INTRODUCTION

BUSSOLA RESEARCH PILLARS AND PROGRAMMES

RESEARCH PILLAR 1:
POLITICS AND SECURITY

EVENTS

1. ROUNDTABLE: IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT FOR THE EU AND THE GULF – MARCH 2020
4. WEBINAR - THE WAY FORWARD IN LIBYA – JULY 2020

PUBLICATIONS

1. BREXIT, THE EU, AND RELATIONS WITH THE GCC STATES
2. THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK: IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE GULF
3. REBOOTING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS
4. EXTREMISM IN THE TIME OF COVID-19
5. POST COVID-19 EUROPE: A SHIFT IN STRATEGIC DIRECTION
6. THE WAY FORWARD FOR LIBYA
7. THE ABRAHAM ACCORD – A CASE FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE
8. DIVERSIFYING RELATIONSHIPS: RUSSIAN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GCC
9. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR AFRICA: EU AND GCC CONVERGENCES
13 RESEARCH PILLAR 2: ECONOMICS AND TECHNOLOGY

14 EVENTS

14 1. WEBINAR: COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON EU-GCC-ASIA CONNECTIVITY – JUNE 2020
14 2. WEBINAR: TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER – JULY 2020
15 3. WEBINAR: TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN EU-GCC TRADE RELATIONS – AUGUST 2020

16 PUBLICATIONS

16 1. CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL AND ASIA
16 2. PROMOTING AN EU-GCC CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA: WATER SECURITY PRIORITIES
16 3. EU AND GCC AVIATION AND TOURISM: FROM A HISTORIC CRISIS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY
17 4. SAUDI ARABIA’S G20 PRESIDENCY - THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ADVANCING GLOBAL COOPERATION IN A PANDEMIC
17 5. A DETAILED ANATOMY OF EU-GCC TRADE RELATIONS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE
18 RESEARCH PILLAR 3: CULTURE AND SOCIETY

19 EVENTS

19 1. PRAYER IN A TIME OF CRISIS: SOLIDARITY THROUGH FAITH – MAY 2020

19 2. TBUSOLA CULTURAL WEBINAR: SOLIDARITY IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC – AUGUST 2020

20 PUBLICATIONS

20 1. THE EU, TURKEY AND REFUGEES: THE NEED FOR HUMANITARIAN APPROACHES

21 CONCLUSION AND OUTCOMES

22 BUSSOLA’S VISION, MISSION AND VALUES
2020 was a year that suddenly and unexpectedly brought the world to a shuddering halt, bringing social, economic and political consequences that will continue to reshape how we live, work and interact with each other for many years to come.

Having developed an extensive programme of research and engagement for 2020 in consultation with European and Gulf interests, the Bussola Institute moved quickly to adapt its programme of work and its mode of operation to allow it to continue pursuing scholarship and debate on issues of shared interest to both regions.

Therefore, despite the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic early in the year, Bussola continued to build a successful research presence in Brussels throughout 2020 while complying fully with the strict measures introduced to combat the spread of the virus. Although Bussola staff worked from home for most of the year, the institute managed to carry out the very substantial programme of work detailed in this Annual Review across all of its research pillars and programmes of activity.

I am enormously proud of the extent to which the Bussola staff team has continued to develop the organisation throughout this difficult and unprecedented time of crisis, maintaining a strong focus on delivering our mission through judicious planning, astute development of its engagement and partnerships and enthusiastically embracing the new world of virtual communications and webinar events.

Throughout 2020, the Bussola Institute was supported by the eminent and enormously experienced members of its Honorary Advisory Board, who have continued to provide a unique level of policy and strategic oversight for the institute and to participate in our projects and events. I also want to acknowledge the immense support we received throughout the year from our distinguished Board of Directors, who provided critical leadership in guiding and directing the work of the institute through this enormously challenging period.

In 2021, Bussola will continue to explore and debate the implications of the pandemic for both Europe and the Gulf and, as the world slowly emerges from this unprecedented period of uncertainty, our research programme will focus on the emerging power relationships that impact on both regions and the evolving challenges and opportunities for closer cooperation presented by issues such as climate change, new technologies and the importance of appreciating our shared humanity and human solidarity.

I sincerely hope that, in 2021, medical and scientific developments will have begun to facilitate some level of return to personal interaction around the world and allow for Bussola to re-engage with friends and colleagues of the institute at its headquarters in Square de Meeûs in Brussels.

