Question for written answer E-005897/2013 to the Commission

Rule 117

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Subject: Inclusion of the United Arab Emirates in the visa-free Schengen area

Securing visa-free access to the Schengen area for United Arab Emirates (UAE) citizens is a top priority and a natural development for the exceptional relations between the EU and the UAE. This can be achieved if the UAE is included in the Commission’s current proposal (from November 2012) for a list of countries whose nationals can enter the Schengen area without a visa (Annex II to Council Regulation (EC) No 539/2001).

The UAE and the EU share important political and security interests, while trade and investment between the UAE, on the one hand, and the EU and the non-EU Schengen countries, on the other hand, is valued at EUR 50 billion.

In 2012, 1 640 000 EU citizens visited the UAE. The current list of European countries whose nationals are issued a visa upon arrival in the UAE will be extended to include a further 12 EU Member States. Furthermore, negotiations are about to be concluded which, from the end of this year, will exempt UAE citizens from visa requirements when visiting the United Kingdom.

The UAE presents a range of solid, positive and objective arguments for being included in the current Annex II list: there are no immigration or security concerns, as there are fewer than 1 million holders of UAE passports (which meet the required technical standards), none of whom has ever been denied a Schengen visa or been detained over immigration or security concerns. We all know that when UAE citizens visit the Schengen area, they travel mainly for business, high-end leisure, (private) medical care, or study/education (fully financed and not at the EU’s expense).

Only one other country in the region (Israel) is exempted from the Schengen visa requirements, and only two other Islamic countries (Brunei and Malaysia) are listed. Even if the UAE case were to be judged on its own merits, the political message from the EU would therefore have a tremendous impact. Parliament will certainly give wide support to this measure.

Given that the UAE complies with all relevant and applicable criteria for being granted Annex II status, we think it is time to act. How does the Commission view the inclusion of the UAE in the on-going revision of the list of countries whose nationals can access the Schengen area without a visa?