



# Disruptive Technologies and Geopolitics – Developing UAE-EU-Italy Cooperative Model

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## Summary

- This Insight explores how the Middle East, especially the UAE, is actively shaping its technological landscape through comprehensive national strategies focusing on disruptive technologies (DTs) like AI, cloud computing and quantum technology.
- The UAE aims to become a global leader in AI by 2031, investing heavily in tech and aiming for economic diversification beyond oil revenues, highlighted by initiatives like the UAE AI Strategy and the establishment of a massive AI data center cluster.
- The core of the Insight is the analysis of the existing collaboration with the European Union and Italy. The EU, with its strong, well established regulatory frameworks, offers potential synergies with the UAE's rapid technology adoption. Italy, as an EU member, is positioned to contribute expertise in sectors aligning with UAE's innovations, leading to mutually beneficial cooperation.
- An in-depth analysis of the UAE-Italy collaboration in the field of emerging technologies is provided in the Insight. Among the suggested areas of further collaboration are: smart city initiatives, healthcare innovation, education and workforce development, and expanding data centre capabilities, highlighting tangible joint projects between the nations.
- Moreover, the UAE is poised to excel in quantum research and applications, with Italy's established background in the field enhancing bilateral cooperation. Joint initiatives aim to leverage each nation's strengths and innovate across sectors.
- Special attention is given to the Global Governance framework on emerging technologies. There's a critical need for global governance frameworks to address ethical considerations of AI. The UAE and EU (particularly Italy) can spearhead efforts in establishing international standards and promote ethical advancements in technology.
- The Insight delves also into the analysis of challenges and opportunities for future cooperation in this field. While opportunities for collaboration exist, differences in regulatory approaches and cultural contexts may pose challenges. Establishing effective communication and protocols will be essential for successful partnerships.
- The UAE and Italy can steer global efforts to harness technological advancements responsibly, aiming for inclusive growth benefitting broader society. This framework fosters the potential for sustained cooperation grounded in shared interests and ethical responsibility, ultimately positioning the UAE and Italy as leaders in global technological innovation.

## A Changing World

The Middle East has rapidly emerged as a prominent player in the global technology landscape, signaling a transformative shift in how innovation is perceived and implemented across the region. Cities such as Riyadh and Dubai are not just passively adopting disruptive technologies (DTs); they are proactively developing comprehensive national strategies aimed at harnessing the potential of these advancements. Technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), cloud infrastructure, quantum computing, and data sovereignty have transcended their status as mere buzzwords, becoming integral components of national visions for economic and social progress.

However, beyond the eye-catching headlines and ambitious multi-billion-dollar projects lies a more nuanced narrative. This story is one of visionary leadership, the cultivation of public trust, and the delicate balancing act of driving rapid technological advancement while addressing ethical implications. As governments and organizations navigate the complexities of these disruptive changes, they must grapple with issues ranging from data privacy to equitable access to technology.

Disruptive technologies, by definition, are innovations that fundamentally alter industries, markets, or societal norms. They do this by creating new value networks and either displacing or significantly reorganizing established technologies, business models, and competencies. Typically, they begin by offering simpler, more cost-effective, or more accessible alternatives to existing solutions. Over time, these innovations evolve to not just compete with but often surpass the dominant technologies currently in use.

These technologies fundamentally reshape competitive dynamics across sectors, compelling organizations to adapt swiftly or risk obsolescence. The influence of disruptive technologies can extend beyond business, sparking widespread economic, social, and regulatory transformations. As the Middle East continues on this trajectory of technological evolution, it stands at the intersection of innovation and ethical responsibility, poised to set a global standard for how emerging technologies can drive positive change while prioritizing the well-being of its citizens and the integrity of its institutions.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have recognized the potential of these technologies to drive economic diversification and innovation. This Insight explores the strategic importance of AI and disruptive technologies in the UAE, highlighting the potential for cooperation with the European Union (EU) and specifically Italy, while also discussing global governance initiatives.