John Dennehy
Secretary General, Bussola Institute
March 2021
As the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, the need for reliable research, evidence and analysis that can inform political debate and public policy has never been greater. The Bussola Institute produces high-quality, independent, innovative research and objective analysis that supports the development of deeper understanding and stronger relationships between the Gulf states (GCC) and the European Union (EU).

Bussola’s research is designed to be interdisciplinary and overlapping as many current issues and challenges are interlinked. Taken together, this results in a comprehensive research and events programme with key outcomes that promote better understanding of critical Gulf issues and emphasise the potential for deepening constructive partnerships between the EU and the GCC countries.

The Bussola Institute’s programme of research is based on the three pillars that support GCC-EU relationships: Politics and Security; Economics and Technology and Society and Culture. These pillars mirror the most significant levers of national and international power. They are also designed to reflect the primary areas of interest and engagement between the two regions.

A range of issues frame relationships between Europe and the Gulf region which emphasise the logic of Bussola’s three-pillar approach as follows:
The **Politics and Security** pillar encompasses the multiple and multifaceted levels of political and security challenges that have an impact on the domestic, regional and international outlook for stability in the Gulf region, Europe and beyond. This includes the status of EU-GCC relations, potential ways to advance the changing security paradigm of the Arabian Peninsula and its implications for Europe. Programmes pursued under the Politics and Security pillar in 2020 included:

- Political Strategic Assessment
- The Changing Security Paradigms
- NATO and the GCC: A New Partnership

The **Economics and Technology** pillar focuses on the economic foundation of the Gulf states and continuing efforts to diversify economic activity away from energy dependence towards the development of knowledge economies that can play a leading role as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Particular emphasis is given in Bussola’s programme of research and engagement to addressing the challenges posed by climate change and the development of digital societies. Programmes pursued under the Economic and Technology pillar in 2020 included:

- Towards a New and Post-Oil Economy
- Climate Change
- The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The **Society and Culture** pillar highlights the key social and cultural elements that have an impact on Gulf-Europe relationships, providing for expansion of networks and a differentiated framework in which relationships can thrive and prosper. Areas covered include gender, youth, media, education and the arts, as well as promoting tolerance, diversity and inclusion. Programmes pursued under the Society and Culture pillar in 2020 included:

- Broadening Youth Engagement
- The Values That Bind Us: Tolerance, Diversity and Inclusion
- Art, Music and Literature
1. **Roundtable: Implications of Brexit For the EU and The Gulf – March 2020**

The Bussola Institute hosted this roundtable discussion to consider the likely implications that the UK’s departure from the EU would have for the EU’s foreign and security policy and status, particularly in relation to the Gulf region. Given the size of the UK economy and its historic ties with the Gulf, the impact of Brexit on future relations with the region was likely to be felt politically, strategically, and economically. One issue that the roundtable explored in this regard was whether the UK would emerge as a competitor for the EU in terms of a potential free trade agreement with the GCC, or in other aspects of preferential treatment for both goods and services. The roundtable examined how existing strategic relationships were likely to evolve in the wake of Brexit and the potential consequences for the region’s wider relations with the EU and its individual member states. The roundtable also considered how Brexit might impact on the EU’s political relations with the Gulf states, particularly at a time of shifting political priorities and polarities.


Given the already-emerging impacts of the first wave of the pandemic, particularly at its epicentre in Europe, the Bussola Institute organised a webinar focusing on the possible implications of COVID-19 on the future of relations between Europe and the Arab Gulf. The focus of the discussion was on the economic, societal, and strategic issues that would inevitably have to be addressed as societies in both regions started to regain their momentum, while trying to avoid a prolonged period of economic downturn and social stagnation. The webinar also considered other potential repercussions that might arise from the immediate measures being taken to overcome COVID-19 in the wider context of the EU-GCC relationship.

The Bussola Institute organised this unique webinar entitled “Post-COVID-19 Europe: A Shift in Strategic Direction?” with the members of the Honorary Advisory Board of the institute. Former President of the Government of Spain, José María Aznar, former President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, former NATO chief and Danish Prime Minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, former Croatian Prime Minister, Jadranka Kosor and former European Commissioner and Greek Minister Anna Diamantopoulou discussed Europe’s post-COVID strategy and relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council states. The debate was moderated by Mr Antonio López-Istúriz White MEP, Secretary General of the European People’s Party and Sergei Stanishev MEP, President of the Party of European Socialists and former Bulgarian Prime Minister, was also in attendance. Universal concern was expressed in relation to the impact of the pandemic, both in terms of its direct consequences for the health and well-being of citizens across the EU and the Gulf, and its economic effects across both regions. While there was broad agreement that responding to the pandemic had presented both regions with a number of challenges, it was also agreed that the pandemic has created new possibilities to accelerate change, and to embrace fresh thinking and innovation.

