



MALTA AND THE GULF REGION

REGIONAL FRAMEWORK POLICY

2025



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND TOURISM



FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to present Malta's Regional Framework Policy for the Gulf, the first policy fully dedicated to this region.

Malta's foreign policy has always been guided by the principles of neutrality, dialogue, and cooperation. Our geographical location at the heart of the Mediterranean positions us as a natural point of confluence between Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa.

The countries of the Gulf region are key partners in our efforts to promote peace, stability, and prosperity. The promising societal and economic changes underway in the region, based on transformative visions for their further development, offer a wide range of opportunities for cooperation and investment. New developments in recent years have inspired stronger cooperation with the Gulf region, such as the need for energy diversification, a renewed effort to address and adapt to climate change, common security challenges, and the alignment of our positions in multilateral fora. Recent events have also demonstrated the crucial role that stands to be played by many of the Gulf countries towards sustainable peace and stability in the region and beyond.

This document reflects our commitment to the fostering of strong and mutually-beneficial relationships with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and others. It sets out Malta's strategic approach to engagement with a region that is not only a hub for global energy resources but also a dynamic centre of economic growth, cultural richness, and geopolitical significance. It furthermore outlines Malta's vision for deepening our engagement in this region, emphasising the importance of economic collaboration, in sectors such as trade, investment, renewable energy, and technology and highlighting our commitment to cultural and educational exchanges, which are essential for building lasting people-to-people connections and fostering mutual understanding.

This policy is not just a statement of intent; it is a roadmap for action which sets out objectives and priorities for the coming years. Our goal is to build a partnership with the Gulf region that is based on trust, respect, and shared interests. By working together, we can unlock new opportunities for collaboration, address common challenges, and contribute to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

I extend my gratitude to all those who have contributed to the development of this policy, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact of our collective efforts in the years to come.



Hon. Ian Borg

Deputy Prime Minister
Minister for Foreign
Affairs and Tourism

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SCOPE

Malta's diplomatic relations with countries in the Gulf region have been established since the 1970s and the 1980s.

Over the years, bilateral relations have developed at varied speeds. On a regional basis, Malta has maintained excellent relations with all countries of the region, as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Building on Malta's excellent relations in the region, the Regional Framework Policy (RFP) aims to guide Malta's engagement, activities and expectations in the Gulf Region, reflecting Malta's commitment to fostering meaningful partnerships with the Gulf states.

Adhering to the values and guiding principles underpinning [Malta's Foreign Policy Strategy \(2022\)](#) and [Malta's Foreign Policy Statement: Strategic Framework 2025 - 2026](#), this policy is guided by the principles of neutrality, a commitment to promote dialogue and de-escalation, reason and respect for international law, secure and develop bilateral and multilateral relationships and increase prosperity and improve the livelihood of its citizens.

Malta's active neutrality, as enshrined in the Constitution, remains a key pillar of our foreign policy. This principle allows Malta to act as a trusted partner in fostering dialogue. Moreover, it provides a platform for offering mediation services between conflict parties, increasing the country's credibility in the international fora.

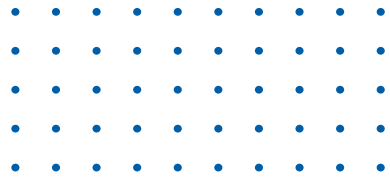
Malta is committed to continue to advocate for **peace, security and stability**, through promoting dialogue and upholding international law. Malta's actions reflect a responsibility towards justice and human rights, ensuring that our actions are consistent with international norms, providing a stable foundation for long-term partnerships with the countries in the Gulf region.

Recognising the interconnected nature of global challenges, Malta aims to secure and develop **bilateral and multilateral relationships**, to engage in mutual respect and shared aspirations towards the benefit of both regions. Malta will aim to continue engaging with regional organisations such as the GCC, and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) based in the United Arab Emirates, to align its efforts with regional and international frameworks.

Malta aims to **increase prosperity and improve the livelihood of its people** by increasing trade, attracting investment and supporting the efforts of Maltese businesses in the Gulf.

Though terminology regarding the geographical remit of the Gulf is open, the term is generally oriented towards the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council – meaning Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and Bahrain, together with an extended neighbourhood including Iraq, Yemen, and Iran, which are not GCC members.

This RFP acknowledges that the identified Gulf States are politically and economically heterogeneous, having distinct histories, cultures, political systems, and interests.



