



LITASCO SA Office Building in Geneva

Russians in Geneva

At around 8,000 (unofficial estimates put the number closer to 20,000), the Russian community is not the largest expat community in the Lake Geneva Region, but it is one of the oldest and quite possibly the most interesting. Reflecting the upheavals of that country over the past 200 years, the Russian community in Geneva has ranged from vacationing aristocrats to revolutionaries plotting their demise, from diplomats at the Russian Mission and interpreters at the UN to, most recently, oil traders (two-thirds of Russian oil is traded here!), students and entrepreneurs. The historical and cultural ties between Geneva and Russia are strong and each new generation of Russians in Geneva add to this richness.

The Russian-Swiss relationship has always been a two-way flow of people, culture and ideas. Two companies in Geneva exemplify this relationship: LITASCO, the oil-trading arm of Russian petroleum giant, Lukoil, and InvestDialog, helping Russian start-ups make it in the global market.

Over the past decade, Geneva has turned into the Number 1 hub for oil-trading, an unlikely role for a city with neither seaport nor oil reserves of its own. Lukoil's decision in 2000 to set up a trading office in Geneva is one reason. As LITASCO, that Geneva office is now the headquarters of eight subsidiaries around the world.

"It was a wise move to set up in Geneva but it was not self-evident," recalls LITASCO CEO, Gati Al-Jebouri. "At that time, trading activities were still located mainly in London, but, little by little, Geneva has become the trading center of the world."

This concentration, he says, helps LITASCO in two ways. "Virtually all the major trade finance players have a base in Geneva and it is important to be close to the banks that support and grow your business," he says. Second, the close contact with other traders helps in expanding Litasco's business. "Sixty percent of the oil we trade is Lukoil system barrels, but 40% is third party oil, so being in Geneva with other trading companies and close to the European market, we benefit from a large number of opportunities. For example, we are one of the largest suppliers of diesel to the French market, Number 2 after Total, and we are trying to expand into the Italian market having purchased a Sicilian refinery, which, in terms of processing, is also managed out of Geneva."

Employment

LITASCO's staff has grown by 15% in the past three years. In the first quarter of this year, LITASCO added another string to its bow: the global management of Lukoil's petrochemicals trading business. "We are now recruiting people to join that part of our business and growing that desk," says Gati Al-Jebouri.

Thirty-five percent of LITASCO's staff is made up of Swiss nationals, so it is very much a Geneva company, says Mr. Al-Jebouri. But

LITASCO's Russian flavor is undeniable. "The mother company is Russian and much of our activity comes from Russia," he explains.

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LITASCO also continues the traditional Russian-Swiss relationship of exchange. "We have a lot of Russians coming here all the time for training and locals working here for a while that we then send out to our branches," says Mr. Al-Jebouri.



GATI AL-JEBOURI, CEO of LITASCO Group

LITASCO's Geneva headquarters

- 100% owned by the Russian company Lukoil, the 6th largest oil production enterprise
- Became responsible for Lukoil's petrochemical-trading in Q1 2009
- Manages global presence (over 80 countries)
- Employs 170 people in Geneva of 28 nationalities