### The UAE's Vision for AI.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has strategically positioned itself as a regional powerhouse in technology and innovation, showcasing its commitment to becoming a global leader in these fields. A pivotal moment in this journey came in October 2017, when the government unveiled the UAE AI Strategy, an ambitious initiative designed to propel the nation's standing in artificial intelligence on the world stage by the year 2031.<sup>1</sup>

This far-reaching strategy encompasses several critical sectors, including healthcare, transportation, education, and energy, with the aim of harnessing AI to drive transformative change.<sup>2</sup>

By investing heavily in AI technologies, the UAE is not only focused on enhancing public services but also on stimulating economic growth and significantly improving the quality of life for its citizens. This holistic approach reflects a deep understanding of how technology can serve as a catalyst for modernization and societal advancement. Historically reliant on oil revenues, the UAE is actively pursuing economic diversification by investing in technology. AI and disruptive technologies are central to this strategy, providing opportunities to develop new industries and reduce dependence on hydrocarbons.<sup>3</sup>

In 2024, the UAE took a landmark step by announcing plans to establish the world's largest AI data centre cluster in Abu Dhabi. This ambitious project is expected to serve as a hub for innovation, enabling the successful deployment of cutting-edge AI solutions and fostering collaboration among businesses, researchers, and entrepreneurs. By creating an infrastructure that supports the growth and development of AI capabilities, the UAE aims to attract global talent and investment.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the UAE made headlines globally by appointing (already in 2017) the world's first Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence (Mr. Omar Sultan Al Olama). This pioneering role underscores the importance the UAE places

on AI, not just as a technological tool but as a fundamental component in shaping the future of the nation and global geopolitical equilibria.<sup>5</sup>

Through its ambitious strategies, the UAE is not only ready to lead in the realm of AI but is also setting an example for other countries looking to harness technology for national development and global competitiveness. As it moves forward, the UAE is committed to continue to innovate, inspire and implement AI solutions that prioritize the sustainability of its economy.

The UAE has invested heavily in tech startups, research and development, and partnerships with leading global tech firms to foster innovation. The UAE identifies resources and energy, logistics and transport, and tourism and hospitality as priority sectors for AI trials and adoption. The UAE National Strategy for AI 2031 outlines an ambitious vision to establish the country as a global leader in the field by the next decade, aligning this goal with the broader UAE Centennial 2071 vision of becoming the most advanced country in the world in this domain. This strategy focuses on creating a strong foundation for economic, educational, and governmental transformation through AI, aiming to generate AED 335 billion in economic growth.

## Cooperation with the EU

The EU represents a significant partner for the UAE in harnessing AI and disruptive technologies. Both regions share common interests in promoting sustainable development, economic growth, and technological advancement. The EU's strong regulatory framework and emphasis on ethical AI development can complement the UAE's rapid technological adoption.

Italy, as a key member of the EU, has much to offer in terms of expertise and collaboration. The Italian government and private sector have been proactive in sectors such as smart manufacturing, urban planning and sustainable energy, all areas where the UAE is seeking to innovate. By leveraging Italy's technological expertise and the EU's regulatory framework, the UAE can enhance its AI initiatives.

In February 2025, the UAE and Italy signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to strengthen investment cooperation in pharmaceuticals, minerals and AI. These agreements aim to foster innovation, enhance knowledge transfer and integrate advanced technology across key industries in both countries.<sup>6</sup>

In May 2025, Italy and the UAE agreed to develop an artificial intelligence hub in Italy. Abu Dhabi-based AI group G42, through its subsidiary Core42, has entered into a partnership with Italian company iGenius to build "the largest AI computing infrastructure in Europe." This partnership aims to deploy a high-performance GPU cluster powered by thousands of NVIDIA Blackwell GPUs. The envisaged pan-European AI rollout will be enabled and operated by Core42.<sup>7</sup>

## Possible Areas of UAE-Italy Collaboration

1. Smart Cities and Urban Development – Italy has a wealth of experience in urban planning and smart city initiatives, which can be invaluable to the UAE's own urban development projects. Cities like Dubai and Abu Dhabi are already implementing smart technologies to improve infrastructure, public services and environmental sustainability. Collaborative projects can focus on integrating AI into urban management systems to enhance efficiency and sustainability.
2. Healthcare Innovation – The healthcare sector is another area ripe for collaboration. Italy is renowned for its advanced healthcare systems and medical research. Joint ventures in telemedicine, AI-driven diagnostics, and health informatics can enhance the quality of healthcare services in the UAE, especially in light of the growing demand for efficient healthcare solutions.
3. Education and Skills Development – As AI evolves, there is a pressing need for a skilled workforce. Italy's educational institutions can collaborate with UAE universities to develop programmes focused on these emerging technologies. The UAE AI Office launched the "AI for All" initiative in collaboration with Google to provide comprehensive training programmes on AI fundamentals for all age groups and professional backgrounds. This partnership can help cultivate local talent, ensuring that the UAE has a workforce ready to meet the demands of a technology-driven economy.

