

# Why Changing Energy Markets Add Relevance to EXPO 2017 Astana

The event has chosen a surprising theme.

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When Kazakhstan bid to host the 2017 EXPO in its capital Astana, it must have surprised many observers. It was not just that no country from the former Soviet Union had yet to host EXPO, but the theme we chose was future energy.

After all, Kazakhstan is one of the world's largest oil and gas producers. Promoting new energy sources and solutions may have seemed a strange decision for a country with such large fossil fuel reserves.

But five years after the historic vote by the International Exhibitions Bureau (BIE) delegates for Astana, that theme seems more timely and relevant than ever. Energy security is an increasing concern for many countries with governments worried about how they can meet the needs of their economies and citizens in future decades.

Around the world, too, the damaging impact of climate change is clearer every year, increasing fears about the legacy we are leaving for future generations. As I write this text in my office in mid-February in Astana, I think to myself that winters are clearly not as cold as they used to be when Kazakhstan's administrative capital moved here 18 years ago.

The agreement reached at the COP 21 conference in December was a vital step in tackling this potentially catastrophic challenge. But commitments to reduce carbon emissions now have to be turned into concrete, deliverable policies.

Green energy – affordable, reliable and environmentally sustainable – is at the heart of the answer to how we protect our planet while enabling prosperity to spread. It is why, despite its oil and gas reserves, Kazakhstan has set itself a target of meeting 50 percent of its own energy needs from alternative and renewable sources by the middle of the century.

Not surprisingly given these major global challenges, international attention on EXPO 17 has been strong. Last month Latvia, although not a member of the BIE, became the 70th country to formally confirm its participation. More than 30 are nations are expected to follow in its footsteps in the coming weeks.

Last week, I visited New Delhi where we signed a country participation agreement with India. The fact that one of the largest economies in Asia and the world will present its green technologies agenda at EXPO 2017 will add great value to the event's attractiveness to both professionals in the field and numerous tourists. Sovereign nations will be joined by many of the world's largest companies, particularly in the energy field, who see EXPO 2017 as an important opportunity to showcase their technology and ideas to a global audience. Businesses know from previous EXPOs what a unique platform exhibitions provide to excite interest in products and services, to drive innovation and forge new partnerships.

This interest, the importance of the subject, as well as the trust placed in it by the BIE, puts a lot of responsibility on Kazakhstan. We have an obligation to ensure everything is ready for the exhibition's opening in June next year and for the many hundreds of thousands of people who will visit Astana during the three months it will run.

As the Second Meeting of EXPO 2017 International Participants in Astana this week will hear, we are confident of meeting this responsibility. The large exhibition site, ideally situated between the city center and international airport, is rapidly taking shape. National and international pavilions are being designed by renowned architects while the entire infrastructure that such a large event will need is in place.

A similar pace of development can be seen outside the site. There are, for instance, a good number of new hotels close to completion with major investment taking place to improve transport in the city and its links to the rest of the country. Nor is it just the physical barriers to success that are being removed. We have already scrapped the need for visas for citizens from more than 20 nations to make it easier for them to visit.

But while the first priority is to ensure the site and city can meet the needs of the hundreds of thousands of visitors during the exhibition, we recognize that its success will also be judged on its long-term impact. From the beginning, we saw EXPO as a national project that can help us achieve our ambition to become one of the world's most advanced economies by 2050.

Our aim is to use EXPO to drive the next stage of our industrial development and diversification with a new emphasis on sustainability, high-tech and skills. The exhibition site and its buildings will, wherever possible, use the latest renewable power sources, smart energy networks and sustainable construction techniques. Their use will embed these skills and knowledge throughout our wider industry.

We have also been determined that the site will have a life long after the exhibition closes. It will, for example, host an International Centre for the development of green technologies and investment projects under the auspices of the UN. The site will also be the home of the new Astana International Financial Centre which is being developed along the lines of its counterpart in Dubai. With its modern buildings and infrastructure along with the housing being constructed, it will form a new vibrant quarter in our capital city as well as a permanent home for high-tech firms, research centers and academic institutions.

By raising our international profile and improving the facilities in our capital city, we expect as well that EXPO17 will provide a long-term boost to tourism to our country. Astana is a gateway to a land of remarkable natural beauty and we hope the exhibition will help show just what we can offer to visitors from around the world.

It is now just over a year until EXPO17 opens its doors for the first time. By focusing on how we power our world in a sustainable way, we are playing our part in finding solutions to one of the major challenges of the century. It is why I hope that many countries, companies and individuals come to Astana next summer. You can be sure of the warmest of welcomes.

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