

**ГОСТЬ РЕДАКЦИИ****INTERVIEW WITH THE HIS EXCELLENCY DR. AHMED AL SAATI,  
THE AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN  
TO THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

*The magazine «Russia and Asia» is considered to be a platform for the dissemination and publication of results of scientific research of the Asian countries, in particular the Gulf states. The goal of the magazine is to bring together researchers and/or entrepreneurs interested in developing scientific and practical knowledge.*

*«Russia and Asia» aims to expand the knowledge of our fellow citizens about Bahrain and other states of the Arabian Peninsula. It can be interesting for students, scientists, entrepreneurs, investors, tourists and other citizens. Therefore, we kindly ask you to answer a few questions about Bahrain, the opportunities and directions for the development of relations between Russia and Bahrain.*

**Is there any difference between Bahrain and other countries in the GCC? If so, what are they?**

GCC countries have many things in common – history, traditions, and culture. But at the same time each country has its own identity. Bahrain is known for its openness. Cultural and religious aspects were historically important elements of the openness of the country. Bahrain enjoys its political and religious freedoms. The island traditionally had been the regional trade center. The people of Bahrain are considered to be generous, kind and hospitable and very tolerant to strangers and foreigners. During the centuries Bahrain was influenced by different civilizations starting from Sumerian and others. It's worth mentioning that Bahrain was the first destination of Prophet Mohammed first envoy for islam mission and the first country in the Arabian Peninsula to embrace Islam. Bahrain used to have strong links with Persia, India, Oman and other countries.

These specific characteristic influenced and helped to raise open-minded generation.

Bahrain is a pioneer nation in different fields. Bahrain was the first country among GCC, where schools were open for boys and girls (next year we'll celebrate 100 years). In 1932 the first bore-hole that gave oil was Bahrain. The first coloured TV set appeared in Bahrain. The first airport was built in Bahrain. The first daily newspaper was printed in Bahrain. First record studios in the region were opened in the country. First cinema, first theatre, first hospital (American Mission Hospital), first elected chamber of trade in the region etc. These are the most important facts about Bahrain.

During the pearl period Bahrainis were the most sophisticated pearl divers. Cartier himself used to travel to Bahrain to buy pearls. During the oil period we have started diversifying our economy – we created new industries. We are quite flexible and get adopted fast to the new conditions. So we didn't panic after the drop of oil prices. We have been developing finance, tourism and trade. Bahrain is dynamically developing people and country.

The rulers of the country are very close to their people. The interaction takes place on the regular basis. His Majesty the King started reforms in 2000, 11 years before the Arab spring. He released the prisoners, announced the freedom of speech, allowed the political migrants to return, political parties were established. Our dynamic development allowed us to be seen on the map despite our tiny territory. The king builds good relations with all.

That's why the British choose Bahrain, when their regional center and they colonised the region.

To sum up each GCC country adds value to the regional group. Oman – with its location, Kuwait – with its oil reserves, UAE – with its trade and business, Saudi Arabia – with its territory and human capital. GCC became distinguished economic and political power and a very well organized alliance.

**Which countries are currently the most attractive for Bahrain in terms of trade and economy? Are there any changes in the geography of foreign economic activity of Bahrain? Do they affect the global hydrocarbon market or other global markets or spheres (for example, scientific and technological development)?**

We have instructions from His Majesty the King to look East and West and from the South to the North. We chose what suits us in different aspects starting from military equipment and IT to agricultural products and others.

We choose what is suiting us. We have relations with all countries that's why you find in Bahrain all nationalities, confessions and companies from many countries.

Bahrain is not isolated. If trend goes to China, we have good relations with China. We follow markets trends, we don't exclude anybody.

Now we are discovering relations with Russia, we found new fields for cooperation. These are oil business, IT, arts, education, etc. We discovered the treasure, which was blocked for us during the USSR era.

**How is the economic relationship between Russia and Bahrain developing today? Are there Russian-Bahraini enterprises in Russia and in Bahrain and, if so, in which areas? Which sectors in Bahrain could you recommend for Russian entrepreneurs and investors?**

The economic relationship is not very efficient and below our potentials. It maybe due to the lack of marketing experience of the Russian side. The business connections are not growing fast, though we wish our relations to be of a higher level. Russia has huge manufacturing sector, energy and agricultural industries, but trade turnover between Russia and Arab countries is lagging behind.

That is why we are working closely with the Russian-Arab Business Council and the Russian ministries such as the Ministry of Industry. We organize forums, exhibitions and exchange visits of officials, investors and businessmen. Hopefully in the next coming 5 years the trade is to increase by 50%. But we can not isolate politics from the economy, that is why we encourage Russia to understand our needs and protect the security in the region against the aggression coming from Iran and Israel towards the stability and peace in the Middle East.

### **What advantages can be gained by Russia from cooperation with Bahrain?**

We are now working on the idea or concept of establishing a regional hub for Russia, especially for such sectors as food industry, oil and services. We try to stimulate and facilitate establishments of Russian Bahrain joint companies. We received a lot of positive responses from Russian businessmen. Even Denis Manturov, the Minister of Industry, announced that Bahrain will be one of the Russian hubs in the region, from where Russian companies can spread to other regions. You should take into consideration that exports of the Bahrain products are not customs tax due.

