

NUMOV Near and Middle East Annual Conference 2009

by Alexandra Kottisch



f.l.t.r.: H.E. Prof. Dr. Maliha Zulfacar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Germany; H.E. Ahmad Muhammad Aldoseri, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to Germany; H.E. Jamal Ali Omar El-Baraq, Ambassador of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to Germany; H.E. Moncef Ben Abdallah, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Germany and Doyen of the Arab Ambassadors in Germany; Dieter Ernst, Member of the Board of NUMOV and Chairman of the Board of Berlinwasser International AG; H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Germany; H.E. Alaa Al-Hashimy, Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to Germany; H.E. Dr. Hussein Omran, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to Germany; H.E. Hael Al-Fahoum, Palestine General Delegate to Germany

As it has become a tradition over the past years, this year's general meeting and annual gala event was again accompanied by a NUMOV – Near and Middle East Annual Economic Conference. As a highlight and appropriate to the occasion of the 75th anniversary of NUMOV, the conference assembled high-ranking speakers. Chaired by **Dieter Ernst**, Member of the board of NUMOV and Chairman of the Board of Berlinwasser International AG, the conference exclusively featured ambassadors from countries of the Near and Middle East to Germany.

Dieter Ernst, welcoming the attending Excellencies and NUMOV members and interested business representatives, touched upon the stable growth in the region despite the global crisis. "The region provides many opportunities and, due to its young population, holds a great potential for the future," Ernst said. Also pointing towards the future, he mentioned the regions interest and investment in promising sectors such as services, Islamic finance, health care and the high-tech industry.

The first speaker was **H.E. Moncef Ben Abdallah**, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Germany and Doyen of the Arab Ambassadors in Germany. Tunisia, both Dieter Ernst and the Tunisian ambassador pointed out, is of growing importance to Germany and also the most important trade partner of Germany in the Maghreb region.

Having achieved enormous progress over the last 20 years, the country has become the most advanced in the region

with an annual growth of 5%, **H.E. Ben Abdallah** said. The modernization of the infrastructure has been a main concern, he went on. Among the initiatives of the government are a few mega projects, namely three power plants for domestic usage and export, and a connection to the Italian power grid. Further, he enumerated a new desalination plant, a



H.E. Moncef Ben Abdallah, Ambassador of the Republic of Tunisia to Germany and Doyen of the Arab Ambassadors in Germany

deep-water port and an extension of the national highway system. Until the year 2040, the government will focus on "high-value sectors in particular the knowledge-based technology" which should be increased to 35% of GDP already until 2017. In terms of foreign

investors, Ben Abdallah stressed the number of jobs German investment and German companies have created in the country and named several new laws for the protection of foreign investments, copyrights and the like.

The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Germany, **H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar**, followed as the second speaker. He acknowledged NUMOV as the association which "makes decisions after studies and updates us and its members on the developments in the whole region." Due to the extensive work, "NUMOV can take the right decisions."

These words gave a suitable introduction to his speech which focussed on the fact that Germany had been a major trading partner of Iran in the past, a circumstance which should be revived. "Iranians today have good trust in Germany, German companies and goods," he said. "This is a great asset for German companies which should be fostered and promoted." As a potential activity he named the automotive industry: As the country has a burgeoning demand for cars, the assembly of foreign brands



The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Germany, H.E. Ali Reza Sheikh Attar

under license may provide opportunities for ailing western manufacturers. And also the renewable energy sector provides "good opportunities for German companies to explore in Iran."

Giving an overview on recent developments, **H.E. Sheikh Attar** explained that over the last three years a paradigm shift in economic policies has taken root in the highest political bodies. At the forefront of this shift is the privatization of companies, in particular companies in the communications sector, the railway, the downstream oil and gas sector and the steel industry. "In almost all sectors," **H.E. Sheikh Attar** said, "Iran welcomes foreign investors and shareholders."

In terms of the recent discussion on the trade restrictions, he bluntly voiced his opinion: "Business people are cleverer than politicians." Underpinning this, he mentioned the imports from the US which have recently grown by an astonishing 100% due to the lack of trade obstacles for US companies.



H.E. Jamal Ali Omar El-Baraq, Ambassador of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to Germany

As the third speaker **H.E. Jamal Ali Omar El-Baraq**, Ambassador of the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to Germany gave his presentation. He warmly welcomed the audience and invited all interest companies and business representatives to visit the Libyan embassy, pledging support with respect to questions and detailed information on trade with and in Libya.

As valuable information to investors, **H.E. El-Baraq** outlined the top priorities

of the Libyan government for the near future. Among them are the improvement of the infrastructure and the health care sector, for the latter particularly in cooperation with foreign hospital operators. Like many other countries in the Near and Middle East, Libya is also pushing on with a city particularly designed for the needs of foreign companies.

He also informed all interested listeners on marking their calendar for July 2010. Then, **H.E. El-Baraq** said, the next German-Libyan common forum, discussing the economic plans of the Libyan government, will take place.

Also the Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to Germany, **H.E. Alaa Al-Hashimy**, who followed, provided insights and the prospect of a further conference on Iraq. As the security situation is still a major



H.E. Alaa Al-Hashimy, Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to Germany

obstacle for companies wanting to do business in Iraq, **H.E. Al-Hashimy** gave an overview on the recent betterment. Among it were great successes in fighting terrorism and improving the security situation as a whole. "Over the last years," he continued, "Iraq has also made great progress with respect to parliamentary work." As an achievement towards a more democratic Iraq he brought in that politicians are now recognising the performance principle of elected government representatives.