MALTA AND THE GULF

Malta has enjoyed positive diplomatic relations with countries in the Gulf region for decades.

In the 1970s and 1980s grants and loans were provided to support specific projects relevant to Malta's economic development. However, in recent years, the dynamic of bilateral relations has shifted, notably given Malta's EU membership. On a regional basis, Malta has maintained excellent relations with all countries of the region, as well as the GCC. Trade between Malta and the Gulf region has increased in recent years. Air connectivity plays a key role in facilitating these ties, and efforts are underway to further expand direct links.

Direct flights currently operate between Malta and the UAE (via Cyprus), and flights to Qatar resumed in July 2025. Malta Freeport Terminals also serve 7 ports in the Gulf: Abu Dhabi and Jebel Ali (UAE), Hamad (Qatar), Jeddah, Dammam, Jubail and King Abdullah Port (Saudi Arabia). The Maltese Government remains committed to assist Maltese businesses to expand in the Gulf. The connections between Malta and the Gulf States, comprising the GCC, have been in existence for a number of years.



Trade missions to the Gulf States have been regular with efforts made to attract foreign direct investment, especially in the aircraft maintenance sector, cooperation in the field of ICT, the setting up of English language schools in Malta, higher education and cooperation in the field of health. On a micro level there have been numerous businesses that have had trade connections with the GCC States, through the import and export of either goods or services. The presence in Malta of the Gulf-based airlines, Emirates, and Qatar Airways, provide adequate connectivity. However, there remains untapped potential for expanding Malta's business opportunities in the Gulf, and further engagement could yield concrete economic benefits for both sides.

Investments such as Tecom in 2006 and 2007, BNF Bank through the JUD Investment Group, SmartCity, in the second decade of the millennium, as well as the more recent investment by the American University of Malta (AUM) and the Qatar Insurance Company through the QIC Europe Limited are five examples that stand out. Such investments conform with efforts to diversify Malta's economy. Investments from the Gulf, however, remain fairly limited and the same can be said about trade.

TradeMalta, along with the Malta Chamber of Commerce (MCC), plays a key role in shaping Malta's trade and investment opportunities, both incoming and outgoing, by analysing developments including in the Gulf. It is well placed to determine trade and investment opportunities with the Gulf States while also identifying the key barriers that have restricted trade and investment opportunities.



Furthermore, there is no investment protection agreement in place between any of the Gulf States and Malta. These would need to be in line with the updated Bilateral Investment Treaties conforming with EU legislation. Both the digitalisation process and the greening of the Maltese economy provide opportunities for investment in both the public and private sectors in line with the EU funded Recovery and Resilience Facility.

It is only through highly focused efforts and follow up actions that Malta and its business community can obtain results in the Gulf States with regards to trade, commercial and investment opportunities. Establishing reliable contacts within the region and developing such relationships based on high quality proposals that are realistic and achievable is also considered critical.

Also relevant to relations with the Gulf States is the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of tax evasion in any financial transactions with business counterparts in the region. This facilitates commercial relations between Malta and countries in the region, and can aid Malta's efforts in attracting foreign direct investment. As has been the case with a restricted number of Gulf States, relevant bilateral treaties ensure that taxable gains generated and taxed in one fiscal jurisdiction are not taxed again in the other.



Trade exchanges between Malta and countries in the Gulf region remain moderate. However, the economies of scale also need to be taken into consideration. Most of Maltese businesses fall within the category of Small and Medium Enterprises, and therefore the scale of exports, though small, could make a big difference for Malta-based companies, such as agri-food businesses. The sector is already benefiting from technological advances that present opportunities to increase productivity. More advanced technology is also increasing productivity in the fish farming industry and given the increasing demand for fish, such developments offer further export opportunities in the Gulf. The increasing demand for alternative foods also offers opportunities for Malta-based firms to tap into markets in the Gulf region. Malta-based firms already export high-quality products to a variety of international markets, including the Gulf, and more effort could further establish their foothold in this region. Maltese companies are also establishing a presence in the region through the establishment of offices or by joining forces with partners on the ground in order to expand their international presence. Furthermore, Malta also fares well in the export of services such as tax, advisory services, auditing, hospitality, healthcare, and integrated logistics facilities providing services to the oil, gas and mining sectors, amongst others. Further exportation of services can be sought to increase commercial activity with the Gulf region.

