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Cyprus President first-ever visit in Saudi Arabia

On January 3, the President of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), Nicos Anastasiades, visited Saudi Arabia at the invitation of the Saudi king, Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud. This was the first-ever visit by a Cypriot president in the Wahhabi kingdom.

Regardless the agreements signed by the parts, the real message is the visit. The ceremony was attended by a number of princes, ministers, diplomats and senior, civil and military officers. [The Saudi Gazette, "Saudi Arabia, Cyprus ink deals to boost ties", January 4, 2018].

Energy and regional geopolitics were discussed, as well as the need to fight religious extremism. Many bilateral agreements were signed, as the avoidance of double taxation, the prevention of tax evasion and a civil aviation executive programme.

Moreover, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed, with the purpose to establish regular political consultations between foreign ministries, twice a year. [Cyprus Mail, "A new era` in Cyprus-Saudi relations (Updated), January 3, 2018].

In 1960 Saudi Arabia has opened an embassy in Cyprus, thus recognizing the island's independence from the UK; but the Saudis closed their diplomatic mission in 1963, when inter-communal clashes erupted. In 2015, the reopening of the Cypriot embassy in Riyadh was followed by the appointment of a Saudi ambassador to Athens, who is also accredited in Nicosia.

This visit is only the most visible indicator of an increasing trend in relations and promising multi-layered cooperation among Cyprus, Greece and the Gulf monarchies.

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