



## IN DIALOGUE WITH HE LUCIE BERGER, AMBASSADOR OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES



Q

**As the new EU Ambassador to the UAE, what are your primary strategic goals for further deepening the relationship between the EU and the UAE during your tenure?**

A

The EU together with its twenty-seven Member States and the UAE are traditionally key political, economic and security partners and the importance of this very rich and wide-ranging collaboration is rapidly increasing in the changing global and regional context. The EU highly values the very reliable and productive exchanges with our UAE partners in areas as various as trade and investment, climate action, sustainable energy, customs cooperation, humanitarian assistance, or women empowerment, and the list is long.

However, if I were to name one strategic objective for my tenure as Ambassador in the UAE this would be my clear intention to demonstrate the huge potential in engaging with Europe also at the EU level to our Emirati counterparts. This means the opportunity to utilize the vast expertise offered by our unique, supranational institutions including in developing cutting-edge policies and regulations at a Continental scale and often with global impacts as well as comprehensive cooperation frameworks with third countries.

Q

**Given your extensive experience in trade and climate action, how do you plan to enhance trade relations between the EU and the UAE, particularly in the context of both countries' commitment to sustainable trade practices?**

A

Let me start by recalling that EU-UAE trade and investment relations are thriving. In 2022 the UAE was our second largest trading partner in the MENA region and first export market with an accumulated volume of trade in goods almost reaching EUR 50 Billion with an additional EUR 26 Billion trade in services. In addition, the UAE is the EU's number one investment destination in the region attracting more than 80% of the stock of EU FDI in these' countries surpassing EUR 150 Billion in 2021 (last available data) and the UAE is also a leading investor in the EU. These positive trends are confirmed by the figures published in the first nine months of 2023. But there is a huge potential to further enhance trade and investment relations.

The EU has made clear that by 2050, it aims to be climate-neutral. Given the urgency to act, we have moreover set an ambitious goal to achieve a 55% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. This objective is at the heart of the Green Deal our comprehensive policy and regulatory framework to attain these objectives notably in the economic context by giving governments and operators the support and incentives to accelerate their transition towards a sustainable economic model. But the EU's Green Deal is not only a comprehensive response to the climate imperative but also a very efficient and promising initiative to generate new business opportunities by helping the emergence of a novel sustainable and circular economic model.

This also provides new areas for economic cooperation worldwide with trusted and committed partners notably the UAE which is promoting economic diversification and sustainability and participation in global value chains. In many of these areas, the EU has cutting-edge technologies and regulations to offer and this will provide new opportunities for stepped-up EU-UAE economic engagement.

As to the important area of trade and sustainability, trade policy can and should play a significant role in promoting these objectives and the EU has already taken important measures to promote this agenda internally in line with our multilateral commitments. On this and other trade-related issues, we are in close conversation with our UAE counterparts who will host the next WTO Ministerial Meeting (MC13) at the end of February in Abu Dhabi.

Q

**With the UAE hosting COP28 and your background in climate action, what specific initiatives or collaborations are you envisaging to foster a joint approach toward addressing global climate challenges?**

A

Let me first stress that the UAE both as a host country and as a Presidency did an excellent job in ensuring a successful outcome at COP28 in Dubai. We also welcomed the attention given by the Presidency to topics generally at the margins of the negotiations. The thematic programme shed new light on the impact that climate change has on health, women, youth and children, vulnerable countries, etc. The final text was of course a compromise and the EU would have possibly liked to go further in some regards. Still, the text eventually adopted has the great benefit of setting the direction for all the stakeholders worldwide including governments, economic operators, investors consumers by including a commitment to “transiting away from fossil”. This is sending a very clear signal to all the relevant players and will also certainly have a positive impact on EU-UAE economic and policy cooperation building on and reinforcing already existing engagements.

In particular, I see important potential in areas covered by some of the global pledges adopted at COP28 notably on tripling renewable energy production and doubling energy efficiency as well as eliminating methane emission by 2030. Beyond the very significant climate change mitigating effects stemming from the implementation of these measures, I see also an important potential in EU-UAE partnerships in these areas with economic operators (investors, technology companies, service providers, etc.) on both sides already active in our countries and the above clear commitments reached at COP28 will certainly boost these engagements.