This Regional Framework Policy provides an overview of various parameters according to which Malta's excellent relations in the region could be explored and enhanced further, while taking into account the evolution of Malta's bilateral and regional relationship with the region.

MALTA'S DIPLOMATIC FOOTPRINT IN THE GULF

In recent years, Malta's diplomatic coverage through resident Missions in the Gulf countries has grown exponentially, driven by an interest in increased direct engagement and by the increased international relevance of countries in the region.

The latest Embassy to be established in the region is in Doha in 2021. This followed the opening of Malta's Embassy in Abu Dhabi, also serving as the Permanent Representation to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), in 2020. Malta's Embassy in Kuwait was set up in 2013, with the embassy in Kuwait being accredited to Iraq and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as well. Malta's Embassy in Riyadh dates back to 1985 and today also covers Bahrain and Yemen. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Oman are covered by Non-Resident Ambassadors based in Malta. It should also be noted that Malta has opened a Consulate General in Dubai, commencing operations in 2024.

Malta has also maintained close relations with the GCC for a number of years, and Malta's Embassy in Riyadh is also accredited to the GCC. In 2017, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the GCC covering various sectors of interest, and a high level of engagement was maintained throughout the years.



EU-GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL RELATIONS

The inaugural Joint Council Ministerial took place in 1985 and was followed by negotiations which led to the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between the European Economic Community and the GCC, agreed in 1988, and entering into force in 1989.

The agreement was foundational but general, outlining an institutional framework to “promote overall cooperation between equal partners on mutually advantageous terms in all spheres between the two regions and further their economic development, taking into consideration the differences in levels in development of the parties”. The key objectives of this partnership outlined three decades ago have therefore remained constant: to intensify trade and investment, to deepen interdependence between the two regions, and to enhance political dialogue.

In May 2017, the EU and the GCC launched a dedicated Dialogue on Trade and Investment Issues, involving the private sector. In 2019, the EU-GCC Dialogue on Economic Diversification was established to build partnerships based on the exchange of EU experience and expertise to assist GCC countries in their economic diversification strategies. In early 2020, discussions on regional security in the Gulf appeared on the Foreign Affairs Council agenda for the first time, with Ministers giving the HRVP “a strong mandate to carry out diplomatic efforts to contribute to de-escalation in the region” and pushing for more active EU engagement in the region on the side of EU institutions.

In this context, EU efforts to devote more attention to the Gulf culminated in the publication of a Joint Communication by the European Commission and the EEAS in May 2022, entitled – A Strategic Partnership with the Gulf – outlining a vision of EU relations with the Gulf region and further broadening the relationship beyond trade. This vision also coincided with an interest amongst EU leaders at the institutional and Member State level to pivot towards the Gulf for energy security in the emerging global context. In this regard, the joint communication outlined five dimensions of EU-Gulf relations: (i) a partnership for prosperity; (ii) the green transition and energy security; (iii) regional stability and global prosperity; (iv) a humanitarian development partnership; and (v) a partnership for people. In turn, these formed the basis of Council Conclusions on the Gulf, endorsed at the level of EU Foreign Ministers in June 2022.



