



Political Reform in the GCC and its implications for EU Policy
Hotel Vincci Soho
C/ Prado 18
Madrid

2nd and 3rd November 2009

An international seminar organised by the Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) and the Gulf Research Center under the Al Jisr Project funded by the European Commission. ¹

¹ This seminar will be run according to the Chatham House Rule and attendance is by invitation only.

AGENDA

MONDAY NOVEMBER 2, 2009

- 9.00 – 9.30 **Welcome and Introduction**
- **Tomás Dupla del Moral**, Director Middle East and South Mediterranean, European Commission
 - **Richard Youngs**, Research Director, FRIDE

- 9.30 – 11.00 **Gulf Monarchies as drivers of reform? An exercise in ‘decompression’ or an appropriate model for political change?**
- Chair:
- **Richard Youngs**, Research Director, FRIDE
- Panel:
- **Abdulkahleq Abdulla**, Professor of Political Science, Emirates University,
 - **Mohammad al-Rumaihi**, Professor of Political Sociology, Kuwait University
 - **Gerd Nonneman**, al-Qasimi Professor of Gulf Studies, Exeter University

Can Gulf monarchies introduce reforms to bring about accountable and efficient government or are such measures a cosmetic means of preserving the interests of the ruling elite? How can EU policy play a constructive role in supporting home grown initiatives for reform?

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee break

- 11.30 – 13.00 **Parliaments and local councils: Real vehicles for change or hollow rhetoric?**
- Chair:
- **Leif Stenberg**, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University
- Panel:
- **Ghanim al-Najjar**, Professor of Political Science, Kuwait University
 - **Saif al-Maskery**, Member of the Majlis Al-Shura, Oman
 - **Isa al-Muzel**, Member of Qatif Municipal Council, Saudi Arabia

Elected parliaments and local councils have frequently been dismissed as being powerless to effect change. Meanwhile, in the case of Kuwait, the empowerment of elected assemblies has led to prolonged deadlock between the ruling family and the country’s elected representatives. This panel will analyse the record of elected assemblies and prospects for democratisation in the region.

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- 13.00 – 14.30 **Prospects for judicial reform**
- Chair:
- **Abdullah Baabood**, Director, Gulf Research Center, UK
- Panel:
- **Mohammed Abdullah al-Roken**, Associate Professor of Law, UAE University
 - **Amal van Hees**, Project Director, Bridging the Gulf Foundation, the Netherlands

Reform processes can only be sustained by comprehensive judicial reform. Will legal reforms regulating transparency and good governance in the private sector also translate to laws affecting the political and civil rights of GCC citizens? This panel will examine prospects for judicial reform in the Gulf and prospects for EU-GCC cooperation in this area.

14.30 Lunch

15.30 - Afternoon free

20:30 Dinner

The growth of civil society in the GCC: Opening a space?

Chair:

- **Kareem Elbayar**, Legal Advisor – Middle East / North Africa, The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), US

Panel:

- **Abdulla Alderazi**, Chairman, Bahrain Human Rights Society, Bahrain
- **Ebtisam al-Kitbi**, Assistant Professor for Political Science, UAE University, UAE
- **Ahmed Abdul-Malik**, Journalist, Qatar

Civil society groups have expanded in the Gulf and governments have moved to introduce new legislation regulating the registration and activities of these organisations. What obstacles do civil society organisations face in the region? How should the EU structure its programmes in order to strengthen the role of civil society in the region?

Energy dynamics and political reform

Chair:

- **Richard Youngs**, Director, FRIDE, UK

Panel:

- **Tim Niblock**, Professor Emeritus of Middle East Politics, Exeter University, UK
- **Giacomo Luciani**, Director, Gulf Research Foundation, Switzerland

A variety of factors, not least a rapidly increasing population and the political instability caused by the “boom and bust” trends of energy dependence, have prompted the GCC states to invest in economic diversification. Do these efforts to increase efficiency and encourage foreign investment bring openings for more participatory government or have the GCC countries ‘decoupled’ political from economic reform?

Coffee break

EU – GCC Relations: The Political Dimension

Chair:

- **Michael Bauer**, Research Fellow, Center for Applied Policy Research, Germany

Panel:

- **Christian Koch**, Gulf Research Center, UAE
- **Jane Kinnimont**, Middle East Analyst, The Economist Intelligence Unit, UK

The drawn-out process of negotiating a Free-Trade Agreement has arguably delayed the development of a political relationship between the EU and the GCC member states. How can the EU and GCC advance their political relations to encompass areas of mutual interest such as security in the region and cooperation in multilateral institutions? What mechanisms can be in place to facilitate dialogue on human rights and support for civil society?

Lunch

In case of any queries while in Madrid, please contact Belén Galindo, +34 91 244 4765, or Ana Echague, +34 91 244 4757.