

POLAND – A GROWING EUROPEAN POWERHOUSE

His Excellency Grzegorz Olszak

Staff Report

Much of the diplomatic career of His Excellency Grzegorz Olszak, Ambassador of Poland to Kuwait, has centered around the Arab World — at his country's embassies in the region and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Department of Africa and Middle East in Warsaw. But this was only to be expected of a dynamic and articulate diplomat whose love for the Arab world at a very young age prompted him to pursue a Masters from Warsaw University in Arabic Language and Culture, and to follow this up with a scholarship in Egypt at Cairo University's Faculty of Literature.

During the course of an exclusive interview with The Times, it was evident that Ambassador Olszak represented the young, outward-looking Poland; a country focused on a future-oriented developmental path and ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of a global economy. The diplomat noted how in 2001, after graduating from the State School of Public Administration, he joined the Ministry of Environment, and served there for four years in various positions, including that of Deputy Director of the Department of Foreign Relations and Director of Minister's Office. But, with a second Masters from Warsaw University in International Political and Economic Relations, as well as his proficiency in multiple languages, including English, Russian and Arabic, he decided to shift to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2005.

"My first diplomatic assignment abroad came in 2005 with a posting first as Deputy Head of Mission and then for a year as Charge d' Affaires at our Embassy in Egypt. Spending over four years in Egypt, I had the unique opportunity to further hone my Arabic language skills. In 2009, I returned to head-



quarters in Warsaw and until early 2012 was the Head of the Division of Arab States and Iran at the Department of Africa and the Middle East," added the envoy.

"In February 2012, I returned to the Middle-East for a five-month stint in Syria, amid the ongoing conflict there. As the United States did not have diplomatic representation in Syria, I was appointed in a special role as Head of the U.S. Interests Section at our embassy in Damascus. Returning to Warsaw in July of that year, I was reassigned to the Department of Africa and the Middle-East, but this time as Counselor-Minister. Then, in April 2013, I arrived in Kuwait and presented my credentials to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed

Al-Jaber Al-Sabah as Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to the State of Kuwait."

Speaking about Polish – Kuwait relations, the ambassador said, "We have enjoyed excellent political and diplomatic relations since 1963, when Poland became one of the first countries to recognize the newly independent Kuwait. Last year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our close and friendly relations with Kuwait. Another milestone in our relations was the strong speech made by our Foreign Minister at the UN General Assembly in 1990. Despite having good trade relations with Iraq at that time, he condemned the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and Poland fully implemented all the UN Resolutions passed against

Iraq. Our Foreign Minister stressed in his speech that ideals like freedom, liberty and human values were priceless. The minister stated, 'Certain national and international values cannot be assessed in terms of calculable prices...'"

"The other important moment in our relations came in 1991 when Polish troops participated in the Coalition Force formed to drive out the Iraqi invaders from Kuwait. Our bilateral relations continue to be boosted through visits by high-level Polish dignitaries and ministers, including the President and the Prime Minister, on more than one occasion. Another important element in bilateral relations is the strong ties between our two parliaments; with Kuwaiti – Polish Parliamentary Friendship Groups functioning effectively in both parliaments. In fact, a Kuwait Parliamentary Group is scheduled to visit Poland in a few months time," revealed the diplomat.

Elaborating on economic relations between the two countries, Ambassador Olszak said that though the current volume of trade was only around US\$ 60 million, there were plenty of areas where bilateral economic cooperation could be enhanced. "In particular I would like to point out that currently there are hardly any Polish food outlets or even Polish food available in the local market. This is something that I am addressing by initiating contacts between food companies in both countries. I am pleased to say that recently two leading Kuwaiti food company representatives visited the POLAGRA Food Fair in Poland and came back highly impressed by the quality and variety of food products available."

With more than two million private farms and over 10,000 lakes dotting the country, Poland has great agricultural potential and is often considered the future 'bread-

basket' of the European Union. Besides being the largest producers in the world of sugar beet, Poland is also the leading producer of potatoes, rye and apples in Europe. Last year Poland had a record apple production of over two million metric tons, and it became the world's largest exporter of apples.

Pointing to another area where the two countries have similar interests, the envoy noted that for more than forty years, the city of Janow Podlaski in Poland has been hosting an annual event dedicated to showcasing and auction of Polish Purebred Arabian Horses. The Kuwaiti are regular guests of this event. The Arabian Horse Days, organized by the Polish State Studs, honors the Polish Arabian Horse breeding program. The event is unique in many respects, including its tradition that dates back to the 17th century and the fact that it is the only enterprise of its kind in the world.

Regarding the level of bilateral investments, the Ambassador said that while there were no direct investments, there were indirect investments to the tune of \$400 - \$500 million, made mostly by financial institutions in the Polish real-estate sector. "Many Kuwaitis have stakes in residential apartments and villas, as well as in commercial properties in Poland. However, I would like to see Kuwaiti investments spread to other areas of the economy, especially considering that Poland's high-income economy is currently one of the fastest growing within the European Union." With a large domestic market, low private debt, flexible currency, and not being dependent on a single export sector, Poland is the only European economy to have avoided the 2008 global recession that crippled many world economies. And, with the implementation of ongoing structural reforms, Poland is poised for entry into the Euro-

zone in the near future.