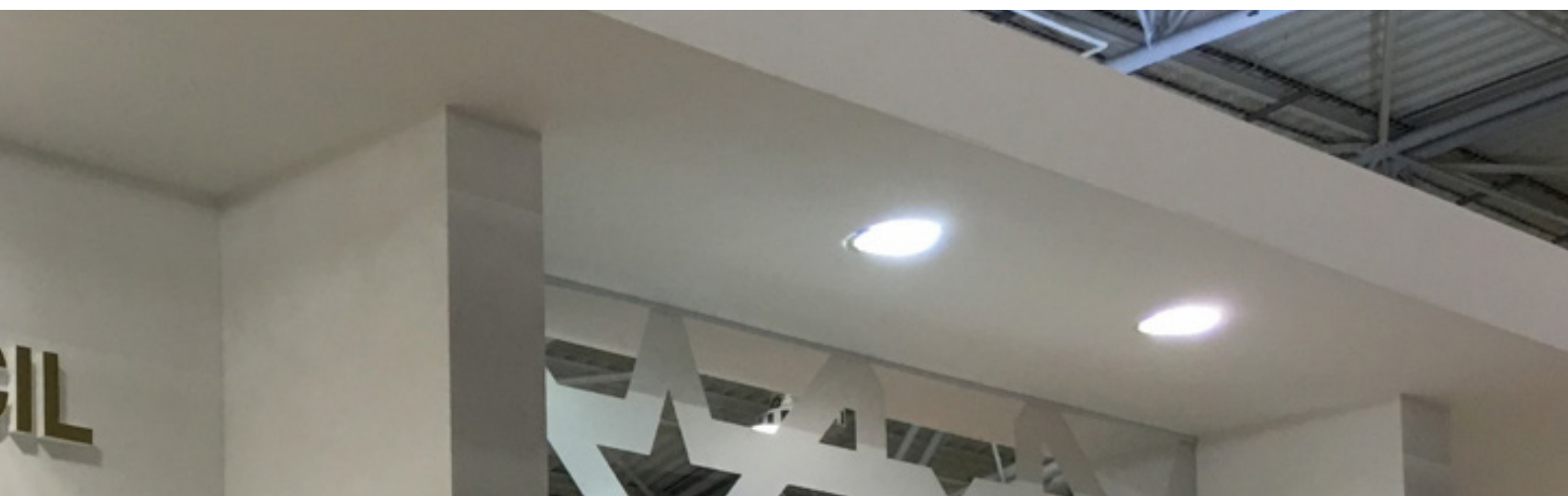
In May 2023, the Council appointed Luigi Di Maio as EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the Gulf region with an initial mandate of 21 months. In January 2025, this mandate was then extended until the end of February 2027. The tasks of the EUSR are to further develop a stronger, comprehensive and more strategic EU partnership with the countries in the Gulf region by supporting the High Representative in the implementation of the foreign policy and security. He will also seek best ways to contribute to the stability and security of the region by engaging and supporting dialogue and long-term regional solutions with individual Gulf partners and relevant regional organisations. At the institutional level of EU-GCC relations, the European External Action Service (EEAS) also signed Cooperation Arrangements with each of the members of the GCC.

The communication notes that a stronger partnership with the Gulf region has a key role to play in the implementation of the European strategy to REPowerEU2, and the complementing EU External Energy Strategy, and includes topics such as an increase of Liquefied Natural Gas supplies, measures to stabilise oil markets, cooperation on hydrogen, energy efficiency, and faster deployment of renewable energy.

In October 2024, the EU continued to develop a deeper and closer partnership with the Gulf region at a time of challenging geopolitical circumstances through the first EU-GCC summit under the theme “Strategic partnership for peace and prosperity”. EU and GCC leaders agreed to work together to promote global and regional security and prosperity, including preventing the emergence and escalation of conflicts and resolving crises by enhancing dialogue, coordination and engagement. At the summit, EU and GCC leaders reaffirmed their joint commitment to a strategic trade and investment partnership, tapping into the opportunities offered by: an enhanced business and investment environment; the green and digital transitions; sustainable energy; and connectivity. The EU and GCC countries committed to intensifying their energy cooperation to explore greater cooperation on energy security, including energy efficiency and renewable energies. The EU is also ready to open negotiations on bilateral Strategic Partnership Agreements with all GCC states.

On the trade front, as of 2023 the EU was the second biggest trade partner of the GCC after China, generating €170 billion in trade. While both parties recognise the significant benefits that a comprehensive trade agreement would bring, progress on the negotiations on the EU-GCC Free Trade Agreement has been limited. Any trade agreement concluded between the EU and the GCC could have a significant impact on Malta's trade with the GCC countries, collectively and individually.

Leveraging Malta's EU Membership, Malta can position itself as a bridge between the Gulf and the EU by promoting EU-Gulf cooperation on various issues. In this regard, Malta can enhance its importance as a partner for Gulf countries interested in expanding their relationship with the EU.



REGIONAL CONTEXT

Presenting both opportunities and challenges, the countries in the Gulf region are often considered as ‘oil rich states,’ but in recent years their dependence on energy exports has rendered them vulnerable to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.


Despite these effects, the Russian aggression against Ukraine has pushed oil and gas prices to very high levels and provided opportunities for new contracts with countries impacted by limited supplies and high prices.



Gulf countries are steadily advancing their economic diversification agendas, shifting from fossil fuel-based models towards broader economic sectors.

