

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Summer 2006 edition of Enterprise UK/Syria!



As we approach the mid-point of the year, we can see that the Syrian market continues to offer a healthy range of opportunities for UK companies. But a visitor to Syria will be pleasantly surprised at developments for example in the Financial Services' sector, with new private banks making a substantial impact, bringing competition and better standards of service, and new products being made available for individual customers and businesses alike. With penetration by banks of the market estimated at less than 10%, it's obvious to see why there is so much interest in this sector. New Islamic banks are expected to open before the end of 2006, on top of private insurance licences already granted and steps toward a Syrian Stock Exchange, it promises to be a key sector of development over the next 2 years.

I am pleased to report that UK exports to Syria in 2005 were a healthy 17 % up over 2004, with much of this growth occurring in the Oil & Gas Sector. Although oil production levels are declining, the continued high price of oil and the desire of the Syrian Government to encourage foreign companies to enter the market, has led to much greater interest from UK firms than previously. The recent Syroil exhibition demonstrated this clearly, with a record attendance from the UK. It is likely that we will see this grow in the rest of 2006 and into 2007.

As an Embassy we continue to remain busy supporting UK companies exporting into the Syrian market. Recent events have included hosting the British Standards Institute in Damascus, highlighting key developments in the Construction Sector, and taking a senior private sector delegation to the UK Interbuild

event at NEC Birmingham. As Syria works hard to take advantage of its wonderful historical and cultural heritage, the Leisure & Tourism Sector is surely one to benefit in coming years. This will mean significant investments in the country's infrastructure, with much Gulf investment already promised, to meet a growing tourist demand. We hope that companies such as Halcrow - with offices now open in Damascus - will find much business to be done. The opening of the hugely impressive Four Seasons Hotel in Damascus, and a new Sheraton in Aleppo to follow soon, are both very welcome steps in the sector.

UK consultants continue to play a major role in Syria, and we feature in this edition an article by WYG International, talking about their Municipal Administration Modernisation programme (MAM) - see page 24 for details.

I am also pleased to announce that we have a new team member to head-up the British Trade Office in Aleppo. Carine Razzouk joins us with much experience of the Syrian market, and we look forward to continuing to help UK firms in the Aleppo area.

And finally farewell. This is my last edition of Enterprise UK/Syria, and sadly pass on the baton to my successor Anne Petrie who arrived in Damascus 16 July . Best of luck to her and to UK companies in Syria!

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