4. Data Centres and AI Infrastructure – The UAE and Italy are collaborating on expanding data centres and cloud computing capabilities. A joint venture between Khazna Data Centers and Italian energy company Eni aims to build a 500-megawatt AI-focused data centre in Ferrera Erbognone, Lombardy. This project is part of a broader partnership between the UAE and Italy, targeting up to 1 gigawatt of IT capacity in Italy.

## Quantum Technologies in the UAE and Italy

When it comes to concrete progress in quantum technologies (QTs), the UAE stands out as a regional trailblazer. With ambitious goals and a well-crafted strategy, the UAE aims to become one of the top five countries globally in quantum research and development.<sup>8</sup>

At the heart of this movement is the Technology Innovation Institute (TII) in Abu Dhabi, which houses the Quantum Research Centre (QRC). The focus of its activities here is not just on research but also on creating practical solutions, such as developing domestic qubit systems, secure cryptography frameworks, and applied sensing technologies. The Centre has already achieved some impressive milestones, like fabricating the first superconducting qubit in the MENA region.<sup>9</sup>

One important project is the XPANSE Initiative, launched at the “Make it in the Emirates” Summit in May 2024. This aims to turn quantum concepts into real-world applications across sectors like energy, logistics and security. Additionally, the VerneX Quantum Valley offers incentives for quantum startups and access to national infrastructure.<sup>10</sup>

Education is also a key element of the overall strategy for quantum technologies. Universities in the UAE offer specialized courses to equip the next generation with quantum computing skills, complementing the national strategy for artificial intelligence; the UAE is also making efforts to attract top talent in the field with strong financial incentives.

On the regulatory front, the UAE has taken proactive steps by implementing mandatory post-quantum cryptography for public agencies and critical infrastructure as of 2024. This is a significant move to secure data in an increasingly digital world. Financially, the government announced a \$100 million investment in quantum computing in 2022, aimed at bolstering talent and enhancing research facilities.<sup>11</sup>

The collaboration between the UAE and EU countries, particularly Italy, on quantum technologies presents exciting opportunities for knowledge exchange and joint innovation. Italy has a strong background in quantum research, with institutions like the National Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN) and the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT) making significant advancements in quantum computing and quantum communication.

In July 2025, Italy adopted its national strategy on quantum, a forward-looking initiative aimed at establishing the country as a leader in the rapidly evolving field of quantum technologies. With a well-rounded approach that encompasses various facets of development, the strategy demonstrates an understanding of the transformative potential of quantum innovations and their implications for society.<sup>12</sup>

At the heart of the Italian quantum strategy is an emphasis on substantial funding and investment. The Italian government is committed to allocating significant financial resources towards research and development, recognizing that this investment is essential for fostering innovation. By encouraging collaboration between public institutions and private enterprises, Italy aims to create a robust ecosystem that leverages diverse expertise and resources to drive quantum advancements.

Moreover, research institutions play a pivotal role in this strategy. Italy is focusing on providing support to universities and research centres, cultivating environments where collaboration can flourish. The establishment of dedicated quantum research hubs and laboratories will facilitate groundbreaking studies, fostering a culture of creativity and exploration that is essential for technological breakthroughs. European collaboration is another cornerstone of Italy's quantum ambitions.

In terms of applications development, the Italian strategy highlights the significance of translating quantum research into practical solutions. Sectors such as telecommunications, finance and healthcare stand to benefit immensely from innovations in quantum computing, cryptography and sensing technologies. By focusing on real-world applications, Italy seeks to ensure that its advancements in quantum technologies have tangible impacts on everyday life.

To support these endeavors, education and workforce development are crucial elements of the Italian quantum strategy. Italy is investing in programmes designed to equip individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in the quantum landscape. Collaborations with educational institutions aim to integrate quantum science into curricula, ensuring that future generations are well-prepared to contribute to this dynamic field.

Furthermore, the Italian strategy acknowledges the importance of a coherent regulatory framework. As quantum technologies advance, establishing policies that foster innovation while addressing ethical considerations is vital. This proactive approach ensures that Italy can harness the benefits of quantum advancements responsibly.