The bilateral agreements concluded in September 2020 between some Gulf countries and Israel, known as the Abraham Accords, have introduced a new dimension to regional diplomacy and continue to shape international relations in the Gulf and beyond.

The religious landscape of the Gulf region is deeply rooted in Islam, playing a central role in shaping the cultural, political, and social fabric of the region. The majority of the population across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—adhere to Islam, with Sunni Islam being the predominant sect. However, there are significant Shia Muslim communities, particularly in Bahrain and parts of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, contributing to the region's religious diversity.



In addition to the native Muslim populations, the Gulf hosts a large expatriate workforce, bringing with them a variety of religious beliefs including Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism. While Islamic traditions and laws heavily influence public life and governance, most Gulf states have adopted varying degrees of religious tolerance. This complex interplay of religious homogeneity and diversity continues to shape the Gulf's evolving identity in a globalised world.

Countries in the Gulf region are becoming increasingly influential, having a profound global impact including how geopolitical and global security positions are shaped. Notwithstanding, maritime security remains a crucial consideration for the countries in the Gulf.

All the Gulf States have sought to diversify their economies by promoting tourism, financial services, some light industry, and even agriculture, but energy exports still provide the bulk of their revenues and large percentages of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Diversification from oil revenue has been in discussion for decades with certain countries, having now intensified their efforts in transitioning towards a green economy.

North African economies as well as those within the Horn of Africa are intertwined with those of the Gulf States. The latter play a significant role, not just economic, but also in terms of geopolitics, security and humanitarian engagement with the wider African continent – particularly the Red Sea Corridor.

Malta acknowledges the role of the Gulf states beyond their region and aims to seek effective collaboration between partners to ensure prosperity for all. Acknowledgement should also be made to the Gulf countries' increasing mediatory role in its region and beyond, which remain essential in contributing towards peace and stability.

MALTA'S OBJECTIVES IN THE GULF REGION

Malta's Regional Framework Policy for the Gulf aims to build on and deepen the existing partnership between Malta and the Gulf by advancing regional stability, identifying commercial and economic areas of cooperation, as well as building partnerships with countries in the region to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Malta's approach is guided by the principles established in our foreign policy, while Malta's positive standing with all countries in the region helps to leverage our expertise and multilateral engagement to contribute to a stable, interconnected future that benefits both regions.

Through this framework, Malta aims to:



Expand political dialogue, including but not limited to Political Consultations and Joint Commissions, and enhance bilateral and multilateral ties.



Unlock economic and commercial opportunities for sustainable trade and investment.



Promote engagement in key sectors such as water resource management, digital technologies, financial services and investment, logistics, tourism and hospitality, aviation, education, and climate, ocean and water diplomacy, maritime affairs to foster economic and environment development.



Contribute towards conflict resolution initiatives, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which is of strategic interest to the Gulf countries.

MAIN BILATERAL AGREEMENTS

Country	Avoidance of Double Taxation	Air Services Agreements	Foreign Ministry Political Consultations	Joint Commissions	Bilateral Investment Treaties
Bahrain	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Kuwait	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iran	X	X	X	X	X
Iraq	X	✓	X	X	X
Qatar	✓	✓	✓	X	X
Oman	X	✓ ¹	✓	X	X
Saudi Arabia	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
UAE	✓	✓	✓	✓	X
Yemen	X	✓	X	X	X

¹ EU-Oman Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement

POTENTIAL AREAS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GULF

While recognising that each of the countries in the Gulf have their own specificities, they do share common elements which may allow for a more streamlined approach at the regional level, alongside tailor-made approaches at the bilateral level.



Political Engagement

To maximise Malta's efforts to boost interaction with the region and achieve the desired goals, on a political level, Malta seeks to establish a framework for Political Consultations where this is not yet in place, strengthening Malta's engagement through periodic high-level meetings. Malta also aims to strengthen the framework of Joint Commissions with countries in the region, to hold periodic meetings with Governments concerned. Furthermore, in an effort to raise its visibility in the Gulf, Malta seeks to increase the frequency of high-level visits to and from the region.



Innovation

Malta has consistently sought to be ahead of the curve when it comes to technology, innovation, and the digital economy with the aim of gaining a strategic commercial advantage, striving to lead the way forward and to be a key player in these sectors. The Gulf offers possibilities for Malta to establish contacts with businesses and academic institutions specialising in the technology sector in order to explore avenues for potential collaboration in the region which in turn benefits our local economy.