4. **Webinar - The Way Forward in Libya – July 2020**

The Bussola Institute welcomed panellists from the European External Action Service and the Gulf Cooperation Council, among others, to a webinar to discuss the way forward for Libya. The June 2020 Cairo Declaration proposed a ceasefire in Libya followed by the withdrawal of all foreign military forces and mercenaries and the disarming of the civilian population as the precursor to national elections for a new assembly. The EU and the leaders of Germany, France and Italy welcomed the Cairo initiative and called for a ceasefire based on the framework put forward at the January 2020 Berlin conference. This webinar sought to explore the opportunities which might arise from the Cairo Declaration and subsequent support from the EU. It further aimed to examine the prospects for a peaceful outcome to Libya’s challenges and to identify steps that would be essential to facilitating the political process.
1. BREXIT, THE EU, AND RELATIONS WITH THE GCC STATES

This paper considers how relations between the EU, the UK and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are likely to be affected following the UK’s formal exit from the EU on 31 January 2020. It suggests that, while many aspects of this triangular relationship are unlikely to change substantially, there is likely to be increasing competition between the UK and EU in pursuit of economic and strategic relations with the Arab Gulf states.

2. THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK: IMPLICATIONS FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE GULF

In this research paper, the Bussola Institute provides an overview of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in Europe and the Gulf region and analyses some of the key implications, both regionally and globally, of this global pandemic. The paper focuses on some of the likely medium-term consequences of pandemic interventions and their potential implications in both Europe and the Gulf.

3. REBOOTING THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

This paper argues that, in light of the reduced US commitment to, and involvement in, the region, and the lack of confidence in Washington’s role as a non-partisan actor, an opportunity is opening for the EU to work strategically with allies in the GCC to pursue a fresh approach to finding an effective means of breaking the impasse in the region.

4. EXTREMISM IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world in 2020 has been profound. This research paper discusses how extremists are taking advantage of global uncertainty to further narratives of divisiveness and hatred, sometimes leading to acts of violence. Extremists and ideologues have been swift in their efforts to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to blame established governments, to disseminate misinformation and to sow further unease amongst vulnerable, and sometimes naive, populations.
5. **POST COVID-19 EUROPE: A SHIFT IN STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

This publication summarises the contributions of the members of Bussola’s Honorary Advisory Board to the rich and diverse discussion in a public debate on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which focused particularly on likely and possible shifts in direction for European and Gulf policy and strategy in the coming post-COVID-19 world. This short summary also offers a number of recommendations for further lines of research and analysis which may shape and guide policy-making in the months and years ahead, especially with regard to encouraging closer EU-Gulf cooperation and collaboration in the future.

6. **THE WAY FORWARD FOR LIBYA**

This report presents the key points from the webinar organised by the Bussola Institute to discuss the way forward in Libya, in June 2020. In the course of the webinar, the panel sought to explore the opportunities which might arise from the Cairo Declaration and subsequent support from the EU. It further aimed to examine the prospects for a peaceful outcome to Libya’s challenges and to identify steps that are essential to facilitate the political process. The report outlines the key points that were made during this virtual event.

7. **THE ABRAHAM ACCORD – A CASE FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE**

In this opinion piece, it is argued that the historic agreement reached by the UAE to stop Israel from further annexation of Palestinian territory represents a continuation of the UAE’s traditional role as a major supporter of the Palestinian people and their struggle to regain their legitimate rights and reflects its increasing stature as a pioneer of peaceful coexistence in the region and across the world.

8. **DIVERSIFYING RELATIONSHIPS: RUSSIAN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GCC**

This paper studies Moscow’s foreign policy towards the GCC within the framework of Russia’s growing role in the Middle East, its desire to protect its national interests using a wide range of means and the limited availability of resources to achieve these goals. The study is not, however, solely focused on Russia’s bilateral relations with individual GCC states. It also examines areas of divergence and convergence between Moscow and the Gulf on a wide range of regional and international issues including, but not limited to, the Syrian civil war and Iran’s regional activities.
9. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR AFRICA: EU AND GCC CONVERGENCE

In the last two decades, the countries of the GCC have significantly expanded their influence economically, politically, and diplomatically on the African continent. This paper seeks to explore the potential for collaboration between the GCC States and the EU in supporting and enhancing development in Africa.
Webinar: G20 - The Challenges and Opportunities of Advancing Global Cooperation in a Pandemic – November 2020

RESEARCH PILLAR 2: ECONOMICS AND TECHNOLOGY

The Bussola Institute organised this webinar to assess the impact of COVID-19 on connectivity between the EU, the GCC States and Asia. A group of invited experts discussed the shifting geo-strategic and geo-economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and how connectivity between the different geo-political regions involved was likely to be affected by this unprecedented and increasingly unpredictable global challenge.