Tourism is another area of the economy that could entice foreign investments. Recently, Poland was ranked among the top-twenty most visited countries in the world by foreign tourists and the sector also contributes extensively to the Polish economy. "Tourism has been rising significantly year-on-year, and while the main tourist attractions center around sight-seeing, a relatively new trend that has emerged is health and well-being spa tourism that caters to a growing clientele. Poland has many specialized medical centers, including one of leading centers for the research and treatment of cancer. Another rather unique concept gaining ground in Poland are the newly conceived kind of spas - 'beauty-farms' - located in the most renowned health resorts where people check-in for a week or two to enjoy a completely rejuvenating experience of both mind and body."

Noting that cultural ties between countries help strengthen relations on the popular level, the envoy continued, "Visiting Polish artists performing in Kuwait, under the aegis of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyya and Kuwaiti National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), as well as Polish musicians and music-instructors residing in Kuwait, have been doing great work in promoting Poland. There are many young Kuwaiti musicians who have joined Polish music academies to pursue their interests further. On another cultural front, the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw (PCMA), with its regional center in Cairo, has been organizing and coordinating archaeological research in the Middle-East area. In Kuwait, PCMA is represented by the Kuwait Polish Archaeological Mission (KPAM) and they, in association with National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters,

have been conducting extensive excavations at selected sites in Kuwait since 2007."

Another venue for closer cooperation between Poland and Kuwait is in the field of education. In 2012 Poland's educational system was ranked among the top-ten in the world in an assessment made by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in coordination with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). With over 500 institutions of higher education, one of the largest numbers in Europe, the country has very high educational standards. "After holding productive discussions with concerned authorities in Poland and Kuwait, I hope to soon see students from this country, including medical and archaeological students, continue their higher education in Poland. Many of the world-class Polish educational establishments offer education in English medium and the quality of education rendered is comparable to the best in the world," added the envoy.

In conclusion, Ambassador Olszak expressed his happiness to be in Kuwait and said that during his relatively short time in the country he had enjoyed the full support and cooperation of the leadership and government, as well as the warm hospitality of its people. "During my stay in the country, I definitely look forward to finding time to brush up on my Arabic language skills," said the Ambassador in parting.

(in association with "The Times, Kuwait")



Health

Twenty-five percent of Russian men die before the age of 55

UPI -- Twenty-five percent of Russian men die before age 55, the average life expectancy for Russian men is age 64, and many blame vodka, researchers say.

The study, published in the Lancet, found Russian male smokers who drank three or more half-

liter -- half-quart -- bottles of vodka weekly doubled their risk of dying compared with those who consumed less than half a liter a week.

The study said heavy drinkers mainly die from alcohol poisoning, accidents, violence, suicide, cancer, tuberculosis, pneumonia, pancreatitis, liver disease and heart disease, RIA Novosti reported.

In recent years, the Russian government, which has described the coun-

try's alcohol abuse as a "national disaster," made a goal to halve alcohol consumption by 2020. The government also went after illegal production and sales.

The study in The Lancet said due to these alcohol policy reforms, Russia's consumption of spirits dropped by a third since 2006, as has the risk of death before the age of 55.

"Russian death rates have fluctuated wildly over the past 30 years as alcohol restrictions and social stability varied under Presidents (Mikhail) Gorbachev, (Boris) Yeltsin, and (Vladimir) Putin, and the main thing driving these wild fluctuations in death was vodka," said study co-author Richard Peto of the University of Oxford.

"This has been shown in retrospective studies, and now we've confirmed it in a big, reliable prospective study."



Space

Space station 'farm' grows a variety of crops

UPI -- A variety of crops successfully grown and harvested on the International Space Station have been verified as safe to eat, a Russian scientist says.

Space-based agriculture has long been of interest, as plants not only scrub carbon dioxide exhaled by astronauts but could be a renewable food source, scientists have said. "The experiments with peas have been very promising," Margarita Levinskikh, a researcher at the Institute of Biomedical Problems, told an annual space conference in Moscow in describing the ISS "farming." Russian cosmonauts have grown Japanese leafy greens and a variety of dwarf wheat that has produced seeds of "just extraordinary quality," RIA Novosti quoted her as saying. Russian cosmonauts will sow rice, tomatoes and bell peppers in the station's Lada greenhouse next year, she said, a cooperative effort between the institute and the Space Dynamics Laboratory at Utah State University.

Currently all food onboard the space station is flown there on periodic resupply missions. Long-duration deep space missions without agriculture would require many months' or years' worth of food, greatly adding to their launch weight, the institute said.

Medicine

Antibiotic 'smart bomb' can target bad bacteria

UPI -- Researchers have developed smart antibiotics that target specific bacteria and sever their DNA, thereby eliminating multi-drug resistant bacteria.

The new approach, published online in the journal mBio, uses the bacterial immune system, called the CRISPR-Cas system. This immune system protects the bacteria by creating strands of RNA called CRISPR RNAs, which match the DNA of the invader and then unleash proteins to cut the invader's DNA.

Researchers devised a way to make these CRISPR RNAs target the DNA sequences of the bacteria, causing bacterial suicide when the Cas proteins begin to attack the bacteria's DNA.

"In lab testing, we found that this approach removes the targeted bacteria," said Dr. Chase

Beisel, an assistant professor at NC State. "We're still trying to understand precisely how severing the DNA leads to elimination of the bacteria."

They were able to target the precise bacteria they wanted to kill, and eliminated Salmonella in a culture without affecting good bacteria. They took this targeted approach to the next level by killing one strain of a species without affect-

ing other strains.

Beisel said that "by targeting specific DNA strands through the CRISPR-Cas system, we're able to bypass the mechanisms underlying the many examples of antibiotic resistance."