- Creating investment opportunities for Maltese tech start-ups and businesses within the Gulf region
- Assisting in the exportation of technological solutions being developed locally
- Expanding support for joint research and development in the digital sphere
- Attracting companies/investors within the Gulf region to Malta
- Identification and participation in events, conferences, and summits in the region, building on Malta's established presence at GITEX
- Creating opportunities for investment and collaboration in film, TV, animation and visual effects

In addition, Malta's cooperation with the Gulf should build on the thematic areas identified in Malta's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 2021-2027). These thematic areas are niche sectors with a strong and high economic potential for growth in innovation. These include the priority areas of:

- Health and well-being, with a focus on cancer, cellular therapy, drug development, digital tools to support healthcare and long-term care, focusing on e-health and bioinformatics and biomedical engineering
- Sustainable use of resources for climate change mitigation and adaptation, with a focus on net-zero carbon buildings, renewable energy generation and energy storage solutions, resource efficiency in industry and turning waste into a resource
- Smart manufacturing, with a focus on sustainable manufacturing and flexible automation
- Marine and maritime technology, with a focus on the valorisation of marine resources and maritime technology
- Aviation and aerospace, with a focus on avionics, composite materials and development of new technologies for maintenance of new products
- Future Digital Technologies (this is both a vertical priority and a horizontal enabler for the former five areas), with a focus on big data and data analytics, open data, smart space applications, human-centric applications, digitizing industries and sustainable use of resources or climate change mitigation and adaptation

Financial Services and Investment

The Gulf region offers a unique opportunity to make things happen in terms of investment, as attested to by a high number of EU Member States putting in place joint investment vehicles with peers in the Gulf, whose objective is to offer a diversified investment portfolio for GCC countries and helping EU Member States to attain their economic objectives.

There are several opportunities for business to co-locate in Malta. Further growth opportunities lie within the following sectors: management of private wealth; banking and financial institutions; insurance and securitisation; funds and asset management; and fintech. Malta offers a number of opportunities with respect to such financial services sectors, amongst which are access to the EU and North and Sub-Saharan African markets; lower cost of business when compared to other EU jurisdictions; English as an official language; highly educated workforce; strong operational infrastructure with unique structuring opportunities; extensive Double Taxation Agreements and an accessible single financial services regulator.

Malta could be an attractive destination for financial services companies in the Gulf region due to its efficient tax system, regulatory framework, and strategic location, particularly for those investors looking to expand their footprint in Europe. Furthermore, Malta has a stable political and economic climate, making it also attractive for businesses looking to expand their operations. The Maltese financial services sector is well-developed, with a range of banking, insurance, fund management, and investment services available.

Additional areas that could be of interest to the Gulf region are wealth management and private equity, including the setting up of Family Offices in Malta.

Tourism and Hospitality

Malta seeks to cooperate on programmes related to travel, tourism, hospitality, and catering. Having a well-developed industry, Malta could offer advisory services (food safety, business management, human resources, operations) in catering and hospitality. Malta seeks to cooperate with interested partners to deliver a range of programmes of study. Through such institutes Malta may seek to establish a representative structure (ex: Satellite campus) to act as a bridge for accredited education programmes to be delivered in the region, or a steppingstone for the relocation of students to the campus in Malta and Gozo.

Connectivity

The aviation sector is a strong contributor to economic growth and the Gulf region offers great potential for Malta in this regard. The opening up of air services to this region is crucial for Malta as it ensures improved accessibility and air transport connectivity between Malta and the rest of the world. From the Gulf region, there are currently direct flights from Doha (Qatar Airways) and from Dubai via Larnaca (Emirates) to Malta.

In recent years, Malta has engaged in air services negotiations with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Bahrain and Oman and Air Services Agreements have been concluded with these countries providing the necessary regulatory framework and allowing the possibility for our airlines and airlines of the Gulf region to develop new routes and opportunities for the carriage of passengers and cargo. Moreover, Malta continued to work closely within the European Union and other EU Member States in seeking to develop comprehensive air transport agreements with third countries at the EU level. All of this has resulted in significant air transport growth, the creation of new employment opportunities in the sector as well as providing more choice and better value to the travelling public.