2. **Webinar: Technology, Research Networks and Knowledge Transfer – July 2020**

The Bussola Institute arranged a webinar entitled “Technology, Research Networks and Knowledge Transfer: Promoting Collaboration and Investment between the GCC and the EU”, to explore ways to promote co-investment and encourage cooperation, particularly using technology and digital innovation, to address the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. A panel of experts from Europe and the Gulf explored ways in which the EU and the GCC might develop stronger research networks to contribute to better and more effective knowledge transfer and encourage a shared understanding of their digital future. There was also a focus on establishing stronger links between young people in both regions and exploring how these could be used to broaden mutual understanding.
3. **Webinar: Trends and Opportunities in EU-GCC Trade Relations – August 2020**

The Bussola Institute held a special webinar on future trade opportunities in the context of EU-GCC relations. A panel of distinguished experts from both regions, including the EU Trade Commissioner, delivered key insights, and explored how the EU and the GCC might develop stronger trade relations, and possibly move towards a Free Trade Agreement between both blocs, in a challenging post-pandemic period. The high-level panel examined the characteristics and challenges of economic trade between the EU and the GCC, commented on the key debates on the issues, and discussed the ways in which the economic relationship between the EU and the GCC might be addressed in the context of the respective priorities of both regions.

4. **Webinar: G20 - The Challenges and Opportunities of Advancing Global Cooperation in a Pandemic – November 2020**

The Bussola Institute hosted this webinar ahead of the G20 Virtual Leaders’ Summit on 21-22 November 2020 under the Presidency of Saudi Arabia. A panel of experts, including senior advisors from Saudi’s G20 Secretariat, examined whether, in the face of an unprecedented worldwide pandemic, it had been possible for the Saudi G20 Presidency to make real progress towards achieving its stated goal of “Realising Opportunities of the 21st Century for All.”
1. CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL AND ASIA

This paper examines the multiple ways in which connections between the GCC and the rising powers of Asia are evolving. In particular, it considers the impact of China’s Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) and how this seems likely to increase the GCC’s focus on Asia, potentially at the expense of its historic economic and security ties with Europe and the US.

2. PROMOTING AN EU-GCC CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA: WATER SECURITY PRIORITIES

This research paper addresses the water security challenges in the GCC countries in the context of climate change. It highlights the climate change impacts on water security in these countries and their priority adaptation actions, as indicated by the countries’ national communication reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Key areas of cooperation opportunities and convergences between the GCC countries and the EU in the climate change agenda are highlighted, with particular reference to the EU’s Green Deal 2020.

3. EU AND GCC AVIATION AND TOURISM: FROM A HISTORIC CRISIS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY

This paper argues that, going forward, both the EU and GCC should align their Covid-19 recovery measures for the aviation and tourism sectors under two core targets: creating decent, sustainable jobs and aligning with the global climate goals.

Publications

In 2020, Bussola’s Pillar 2 research programme published the following papers:

1. CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL AND ASIA
2. PROMOTING AN EU-GCC CLIMATE CHANGE AGENDA: WATER SECURITY PRIORITIES
3. EU AND GCC AVIATION AND TOURISM: FROM A HISTORIC CRISIS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY
4. SAUDI ARABIA’S G20 PRESIDENCY - THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ADVANCING GLOBAL COOPERATION IN A PANDEMIC

This report provides an overview of the discussion hosted by the Bussola Institute on the challenges and opportunities of advancing global cooperation in a pandemic during Saudi Arabia’s G20 presidency. The G20 objective for 2020 was “Realising Opportunities of the 21st Century for All”. This webinar discussed in detail the three themes of the Saudi G20 agenda, namely empowering people, safeguarding the planet and shaping new frontiers by adopting long-term and bold strategies to share the benefits of innovation and technological advancement.

