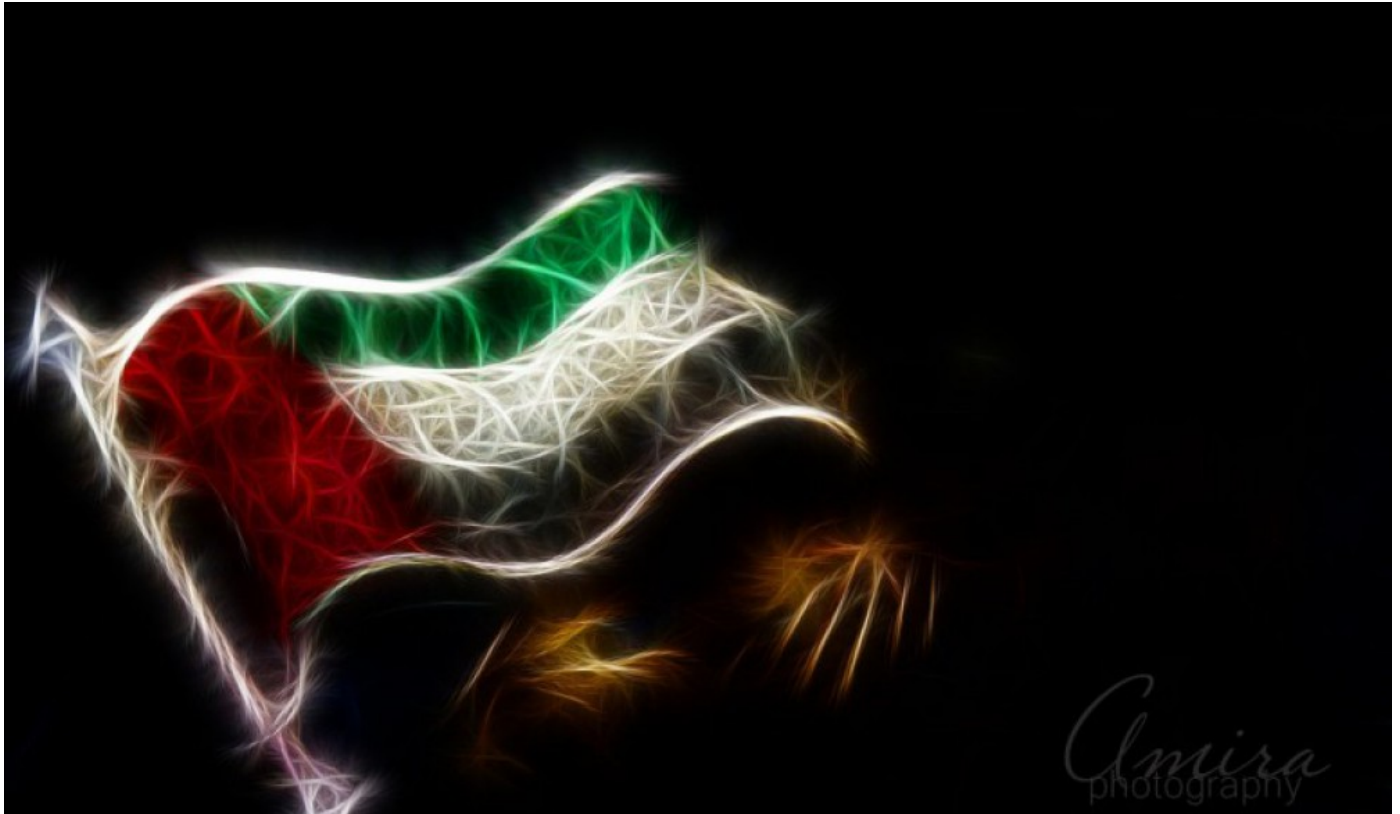


UAE Making A Statement.....

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This brings to 106 the number of countries that Emiratis can travel to without visas. Qatar was second in the region, with passport holders eligible to visit 66 countries without visas.

The privilege, residents said, had been made possible only through tremendous efforts by the country's leadership, and was a testament to the political and financial stability of the UAE.

Saeed Al Hanki, 59, said the move was proof that the Government did its utmost for the comfort of its citizens.

"This is a positive step, and as nationals we should be appreciative of this and own up to this responsibility of representing the UAE in a positive way, when travelling to Europe," he said.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a set of guidelines for Emiratis who want to travel to the Schengen countries. One was to represent the UAE in an honourable manner and follow the rules and-guidelines of the host country.

Sheikha Al Jabeti said the visa waiver was an achievement of UAE diplomacy, and an example of the successful leadership of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed.

"This is another addition to our growing balance of diplomatic achievements. It's a testament to the UAE and it's enough that even neighbouring countries are applauding our efforts."

She said Emiratis should be proud to be from a country where the citizens "come first".

Dr Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, a political science professor at UAE University, said the EU had long acknowledged that the UAE was a model of success. This did not happen overnight, he said.

"It is the result of tremendous diplomatic efforts and the dedication of Emirati diplomats, particularly the minister and the ambassador, who were the driving forces behind the decision.

"This is a historical move and one that we take great pride in."

Ahmed Al Dhaheri, the director of councillor affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the move "reflects the impact of the UAE in the international arena, and the respect and confidence of-European countries and the nations of the whole world in the-

UAE. It makes the various Schengen countries keen to be open and promote their common interests with the UAE in all areas, as well as-to open their border ports for visa-free entry of UAE nationals".

Saeed Al Nowais, a diplomat, said: "The European Union had no reason to refuse such an agreement. There are no obstacles. The UAE is a safe, prosperous, peaceful and politically stable country."

He said the decision reflected well on the wise leadership of the President, the Crown Prince and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Sara Saeed, 33, who travels frequently, said: "This is a relief. It saves a lot of time and money. I can now travel anytime without the hassle of going to the embassy for a visa."

Ahmed Al Shamsi, an FNC member from Ajman, said the decision should be considered as a "privilege to the European Union" rather than the UAE.

"There is no danger of UAE nationals immigrating to European countries. We enjoy financial prosperity and a stable social atmosphere. The level of the country's economic prosperity is equivalent, if-not higher, than most European countries," he said

"It is nationals from other countries that would like to immigrate to the UAE."

Mr Al Shamsi said this was among the factors that prompted the EU to enter into a partnership with the UAE.

"The Schengen waiver is unique in that there are no preconditions unlike the UK, where a form has to be filled out 48 hours beforehand and a single error means the process has to be repeated-again," he said.

The eight non-Schengen EU countries where visa-free rules also apply include Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Romania, the Vatican, Andorra, San Marino and Monaco.

The UK and Ireland are also not in the Schengen area, but since the beginning of last year Emiratis have been able to apply online for a free visa waiver for travel to the UK.