### **What are the economic interests of Bahrain in Russia?**

I think it's mainly food. We are importing wheat from Australia, other products from China and Europe, but we see that it's cheaper and of higher quality from Russia. Pure drinking water is another product. Russia owns almost 40% of the world water resources and we suffer lack of drinking water. We should think about how to transport water to our region.

Another important position is technology. I have been struck when I have visited the Skolkovo park. We have started communicating – a delegation will come from Bahrain soon. Maybe Skolkovo will provide us with smart solutions.

Civil construction, medical and health care spheres are of our interest, too. We are negotiating with one of the Russian clinics the possibility of establishing in Bahrain a regional cancer center.

### **In your opinion, can EU and US sanctions against Russia somehow (how?) affect the development of Russian-Bahraini relations?**

I think this should be an advantage for Russia to open new markets, and the Arabia is a good market, we have high consumption and all GCC airlines will have daily flights to Moscow soon. This is a good reason for Russia to speed up to open to the GCC market.

### **How does the development of integration processes within the framework of the GCC affect the Russian-Bahraini relations? Can these relations, in turn, affect the integration processes?**

We are talking about Bahrain as a gateway to GCC. When Russian businesses come to Bahrain, they don't come to the island, but to the region. Because they can spread their activities through the Arabian Peninsula. And it's a very positive effect. Each country, member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, has its own advantages, needs and potentials.

### **Are there already the results of those official visits of the leaders of our countries that were held in 2017?**

Yes, prior to His Majesty's visits to Russia we couldn't make anything. He opened the doors and made huge push towards development of mutual relations. During his 3 Royal visits and visits of Crown Prince many agreements were signed between Bahrain and Russia, and there is something like check list or road map, where the King checks what we have achieved. And this is very important.

We wish president V. Putin comes to Bahrain, after the elections we hope to see him there.

**What are the obstacles for the development of trade and economic relations between Russia and Bahrain? What steps, in your opinion, should be taken to eliminate them?**

Bahrain Russian Business Council was founded nearly 25 years ago, but unfortunately the result is under our ambitions. There is a meeting only once a year, the inability of the Russian partners to communicate in English language is another problem. After leaving Bahrain we expect the Russian side to follow up.

The Russian businesses are no efficient in promoting and marketing abroad. They need to improve their promotion skills though we can see many Russian companies have very valuable and sophisticated products and services. Their promotion materials are usually not in English, which is international language for business. The best way to overcome these obstacles is to establish Russian Trade Mission Center in Bahrain affiliated to the Embassy of Russia or private sector, where they can promote Russian products and services and to provide Russian companies with information.

**How comfortable can Russian citizens feel in Bahrain - as tourists, entrepreneurs, investors? What traditions or characteristics of Bahrain, including economic ones, could be of interest to Russians and attract their interest to your beautiful country?**

I think it's better to invite tourists to see with their eyes how Bahrain looks like. I can say that life in Bahrain is similar to Russia. We have beaches, bars, night clubs, open life style, shopping malls. Whatever they can do in Russia, they can do in Bahrain. We encourage women in Bahrain, they are actively involved in business.

**What can be alluring for us in Bahrain in the cultural and historical context? In the gastronomy?**

There are friendship associations in Bahrain and Russia, also there is Russian speaking community in Bahrain. About 500 Bahrainis graduated from Russian and Soviet universities, some of them married to the Russian ladies. We have Russian language school. But unfortunately in Russia we don't have such diaspora, we are working on creating such community in Moscow. I believe such societies can help a lot in bringing both countries together and I also think that social and cultural fields can help a lot to the economy.

**Do you think there is a need to intensify the "promotion" of Bahrain in Russia to attract tourists, entrepreneurs, investors from Russia to Bahrain and vice versa? What can be done for this? Speaking of the "brand of Bahrain", the most recognizable symbol, what could it be? And what could be the "brand of Russia" in Bahrain?**

Last year in Moscow we opened a tourism promotion office with Russian team, they are doing good business and promote Bahrain. We have daily flights of Gulf Air. In our embassy we have just started trade section, which connects all Russian republics and regions and it functions like information center and link between Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bahrain and the Russian regions. We are also publishing Embassy's news bulletin, which include information about business opportunities in Bahrain. We have social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram accounts to introduce Bahrain to the Russian people and sometimes we issue special editions like tourism guide directories.

**What experience could Bahrain, including in the integration sphere, share with us?**

We have mostly the same background. We consider Russia being an Eastern country, close to the oriental mentality culture, family values and we feel that the Russians are closer to the Arabs than to the West.

So, I think we can work in so many fields together – business, social sphere, tourism, politics. I find it very important to launch Islamic banking. We have Islamic banking, this will open huge window for the investment and development of Russia through the Islamic financial institutions. I think Russia should take fast steps because we see in USA, EU, Japan, China and other banks open branches just for Islamic services. I wonder why this process is delayed here in Russia all these years, though you have 20% of muslims of Russia's population. They don't have access to the Islamic banking services. This bank can work under total supervision of the Russian Government and comply with the Russian law.

**What kind of cooperation with Russia could be beneficial and relevant for the Kingdom in the scientific and educational sphere?**

Russia is a very advanced in space and nuclear energy. They can be very helpful to start space sciences and we are in our way to sign MoU with Roscosmos and encourage Roscosmos to open a center in Bahrain for commercial business. I believe that most Arab countries want to get benefits and services provided by Roscosmos. It is worth establishing a study center in Bahrain for medical treatment.



**Interviewer:**

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