For 2010, Iraq is planning an Iraq-German economic conference to be held in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Additionally, the Iraqi embassy in Germany will publish around 500 projects of interest for German investors on their website. "Iraq is as attractive as ever," **H.E. Al-Hashimy** concluded. With greater focus on the strategic position, the presentation of

H.E. Ahmad Muhammad Aldoseri, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to Germany was next on the agenda. The peg to his presentation was the strategic location of Bahrain with respect to the GCC states and the wider Gulf region. "Considering the market potential of the GCC states," he said, "Bahrain is



H.E. Ahmad Muhammad Aldoseri, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to Germany

the ideal gateway to a trillion dollar market." As he went on, Bahrain has become home to the regional offices of many international companies wanting to explore the market of the GCC states. A good prerequisite to this, **H.E. Aldoseri** said, are the central location of the country, the good relations with its neighbours, minimal costs for businesses, high productivity and a well-developed infrastructure. In short: "Bahrain works with, not against businesses."

Further, and not in the least irrelevant, **H.E. Aldoseri** said that "Bahrain has an open, tolerant and welcoming society. The quality of life is among the highest in the region, especially for families."

The next speaker again pointed to an unresolved issue in the region: the Near and Middle East conflict. **H.E. Hael Al-Fahoum**, Palestine General Delegate to Germany spoke on the recent developments and the most pressing issues of his country.

As the conference elaborated on economic issues, the General Delegate to Germany highlighted the importance of the economy also for his country. He bemoaned the "scarcity of economic dis-

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course on Palestine,” as the “economy is the vital factor for any nation, country and people.” The worst obstacle to the Palestinian economy, **H.E. Al-Fahoum** said, “is the stage of siege.”

Going on with his speech, he promoted a bottom-up approach to solving the economic challenges of his country. Such an approach, however, may only succeed with strong and immediate international cooperation, he added. In the short term, his country requires immediate relief and reconstruction aid “to help the Palestinians become self sufficient.” In the medium term, the country has to establish a stable economy allowing normal business activity, “in order to enable Palestinians to make a contribution to the wealth and stability of the region,” **H.E. Al-Fahoum** closed.

The penultimate speech was delivered by **H.E. Prof. Dr. Maliha Zulfacar**, the



H.E. Hael Al-Fahoum, Palestine General Delegate to Germany

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Germany. Also **H.E. Zulfacar** stated that it is “difficult to isolate the economic situation of a country from its political situation.” Today, Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries of the Near and Middle East. But



H.E. Prof. Dr. Maliha Zulfacar, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Germany

international support has resulted in an increase of trade providing some perspective for the Afghan economy and society.

Three good reasons for investors to cast an eye on Afghanistan, she said, are that the country has a rapidly growing market, a strategic location with easy access to neighbouring markets and, finally, it promotes private investment by removing obstacles and the establishment of a free, liberal market. An additionally advantage, she added, lies in the fact that Afghanistan has no export tax, while having at command a wealth of natural resources such as oil, gas, iron, etc.

The conference was rounded off with a multimedia presentation by **H.E. Dr. Hussein Omran**, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to Germany. He promoted Syria as being “the right partner for Germany in the region.”

As key achievements since the year 2000, **H.E. Omran** recited facts such as the decrease of debt as per GDP from 160% in 2000 to only 8% in 2007 and a dramatic, 12-fold increase of investments since 2001. But, he assured the listeners, the government will not rest on its laurels. It has already started to focus on the challenges of the future, such as the lack of competitiveness in the econo-

my or the adjustment in terms of lower oil revenues in the future.



H.E. Dr. Hussein Omran, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to Germany



Attendants of the Economic Conference

These issues are also address with major projects such as the industrial and residential city of Hassia, which provides infrastructure, services and the location for companies interested in settling in Syria. But also other trends in Syria provide perfect opportunities for foreign investors, among them are a growing tourism industry and the willingness of the government to cooperate with German investors in the improvement of the water treatment sector and the establishment of a micro financing bank.

The NUMOV – Near and Middle East Annual Economic Conference was closed by Dieter Ernst after a lively discussion of final questions and with a short summary of the conference and the insights the presentations yielded. Again, he thanked the high-ranking speakers for their participation in and contribution to this conference. ●



Speakers of the conference

NUMOV's Annual Meeting 2009



f.l.t.r.: Werner Schöltzke, Jens-Ove Stier, Martin Bay, Helene Rang, Klaus Eberhardt, Burkhard Dahmen, Martin Marsmann, Jürgen Sander, Abdurrahim Gülec

This year's Annual General Meeting of NUMOV, the German Near and Middle East Association took place at the Konzerthaus Gendarmenmarkt in Berlin before the 75th anniversary gala of NUMOV at the evening joined by many NUMOV members.

The Chairman of the Board of NUMOV, **Martin Bay**, highlighted

the very positive development of NUMOV in the last year. The number of members increased to more than 600 – a significant sign for the good work of NUMOV in the past, **Martin Bay** stated. He went on that NUMOV as the best interlinked association in the Near and Middle East has not been negatively influenced by the global economic crisis.

NUMOV's success was demonstrated by numerous events in 2008 and at the beginning of 2009 such as delegation trips to the region, high-level business Round Tables or economic forums, for example. Furthermore, **Martin Bay** figured out the positive result in the last year and gave an optimistic outlook for the development of NUMOV in the future. ●