

## GERMAN AMBASSADOR DIETER W. HALLER

The faces of the German community in Riyadh are constantly changing. Every month new people arrive while others move to other destinations. Career opportunities, exciting adventures, private reasons – there are many ways (or all of them together) to start a new chapter of life in Saudi Arabia. The column “New Faces” welcomes and portrays people, who are newly washed ashore the streets of Riyadh.

*We would like to continue to give the Saudi public the opportunity to experience German culture in Riyadh.*

Dear Ambassador Haller, welcome back to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We hope you have accommodated well and enjoyed pleasant summer months. What did you notice has changed most in Riyadh since you left as ambassador in January 2014?

I am happy to be back for my second term as German Ambassador. What has struck me most upon coming back to Riyadh was the fact that a lot of the projects that I only knew in their beginnings have made enormous progress such as the Metro and also the other big infrastructure investments like the new airport terminal, the new roads and flyovers, as well as some towers in the city which have been completed in the meantime or have increased in size and height respectively. The face of Riyadh is changing – and so is the country.

For you it is indeed a return to a familiar environment. What was your motivation to return to Saudi Arabia? Is it actually common for ambassadors to return to a country, where they have served before or are you an exception?

As a modest civil servant I have to follow the decision of my Minister. Saudi Arabia is a country

which undergoes an unprecedented transformation and has, at the same time, to cope with enormous external challenges. And there is the human factor. I have never felt as warmly welcome as here in the Kingdom. There are so many creative and smart people living in Saudi Arabia that I am sure this country will succeed on this path. It is true that this is quite an exception to return as an Ambassador, but Saudi Arabia is such an exceptional country and why should Germany not also make an exception.

You returned to Saudi Arabia during a time of major economic and politic challenges. The Kingdom is undergoing major changes to prepare for the future. What do you think are the biggest challenges for the country?

Being such a young country, it is important to take decisions today that will ensure the well-being of the Saudi people for the years to come. The low oil price is undoubtedly a challenge for the Kingdom, but it also creates the opportunity to launch important reforms. This was done in the Kingdom when the Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman announced the Vision 2030, which is a very important step. This clearly demonstrates that the

Saudi leadership is aware of the challenges, willing to take on these challenges and also able to find solutions.

As the Saudi Vision 2030 was announced earlier this year in April, the whole world listened carefully to the plans of the Saudi Arabian government. The document envisions major economic and societal transformations for the Kingdom such as the reduction of the dependency on fossil fuels, private sector development, or employment of women. Which factors do you think are critical for making the Saudi Vision 2030 a success? Or which factors are the most important barriers for change?

First of all, as Saudi Arabia is preparing for the implementation of "Vision 2030" today, please let me state that Germany and German companies stand ready to support Saudi Arabia with their expertise in a long-term partnership. The challenges are manifold, but there are just as many promising avenues. One of the roads to success is to have strong and reliable long-term partners. Germany and its companies are ready to be this strategic partner. This includes the creation of a manufacturing industry based on locally available raw materials such as crude oil, gas or aluminum. Germany figures among the top investors in the strict sense, as defined by the Saudi Investment Authority, SAGIA. More and more German companies decide to establish a manufacturing base in the Kingdom. Alone or together with a Saudi partner, they transfer technical know-how to the country, create high-quality jobs, and qualify a new

*With a young and dynamic population, with the integration of particularly well educated and trained women into the labor market, and with the opening up of society allowing creativity to express itself, Saudi Arabia has all the tools to surmount these barriers.*

local workforce by offering vocational training to young Saudis. At first glance, you might also find barriers to change, but I do not see them as insurmountable obstacles. With a young and dynamic population, with the integration of particularly well educated and trained women into the labor market, and with the opening up of society allowing creativity to express itself, Saudi Arabia has all the tools to surmount these barriers. And as I said before: Saudi Arabia has partners who are willing to lend a helping hand in this process.

Germany is a close ally of Saudi Arabia and both countries have been enjoying good economic relations for decades. In 2015 Germany was the third biggest trade partner of Saudi Arabia importing goods and services worth around 10 billion EUR. Which role will Germany and the German economy play in the future of Saudi Arabia?

The Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program do put a strong focus on industrial diversification and efficient facilities. Industrial excellence and efficiency are the hallmarks of the German industry. High energy prices and expensive labor have forced the German industry and their suppliers of industrial

equipment to provide outstanding quality and plants, which can be run with minimal manpower and minimal consumption of energy and water. We are standing ready to assist our Saudi partners to bring the Kingdom to the forefront of industrial innovation.

Let's talk about the German Embassy in Saudi Arabia. Do you have plans of what you would like to achieve during your term? Do you think the role of the German Embassy has changed compared to your last term?

During my first term, my team and I succeeded in making Germany one of the most appreciated destinations for Saudi visitors either for professional, private, or health reasons. The number of visas issued was multiplied by five between 2010 and 2013 and today most of the visas issued to Saudis are long-term visas. Saudi visitors appreciate the professionalism of the German economy, the hospitality of the German tourism and hotel sector, and the quality of German health services. This is a source of pride for all of us. My first term as ambassador also coincided with permanent growth in our bilateral trade figures. One of the challenges will be to keep this exchange at this level and to even increase it. In addition to that, I would love to see a similar development in the cultural field. The German participation in the Janadriyyah festival, initiated during my first term as ambassador here and put into practice after I had left, has created a fertile environment for a revolution in our cultural relations. Almost a million Saudis enjoyed the different cultural performances from Germany either inside the German Janadriyyah Pavilion or outside at the giant stage. We would like to continue to give the Saudi public

**DIETER WALTER HALLER** is the German Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. After graduating in Political Sciences, International Law and English Language and Literature at Tübingen and Cambridge (UK) Universities, he entered the Diplomatic Service in 1981. His assignments led him to Chile, Kenya, as Ambassador to South Africa as well as to Saudi Arabia for a first term from 2011 to 2014. In Berlin he served as Director for Asia, Africa, Near and Middle East, Latin America at the Office of the Federal Chancellor as well Deputy Chief of Staff in the Federal Foreign Office amongst others. Most recently he was the Director General for Economic Affairs and Sustainable Development at the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

the opportunity to experience German culture in Riyadh. The Goethe Institute, which has been offering German language courses since 2014, is scheduled to have its official opening in early November 2016 and could indeed play a central role in this field. On the flipside, the Saudi cultural week in 2014 gave the German public an opportunity to get to know Saudi culture. So there is in my eyes a golden opportunity to continue on this path. Exploring future opportunities for German companies in a changing Saudi market and in the implementation of the Vision 2030 will be a key priority of my commitment. I am confident that together with GESALO and all German stakeholders we will be able to consolidate our economic partnership with the Kingdom.

And on a personal note, for how long do you plan to stay this time?

As long as possible. 2030 sounds nice to me....

Many thanks for the interview, dear Ambassador Haller. I wish you all the best for the future and a successful term.

The interview was conducted for GESALO by **DR. KIM J. ZIETLOW.**