

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-002444/24
to the Commission
Thierry Mariani (P/E)
(6 November 2024)**

Subject: State of play of discussions between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on a free trade agreement

Despite negotiations going on for more than 30 years, discussions between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on a free trade agreement have still not been concluded. In May 2024, Johannes Hahn, the European Commissioner for Budget, said that the EU was now exploring alternative avenues for economic cooperation with GCC countries, highlighting the possibility of bilateral agreements.

1. Could the Commission specify what were the major obstacles that prevented the conclusion of a free trade agreement between the EU and the GCC?
2. In addition, what alternative forms of cooperation does the EU envisage if such a comprehensive agreement remains out of reach?

Submitted: 6.11.2024

**Answer given by Mr Šefčovič on behalf of the European Commission
(6 January 2025)**

Negotiations for the regional EU-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were suspended in 2008, due to different levels of ambition.

Exploratory discussions regarding the possibility of re-launching negotiations were held with the GCC counterparts in 2024 and these confirmed that the GCC maintained its reservations on key issues: export duties, trade and sustainable development, public procurement and investment.

In this light and in line with the conclusions of the EU-GCC Summit of October 2024 ⁽¹⁾, which called for the EU and the GCC to explore tailor-made agreements supporting trade and investments, the EU intends to upgrade relations with the Gulf partners and, in complementarity with the EU-GCC Cooperation Agreement (1989) ⁽²⁾, establish a comprehensive, legally binding framework at bilateral level by offering bilateral partnership agreements with each of the six Gulf countries, based on the EU Gulf Strategy (2022) ⁽³⁾.

In parallel, the EU would be open to explore preferential trade agreements with those Gulf countries that are interested and share the level of ambition, while aiming to take forward discussions at regional level with a view to reach a regional GCC-EU Free Trade Agreement, including an investment chapter.

The EU and the GCC will also work together to advance the scope of the Trade and Investment Dialogue through new areas, i.e. regulatory cooperation, restrictive measures, protection of intellectual property rights including geographical indications.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2024/10/16/>

⁽²⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL%3A1989%3A054%3ATOC>

⁽³⁾ COM/EEAS Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council A strategic partnership with the Gulf, 18.5.2022 JOIN (2022) 13 final; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022JC0013>