthcoming events, webinars and recent updates, please follow us on:**



<https://twitter.com/DialogueEu>



<https://www.instagram.com/eugccdialogue/>



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/eu-gcc-dialogue-on-economic-diversification>

**THE EU-GCC DIALOGUE ON  
ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION**



Funded by  
the European Union



**SCAN ME**  
to learn more about the project