

EEC trade team holds 'fruitful' talks during visit to Sultanate

By

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MUSCAT offers a potential market for a two-way trade with the European Economic Community member countries whose main thrust is not only to export their goods but also to encourage imports, according to Robert Hull, head of Asia and Middle East division of the EEC.

Mr Hull arrived in Muscat yesterday, leading a 25-member EEC trade delegation, on a two-day visit, as part of their business promotion tour of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The visiting team yesterday held discussions with the Commerce and Industry Undersecretary, Ahmed bin Abdunabi Al-Jacki followed by a meeting with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry officials.

Expressing his happiness on the outcome of the meeting, Mr Hull told the "Observer" that the meetings were "fruitful and paved the way for further cementing trade relations between the Sultanate and the EEC members."

"We believe in a two-way trade and Oman offers a potential market, especially for agricultural and agro-industrial products.

"Another major item discussed was means of furthering economic cooperation.

"Our main aim is to explore the areas where joint ventures could be set up, including exchange of technical know-how and expertise," Mr Hull said.

The GCC members, Mr Hull added, were the third largest trading partners of the EEC, first being the US followed by the European Free Trade Association countries.

The EEC's imports from the GCC members last year amounted to 21,517 million European Currency Units — one ECU is equivalent to 80 US cents and the exports were valued at 22,542 million ECUs. Of these, agro-industrial products accounted for 10 per cent.

The team, second of its kind



Picture: Amar al Rahabi

from the EEC and the first to visit the GCC countries, has toured Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. During their stay in Riyadh, the mission has conferred with the GCC Secretary General, Abdulla Yaqoob Bishara, "allaying fears that protective tariff would be imposed on petrochemical products imported from the EEC countries," Mr Hull said.

The EEC set up its first trade mission with the view of boosting trade relations with the Far East countries.

Later, OCCI director, Shaikh Aflah bin Hamed al Rawahy, who chaired the meeting with the visitors, said that they discussed how to boost exports from Oman, particularly fish and copper, which

are abundant here.

On the trade with the EEC members, Shaikh Aflah revealed that non-oil exports recorded a significant increase in the past few years. Oman's exports rose from RO11 million in 1983 to RO17 million last year. The exports in 1982 amounted to RO8 million.

Oman's oil exports to the EEC dropped from 17 million barrels in 1982 to 4 million barrels in 1983.

The UK continues to be the major buyer of non-oil goods, mainly re-exports of machinery and equipment, accounting for RO11 million last year followed by Netherlands, (RO2 million) and Germany, (RO1 million).

On imports, Shaikh Aflah said machinery and transport equipment formed the major item repre-

senting 43 per cent of the country's total imports, followed by manufactured goods, (19 per cent); and foodstuffs. "Some 10 per cent of the country's foodstuff demand is met by the EEC countries with milk topping the list.

"And 90 per cent of milk and 56 per cent of poultry farm products imported into the country come from the EEC members.

"Further efforts are being made to boost the country's exports and both sides have decided to take follow-up measures vigorously", Shaikh Aflah said.

The visiting team also conferred with leading Omani businessmen and industrialists at the OCCI exhibition centre.

They will leave Muscat today for Doha.