At an EU level, a comprehensive air transport agreement was signed between the European Union and the State of Qatar on 18 October 2021, the first such agreement between the EU and a partner from the Gulf region. The agreement will upgrade the rules and standards for flights between Qatar and the EU, and will set a new global benchmark by committing to strong, fair competition mechanisms, and including provisions not normally covered by bilateral air transport agreements, such as social or environmental matters. Furthermore, it is to be noted that the discussions between the EU and Oman on a comprehensive air transport agreement were completed in June 2020. Maritime connectivity is also another area worth focussing on as there is potential to deepen collaboration with Gulf ports for shared initiatives in logistics, shipping and maritime services, as well as potential to cooperate on smart port technologies and regional shipping initiatives.

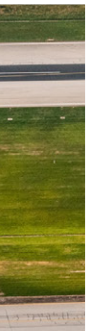


Education

Malta has the potential to be considered as a centre for the internationalisation of education, to attract both international education institutions that wish to explore the possibility of establishing a presence in Malta either through a strategic partnership with already established education institutions or through an own branch/stand-alone campus. Malta aims to attract students at all levels of studies including further and higher education to pursue studies in Malta at Malta's various education institutions.

Furthermore, as a bilingual country where both Maltese and English are widely spoken, Malta offers a unique advantage for international students. With its strong reputation as a quality English Language Teaching (ELT) destination, Malta provides an ideal environment for students to enhance their language skills while pursuing further and higher education.

The discussion on education can put a greater focus on cultural exchange and diplomacy: memoranda of understanding on cooperation in the cultural sector, as enacted with UAE (2021), may be sought with other Gulf States to deepen and strengthen the cultural ties between Malta and other Gulf States. These are steps in the right direction towards the attainment of active citizenship and people to people connectedness. It is essential to continue to seek to bridge the gaps in intercultural relationships including through interfaith dialogue and understanding as well as recognising the importance of cultural diversity via a coherent and integrated approach.



THE MULTILATERAL AGENDA

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Malta will continue to pursue a policy of working with countries in the region to pursue the joint achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, through supporting greater development engagement by the EU and other international actors, and through offering to exchange knowledge and experiences about actions in our respective societies aiming to address fundamental development concerns. This engagement is particularly necessary in view of the high levels of development in the region. From a humanitarian perspective, Malta will also continue to draw attention to humanitarian situations requiring urgent attention in the region, particularly in the case of Yemen, which is experiencing ongoing conflict with significant humanitarian consequences. Given the situation in Yemen, Malta has consistently provided humanitarian support to UN agencies working to address the humanitarian catastrophe affecting the country, with particular attention to the need to combat famine and the needs of children.

Multilateral Fora

Malta will continue to enhance its engagements with multilateral fora in the region notably with the GCC and IRENA.

The GCC's role in the region, in bringing its members together to discuss matters of common interest ranging from regional security to economic issues, remains of utmost importance. In seeking unison and consensus on topical issues, it is in Malta's interest to intensify its coordination with the GCC, which constitutes yet another avenue for significant cooperation on matters of common interest.

Malta officially joined the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in June 2009. Malta's commitment to renewable energy was further demonstrated in November 2020 when the country's first Permanent Representative to IRENA was appointed. Malta's active participation in IRENA reflects its commitment to advancing renewable energy and sustainability on both a national and international scale.

Therefore, in April 2024, Malta joined the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Lighthouse Initiative during the 14th session of the IRENA Assembly in Abu Dhabi. As a member of IRENA, Malta supports the sustainable use of renewable energies and is participating through cooperation with the University of Malta's Islands and Small States Institute (ISSI) in the SIDS Lighthouses Initiative to promote its islands and small states policy. The Lighthouses Initiative is a framework for action to support Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the transformation from fossil fuel dependence to a resilient renewables-based energy system. The initiative is also part of facilitating IRENA's Ambitious SIDS Climate Action Package: Accelerating Sustainable Energy in SIDS to achieve Energy Transition Targets by 2030. ISSI, also in cooperation with other academics based at the UM, has been collaborating with IRENA on a project that seeks to understand the urban solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation potential in SIDS, specifically assessing technical, socio-economic and financial barriers to PV uptake in the context of SIDS.