Finally, increasing public awareness is an essential goal. By fostering a greater understanding of quantum technologies among the general populace, Italy aims to engage citizens in this scientific journey. An informed public is not only more likely to support innovation but also to appreciate its potential benefits and challenges.

Italy aims to strengthen its position within an international framework. Such partnerships not only enhance resource sharing but also create opportunities for joint projects that harness collective expertise to tackle complex challenges.

In March 2025, a MoU was signed between the UAE's Quantum Research Council and Italy's INFN to enhance cooperation in quantum science research. This partnership aims to promote collaborative projects, focusing on the sectors of communications and computing while facilitating the exchange of researchers and expertise.

Several joint initiatives could be envisioned in this partnership, such as quantum computing workshops and seminars (hosting events to share knowledge about quantum algorithms and programming, benefiting researchers and companies in both regions); collaborative research programmes (developing specific research projects that leverage the strengths of both countries, focusing on practical applications of quantum technologies in healthcare, cybersecurity and environmental monitoring; funding for start-ups; joint funding opportunities for start-ups and SMEs working in QTs, fostering innovation and commercialization of quantum solutions).

## Global Governance of Disruptive Technologies

In addition to bilateral cooperation, there is a growing need for governance frameworks that address at a global level the ethical and societal implications of AI. The EU and GCC countries, particularly the UAE, can play a pivotal role in shaping global standards and policies. In the last few years, international initiatives have multiplied in an effort to ensure responsible AI governance.<sup>13</sup>

The United Nations Global Digital Compact aims to promote an inclusive digital future. Adopted at the UN Summit of the Future in September 2024, it is a comprehensive framework for digital cooperation and the governance of digital technologies and AI. The UAE, with its strategic investments in technology, can contribute to this initiative by sharing best practices and collaborating with EU countries to create a digital environment that respects human rights and fosters innovation.

The Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law is the first-ever international legally binding treaty in this field. The Convention was finalized and opened for signature in September 2024.

Adherence to the Convention is also open to states that are not members of the Council of Europe; therefore, although not a member, the UAE's engagement in this process could help ensure that its AI strategy aligns with international human rights standards. Stronger forms of collaboration with member states can facilitate knowledge exchange, enabling the UAE to further integrate ethical considerations into its technological advancements.

The UAE has also played a significant role in the Rome Call for AI Ethics, launched in February 2020. This initiative, supported by major tech companies and institutions, emphasizes the need for ethical AI development that respects human dignity, privacy and the environment. The UAE's commitment to these principles enhances its reputation as a responsible AI leader.

The UAE's involvement in international AI safety initiatives further underscores its commitment to responsible AI governance. The UAE participated in the AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in November 2023, which focused on the safe and ethical deployment of AI technologies. The discussions emphasized collaborative approaches to AI regulation and safety, with the UAE contributing insights from its own regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, the UAE has played an active role in the following summits, including the 2024 AI Safety Summit in Seoul, the 2025 AI Action Summit in Paris and the 2026 AI Impact Summit in New Delhi. These platforms will allow the UAE to engage with global leaders and stakeholders, sharing best practices and fostering international partnerships to address the challenges posed by AI technologies.<sup>14</sup>

At regional level, the GCC can establish forums to discuss AI governance and ethics, promoting dialogue between member states and with the EU. Such platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing and collective responses to challenges posed by AI, ensuring that the benefits of these technologies are widely distributed and ethically managed.

As with AI, global governance of quantum technologies is essential for fostering their ethical development and responsible use. The rapid advancements in QTs present both significant opportunities and complex challenges that require cooperation on an international scale. The UAE has a unique opportunity to collaborate with entities like the EU to establish robust international frameworks aimed at addressing these multifaceted issues.

By engaging in joint initiatives, the UAE and the EU can create governance structures that prioritize ethical considerations, ensuring that quantum technologies are developed and utilized in ways that are safe, transparent, and equitable. Such frameworks would not only promote best practices but also facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources, ultimately benefiting both regions.

One noteworthy initiative that exemplifies this spirit of collaboration is the 'Horizon Europe' programme. This ambitious funding scheme supports research and innovation across various sectors, including QTs. By tapping into resources allocated through Horizon Europe, the UAE can enhance its research capabilities, attract top scientists and researchers, and foster a culture of innovation in quantum technology development.