5. A DETAILED ANATOMY OF EU-GCC TRADE RELATIONS: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

This paper outlines the principles that govern the foreign economic strategies of the EU and GCC countries, as well as briefly describing the formal results of diplomatic efforts aimed at deepening economic ties between the two blocs. It also describes in detail the current status of trade relations between the EU and GCC and examines the future prospects for the trade relationship between the two, including the possibility of concluding a Free Trade Agreement.
1. **Prayer in a Time of Crisis: Solidarity Through Faith – May 2020**

As part of its ongoing interfaith programme, “The Values that Bind Us”, the Bussola Institute organised this unique webinar entitled "Prayer in A Time of Crisis: Solidarity Through Faith". The event sought to explore how the principles enshrined in the Document on “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” signed by the Pope and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi in 2019, could be mobilised in this time of crisis to promote a culture of tolerance, cooperation and solidarity that would enable humankind to address the enormous global challenges surfaced by the COVID-19 pandemic. The webinar was held in conjunction with the “Prayers for Humanity” initiative of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, the group dedicated to sharing the Human Fraternity Document’s message of mutual understanding and peace.

2. **Bussola Cultural Webinar: Solidarity in A Time of Pandemic – August 2020**

The Bussola Institute organised this unique online cultural event which reflected the themes of solidarity and shared experience during this unprecedented time of pandemic. Four accomplished musicians introduced musical compositions combining Arabic sounds and Western melodic flavours, showcasing
fusion across world music: the flute and harp from Europe alongside the oud and traditional percussion instruments used in Arabic music. The webinar opened with a piece specially composed for the event, which also provided a soundtrack to a video commissioned for the occasion which showcased images depicting shared humanity and human solidarity that had emerged during the pandemic. The musicians also played individual pieces and discussed what these, and their music signified for them in this time of crisis for humanity.

1. THE EU, TURKEY AND REFUGEES: THE NEED FOR HUMANITARIAN APPROACHES

This paper argues that the agreements reached between the EU and Turkey to manage the refugee crisis have not resulted in a humanitarian approach to the issue. Instead, these arrangements continue to be marked by a divisive and politicised discourse that reflects underlying tensions between the two parties, rather than addressing the urgent requirements of a vulnerable population. The paper addresses the problems created by this approach to handling the refugee situation and explores options for pursuing a more humanitarian approach.
Despite the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic early in the year, Bussola continued to build a successful research presence in Brussels throughout 2020.

Having developed an extensive research and engagement plan for the year in consultation with European and Gulf interests, it continued to pursue scholarship and debate on issues of shared interest to both regions.

While complying fully with the new structures introduced to combat the pandemic meant that Bussola staff worked from home for most of the year, the institute managed to carry out the very substantial programme of work detailed above across all of its pillars and programmes.

In the course of 2020, the Bussola Institute significantly re-shaped its strategic plan to accommodate the very significant political, economic and societal shifts brought about by the impacts of the pandemic across the globe and enthusiastically embraced the new world of virtual meetings and webinar events.

In 2021, Bussola will continue to explore and debate the implications of the pandemic for both the Arab Gulf and Europe, as the world slowly emerges from an unprecedented period of tumult and uncertainty to deal with an emerging tapestry of evolving power relationships and the ever-present challenges and opportunities presented by issues such as climate change, new technologies and perhaps a greater appreciation for our shared humanity and human solidarity.

2021 is also likely to see Bussola return to its headquarters in Square de Meeûs in Brussels, where it will continue to undertake and disseminate collaborative, cutting-edge research, develop strong, strategic partnerships and organise events to promote public debate, influence change and advance new thinking on relations between Europe and the Gulf.
BUSSOLA’S VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

VISION
The vision of the Bussola Institute is to be a world-class Research Institute that is acknowledged as the premier source of understanding and knowledge concerning relations between Europe and the Gulf states.

MISSION
The Mission of the Bussola Institute is to generate and share information and knowledge, that fosters improved understanding and promotes stronger Gulf-European relations through rigorous research and objective analysis.

VALUES
- Bussola is committed to developing evidence-based, innovative research and objective analysis, free from bias or political influence.
- Bussola aims to be regarded as a trusted and independent research centre through delivering impartial advice, learned opinion and credible analysis.
- Bussola believes in the vital importance of open communication, consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, including Governments, the European Union and the wider community of internationally respected organisations, research institutes, academia and individuals.
- Bussola is committed to the principles of continuous improvement, innovation and evaluation which will underpin all of its activities.
- Bussola is dedicated to delivering excellence and innovation in all its work and will measure and evaluate the quality of its output against the highest international standards.
- The achievement of Bussola’s goals is underpinned by sound governance and supportive systems within the institute.
- Bussola values its staff and will create a nurturing environment where all staff and associates can learn, develop and contribute to the goals of the institute.
- Bussola is accountable and respectful in its dealings with partners, stakeholders, suppliers and staff.