**How does the EU's Green Deal align with the UAE's sustainability goals, and what opportunities do you see for collaboration in areas like sustainable energy and environmental protection?**



As mentioned above under the European Green Deal, the EU will become climate-neutral by 2050. The UAE plans to become carbon neutral in the same time frame. While still being a very energy-intensive economy, the UAE signed up during its COP28 Presidency to triple renewables and double energy efficiency in the country by 2030. Masdar, UAE's renewables leader has also ambitious green investment plans abroad, including in the MENA region. The EU therefore foresees to cooperate with the UAE on renewables and energy efficiency measures to accelerate the global energy transition. Another interesting track for possible cooperation is renewable hydrogen. As laid out in its Hydrogen Leadership Roadmap, the UAE plans to become a leading hydrogen exporter. The UAE could therefore make an important contribution to the EU's energy security in the future. We are in the process of establishing an EU-UAE Hydrogen Working Group to exchange best practices in policy design and regulation.

As regards collaboration on environmental issues, we could focus on three sectors, namely: sustainable water management; the transition to a resource-efficient, low-carbon circular economy; and biodiversity protection.

Water is a finite resource and the sustainable management of water is integral in addressing both energy and food security. Water reuse, in particular, is an area with considerable potential, as a more cost-effective alternative to desalination with less impact on the environment.

A circular economy is a means of production and consumption that aims to minimize waste and pollution by reusing limited resources. Sustainable waste management is a key element to it, with the sustainable collection, recovery, and recycling of waste materials creating economic opportunities while simultaneously reducing the negative impacts of waste disposal.

Biodiversity degradation and loss is a global crisis that threatens human beings, through the impact on food production as a result of degraded soil and water and a loss of pollinators, a proliferation of pests, and an increase in CO2 emissions. Action on biodiversity protection and restoration is critically needed, in light of a global commitment to protect at least 30% of the world's land and seas by 2030. This means action at a national and regional level as well as integrating biodiversity protection into international development assistance.



**Considering the evolving geopolitical landscape, what are your views on strengthening EU-UAE cooperation in diplomatic actions to address regional and global challenges?**



The EU has traditionally been and will remain a staunch supporter of a rules-based international system. Our internal functioning with supra-national institutions and 27 countries working closely together in a wide range of policy areas is based on clear and enforceable rules. We also believe that in the global context relying on multilateral rules and obligations among countries as well as non-state actors is the only way to ensure peaceful coexistence and economic prosperity for all. Hence our unwavering commitment to support the good functioning of international institutions be it in the WTO or the UN bodies notably in the area of climate mitigation as was demonstrated by the EU's active involvement at COP28.

In this regard, the EU and the UAE -- have been natural partners in the past. Given recent developments and challenges in the global and regional order I am convinced that this partnership will grow even stronger in the future.



**Beyond trade and politics, how do you plan to promote cultural and educational exchanges between the EU and the UAE to foster deeper mutual understanding and collaboration?**



This is indeed a very crucial area in which we should strive to tap into the full potential of bilateral cooperation. Culture is a domain on which our countries have a lot to offer to each other and we are working on some specific projects to further promote cultural exchanges. Here I can refer to an excellent project in the process of implementation which is the organization of a European Film Festival in Abu Dhabi in the not-too-distant future streaming both European and Emirati films.

In the domain of education, there are already significant exchanges between EU and Emirati education establishments and researchers in the context of the Erasmus programme. However, we see a potential to further these exchanges and have more students from the UAE spend time in European Universities and vice-versa. And around our Europe Day celebrations on the 9 of May, we are also planning to organize a simulation of the EU's internal decision-making context (so-called Model EU whereby participants represent the positions of the respective EU Member States as well as EU institutions in negotiating mode) for Emirati students to familiarize them with the complex but efficient way our system is functioning.