In addition to direct collaboration on research, the UAE and EU can engage in dialogues aimed at aligning their regulatory approaches. Harmonizing regulations will be crucial as quantum technologies continue to evolve, ensuring that both regions can respond swiftly to emerging ethical dilemmas and societal impacts.

Furthermore, joint conferences, workshops, and collaborative projects can serve as platforms for knowledge exchange and capacity building. By pooling expertise and resources, the UAE and EU can take the lead in setting international standards that guide the ethical application of QTs, promoting a framework that balances innovation with responsibility.

In conclusion, as the world stands on the brink of a quantum revolution, the UAE's proactive engagement with global partners like the EU will be instrumental in shaping a future where quantum technologies can be harnessed ethically and effectively. By establishing comprehensive governance frameworks and fostering collaborative research initiatives, they can pave the way for advancements that not only drive economic growth but also contribute positively to society at large.

## **New Challenges Ahead: The Need for Even Stronger Cooperation**

The prospects for enhanced cooperation between the UAE and EU countries, particularly Italy, are promising, offering a pathway to significant advancements in technology and governance. However, several challenges must be overcome to realize this potential. Differences in regulatory approaches, cultural contexts and varying levels of technological maturity can complicate collaborative efforts. To address these challenges effectively, establishing clear protocols for collaboration and communication will be essential.

The UAE's proactive stance on embracing AI and disruptive technologies, including quantum technologies, presents a formidable opportunity for fruitful partnerships with the EU. By leveraging each other's strengths, such as the UAE's rapid technological advancements and Italy's rich history of innovation, both regions can drive significant innovation, enhance economic diversification, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development efforts.

Moreover, the UAE and the EU have a unique opportunity to shape ethical frameworks governing AI and quantum. By actively participating in global governance initiatives, such as the UN Global Digital Compact and the Council of Europe Convention on AI and Human Rights, even those not formally adhered to, they can promote human rights and societal well-being. Initiatives like the Rome Call for AI Ethics and the following AI Safety Summits further exemplify the collaborative spirit necessary to establish ethical guidelines that resonate worldwide.

Events such as the Abu Dhabi Global AI Summit held in November 2025 can provide valuable platforms for dialogue and knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration between industry leaders, policymakers, and researchers. These forums will allow stakeholders to discuss best practices, address ethical concerns and share insights on the socio-economic implications of emerging technologies.

As global challenges become increasingly complex and interconnected, the partnership between the UAE and Italy will be paramount in harnessing the transformative power of these technologies. By navigating the intricacies of governance and technological impact, they can position themselves as leaders in responsible innovation, setting trends that resonate far beyond their borders.

Through strategic cooperation, both regions can effectively address the ethical implications of AI and disruptive technologies, ensuring they contribute positively to society and foster inclusive growth. By building a foundation of trust and openness, the UAE and EU member states, such as Italy, can pioneer new frontiers in technology governance that serve the best interests of their populations and the broader global community. In an era where technological advancements hold tremendous promise, their collaborative efforts can lead the way in harnessing this potential for the greater good.

- To translate this shared strategic vision into sustained, practical progress, the UAE, the EU and Italy could envisage to study forms of further cooperation, for example by establishing a structured cooperation mechanism focused on operational deliverables in emerging technologies. This could include permanent 'Technology Coordination Platforms' to align regulatory approaches, coordinate research agendas, and accelerate cross-border pilot projects in AI, quantum, and smart-city applications. A joint investment fund dedicated to AI and quantum-tech startups would help scale innovation while promoting balanced participation from public and private sectors.
- To address workforce needs, partners should launch integrated training pathways, pairing UAE innovation programmes with European technical universities and Italian research institutes, ensuring mobility of researchers and harmonized skill development. On the infrastructure side, jointly operated AI and quantum testbeds, including federated data centers, secure digital corridors, and shared HPC/quantum facilities, could provide a common operational environment for deploying next-generation applications.
- Finally, and more ambitiously, a specific international governance task force could be spearheaded to jointly shape global standards for AI safety, post-quantum security, and digital ethics, leveraging their complementary strengths: the UAE's agility, the EU's regulatory leadership, and Italy's scientific excellence.

Together, these operational measures would transform political alignment into tangible outcomes, positioning the UAE, the EU, and Italy as influential architects of a secure, ethical, and innovative technological future.

## Endnotes

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