

Travelogue of a 24-hour steeplechase to Riyadh on 9 & 10 May 2008

After Roedl, Meyer-Reumann had received its licenses for the local office in Dubai as well as the regional office in the DIFC, it was now essential to tackle the planned expansion in the Gulf region. Saudi-Arabia, where I had myself once worked as a lawyer for 8 years, is currently experiencing an economic boom and was therefore a priority. A short trip on May 9 and 10, 2008, was intended to mark the beginning of our presence in Saudi-Arabia.

Initially, everything went according to plan. I arrived at the airport much too early and the flight departed on time. I had heard that passport clearance had been improved considerably in Riyadh. When I arrived there, the line was 25 meters long - as always - and -as always- I had to complete a handwritten request to enter the country. I braced myself -as always- for a wait of approximately 1.5 hours for passport control. But, surprise, surprise: the line progressed rapidly and after only 20 minutes, I had passed passport control. I did not get the impression that my written request had even been acknowledged.

As my nail scissors and my shampoo had already repeatedly been taken from me when carried in my hand luggage, this time, I had put them in my checked luggage to be on the safe side. It took an eternity until I finally spotted my little suitcase on the baggage carousel. As far as the time I had saved at passport control was concerned: lightly come, lightly gone.

After this, I wanted to rent a car and it again took some time until I discovered that cars can no longer be rented at Riyadh International Airport. I was sent to Saudia's Domestic Airport where I quickly received my car. They also had cars with GPS, which I really love, but only in the absolute special class from Saudi Rial 1,000.- per day. I passed and was pleased that my new BlackBerry also had a GPS-system. Unfortunately, I always had to have been to the destination at least once before being able to find it again. Accordingly, it took a while for me to find my hotel, the Holiday Inn in Olaya.

The next morning at 10am, I had my appointment at the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority (SAGIA). I had already been there once before and it was not too far from the hotel. Nevertheless, I left my hotel an hour before the meeting. When I reached the vicinity of the SAGIA, I showed some passers-by a map of the SAGIA from the internet and was sent in all directions. By now, it was 10am and Mr. Suliman Al Sayyari, who I wanted to meet with at the SAGIA, was already there and I - as I believed - was somewhere near the SAGIA. I stopped a taxi and asked the driver to drive ahead of me and show me the way. I was sure that the taxi

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driver actually knew SAGIA's location. Strangely enough, however, he drove in a completely different direction than I had expected. I came past my hotel again and we drove towards the airport. Had he misunderstood me after all?

During the drive, I received a lesson in Saudi traffic behavior. To turn left from a seven-lane street, you don't get in the left lane, but go all the way to the right, turn on the left indicator and then, on the intersection, simply pull to the left. It was running the gauntlet, but it worked! When I had successfully survived this advanced course, things immediately intensified: the new street I had turned into also had seven lanes. I was on the right, but directly after turning, the taxi driver wanted to get onto a bridge which could only be reached from the lane farthest to the left. The advance course for professionals did not quite work out. There was a Saudi "four wheel driver" behind me who was not attempting the "from right to left exercise", but the "from left to right exercise" and who hit the side of my car from the rear. His car had a small scratch on the bumper and my car had a little body damage. Within 10 seconds, we agreed that de facto there was no damage. No police - no loss of time. The taxi driver had patiently waited by the side of the road (after all, he still needed his fare) and we continued our trip.

In the meantime, Mr. Al Sayyari had begun with the negotiations, as the director in charge had another appointment at 11am and it was getting late. Via BlackBerry, I asked those questions I wanted to get answers to. The taxi driver had finally safely taken me to my destination and I had to discover that since my last visit to Riyadh, the SAGIA had moved its head office to a completely different part of town, in the direction of the airport. When I arrived, Mr. Al Sayyari had already concluded his meeting with the director in charge. My questions had essentially been answered.

As "replacement", Mr. Al Sayyari offered to visit SAGIA's deputy governor who he knew personally, but who was of course not responsible for my very simple questions. I therefore came to enjoy a very interesting meeting with Dr. Awwad S. Al-Awwad, the Deputy Governor of SAGIA. He was very interested in my plan to return to Saudi-Arabia after 20 years and offered me his support for the seminars we have planned. For a longer time, we also spoke about the program "10 to 10", which King Abdullah has declared as "top priority". The "10 to 10" program is aimed at reaching tenth place in the list of countries with the most efficient legal protection in the area of commercial law by the year 2010. To reach this goal, a number of serious changes were necessary. A new Judicature Act has already been passed. New commercial courts are currently being set up and the judges are being instructed in economic and commercial law. In total, the Saudi king has allocated Saudi Rial 7 billion (!) to this. The SAGIA has just used USD 50,000.- of this to enable some Saudi judges to travel to Singapore to study the local economic legal system. According to Dr. Al-Awwad, the Americans and English also emphasized their offer to provide active support. Dr. Al-Awwad was not aware of any German

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assistance. He did say, however, that it would be very welcome, particularly as the legal systems of Saudi Arabia and Germany are more alike than the Saudi system and the “common law” of the English and Americans. I promised him that I would think about this.

Mr. Jochen Hundt, a German lawyer, had invited me to lunch and we talked about the development of Saudi-Arabia in general and of the legal sector in particular. My impression gained at the SAGIA was confirmed: Saudi-Arabia is booming, there are many opportunities and much is changing. For example, in 2006, a new law on tendering for public contracts was announced, manifesting the pursuit of increased efficiency. Mr. Hundt and I agreed that this could be a good subject for a seminar in Saudi-Arabia, Abu Dhabi, but also in Germany.

In the evening, I spoke to Mr. Al Sayyari once more about our further plans to introduce the German circle to the Saudi possibilities and we decided to assign this task to SAGECO, respectively Mr. Al Sayyari, Sesam Business Consultants and Roedl, Meyer-Reumann Middle East Ltd. as well as Mr. Hundt, lawyer, as a team.

The return trip to Dubai in the evening went smoothly. When I arrived in Dubai, I had to line up at passport control, as my E-Gate card had expired. The lines, however, were short and there were 5 people in front of me at most. I was surprised to find out that it took more time to deal with these 5 people than it took to deal with a 25 meter line in Riyadh. But I also survived this. I then looked for a taxi in front of the airport to take me home. The line at the taxi stand reminded me of passport control in Riyadh. Although it was well organized, it still took over half an hour for me to get a taxi.

Dubai just isn't what it used to be.

This was the end of a short trip with many small obstacles but which on the whole was successful.

Dubai, 14.05.2008

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