Furthermore, in January 2025, Malta joined the Global Offshore Wind Alliance (GOWA), a milestone which follows the Government's significant initiatives in advancing the offshore renewable energy sector. Malta's decision to join GOWA reflects its commitment to contributing to collaborative initiatives within the offshore wind energy sector. By engaging with international partners, Malta aims to accelerate the deployment of offshore renewable energy; a crucial element in global efforts to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

Within the wider framework of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Malta is engaging in climate change initiatives with countries in the Gulf region, notably through its participation in the Group of Friends of Culture-based Climate Action. This coalition, established during COP28 in December 2023 in the United Arab Emirates, comprises 27 countries committed to integrating culture as a central pillar in the global response to climate change. The UAE co-chairs this group, highlighting its leadership in the Gulf on climate action.

Malta also cooperates very closely with likeminded Gulf countries on climate and security initiatives within multilateral fora like the United Nations. On 21 March 2023, a number of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members including Malta and the UAE launched the Joint Pledges on Climate, Peace and Security, reaffirming the shared goal to systematise and advance the UNSC's efforts in delivering responsive, context-specific, and evidence-based approaches to directly tackle the real implications of climate change for the maintenance of international peace and security.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Malta's policy towards the Gulf Region factors in the context of an increasingly tense global environment, characterised by great power competition and unprecedented challenges to the rules-based international order. This heightens the importance of diplomatic efforts which remain at the forefront of Malta's relations with the Gulf.

As such engagement with the Gulf region should continue to be anchored in Malta's belief that the International Community must strengthen commitments to not only consolidate, but defend multilateral institutions and processes while pursuing avenues for dialogue. Dialogue remains the key building block in our approach towards this region and in deepening our existing partnerships with the Gulf countries and regional institutions. As a result, and through this framework, Malta will work incessantly to expand its political, bilateral and multilateral ties while advancing economic and commercial opportunities for the sake of pursuing sustainable trade and investment. In so doing, Malta will continue to promote engagement in key sectors while seeking to contribute towards conflict resolution initiatives in close cooperation with the Gulf countries.

Crucial to all of this is bolstering Malta's well-established relationship with the Gulf countries and the regional institutions through a tailor-made approach. Adopting such an approach enables for a dynamic relationship with the Gulf countries and regional institutions that can continue to evolve and grow by building on ongoing cooperation and tapping into new potential areas of engagement for the sake of mutual benefit.

Underlining all of this is the need to ensure that this Framework - crucial as it is in guiding Malta's relationship with the Gulf countries and regional institutions for the next 3 years - is consistently updated. This is important in catering for any new developments and changing realities which Malta would then also address through its foreign policy agenda towards the Gulf Region. This dynamism also remains crucial in guiding our approach when formulating the upcoming Framework for the Gulf Region.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The strategy will be implemented through a whole-of-government approach, ensuring coordination and coherence between ministries, embassies, and all relevant stakeholders.

Collaboration with regional and international partners will be essential in advancing the framework's goals, with consistent and regular monitoring to ensure accountability and alignment with changing priorities.

Appoint a Government Envoy for the Gulf Region

The Government Envoy will focus on assisting the development of trade, investment and economic relations with countries in GCC countries, promoting engagement in sectors of interest while also promoting interests of Maltese companies in the region.

Annual Progress Evaluation

Develop annual progress reports to assess the impact of Malta's engagement in the Gulf region and recalibrate priorities as necessary with realistic targets which take account the varied political and demographic circumstances in the different Gulf countries.

Consultation Mechanism

Regularly consult both bilaterally and with regional organisations to ensure that Malta's initiatives complement ongoing Gulf projects.

In order to measure the impact and effectiveness of this RFP, clear metrics to evaluate the success of Malta's framework, ensuring alignment with Malta's foreign policy goals and the goals established in this framework, will be established. Furthermore, the outcomes to adapt to the evolving dynamics in the region ensuring the frameworks' relevance and effectiveness, will be reviewed.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AUM – American University of Malta

BITs – Bilateral Investment Treaties

CEPA – Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement

EEAS – European External Action Service

ELT – English Language Teaching

EUSR – European Union Special Representative

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

GCTP - Global Council for Tolerance and Peace

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GOWA – Global Offshore Wind Alliance

IRENA - International Renewable Energy Agency

ISSI – Islands Small and Small States Institute

KSA – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

MCC - Malta Chamber of Commerce

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

PV – Photovoltaic

RFP - Regional Framework Policy

SIDS – Small Island Developing States

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

UAE – United Arab Emirates

UM - University of Malta

UNSC – United Nations Security Council



