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Interview: Uzbekistan a solid energy partner



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Uzbekistan's first Deputy Minister for Energy Azim Akhmedkhadjayev.

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New Europe sat down in the Uzbek capital during the first Tashkent International Investments forum with the first Deputy Minister for Energy **Azim Akhmedkhadjayev**, discussing about the strategies and priorities of the central-asian country.

New Europe: Deputy Minister, can you talk to me about your future national energy strategy?

Azim Akhmedkhadjayev: We recently adopted a strategy up to 2030 and by that date our goal is to bubble our capacity in terms of energy, nowadays we are talking about 14 GW in the entire country while our goal is achieve 30 GW. Apart from this objective, my ministry plans to develop on renewable energy reaching the 30%, we are going to support projects on sun, wind and hydrogen. Uzbekistan is fighting a lot to become a very green country and together with other central Asian neighbors we are quite successful, using a metaphor my country didn't "invent any bicycle" but just tried learn from the best experiences developed here. For us it was important to set up a collaboration with companies like BCG, Mckinsey, etc. in order to build up strategies on oil, gas and electricity. We have a forecast by 2024 which states that we will reach, in renewable energies, 3.6 GW, my country will do up to 4 GW in gas turbines power plants. On March 24th we launched with a ceremony a huge gas turbine power plant in the south of Uzbekistan (Surxondar region), Siemens Energy and French company EDF also took part to break ground ceremony. Our mission is to attract high quality investments into our sector, bringing in more European experiences and technology.

NE: About the renewables, in which direction are you going, more on hydrogen or on wind?

AA:First, we gained some experience with our partners from the gulf countries like Masdar from UAE and AKWA Power from Saudi Arabia, bilateral contracts were signed with them and we launched last year our first 100 MW with Masdar. We will implement then another 100 MW project with the French company Total area, this will be very likely launched in April. We did a ground breaking ceremony early this March with AKWA Power on wind, it is a 100 MW project in Nukus, firstly it is key to develop the solar energy of course then in parallel it will be turn of discovering capacities in wind. The first contracts signed were bilateral but now we switched to bidding's. Thanks to this tool it is possible do more attractive projects, we are noticing a good competition because a lot of companies are coming here trying to give the best possible prices. Our average price for solar in these days is like 2.6 cents and wind it is a little bit less than that.

With the support of our President it was established the National Renewable Energy Institute funded under the roof of the Ministry of Energy. Within this institution we want, together with AKWA Power and United States Airports, to do R&D on the basis of which we will study hydrogen energy as well as we will issue certification points for all equipment that will be coming into Uzbekistan for the development of renewable energy. It is important to certificate all these equipment who are coming to my country, the certification body will be formed together with top consulting companies from Europe, USA, etc. We are quite ambitious and we understand that today's agenda is on de-carbonization; according to several estimations Uzbekistan could reach by 2050 the 0 carbon energy system, we will try to be in line with that goal.

We want reduce our emissions, in our strategy it was set the goal of reducing emissions by 10 % in the next 8 years but last year during the Glasgow Conference (COP 26), we set another ambitious goal to reach 35% in the next 8 year. We don't want to be exaggerated but just be as pragmatic as possible because the world is changing, and for us it is important to be in compliance with all these changes. Deep researches were done, traveling around and seeing the capacities and experiences in other countries. We know about the US experience on shale gas, we are thinking about that even though there are rumors that shale gas have some problems but at the same time we must admit that the best experiences are coming from the US, we started our talks with USGS (science agency by the US department of interior) as well.

NE: Can you talk now about the cooperation with Europe?

AA:We recently launched a very important gas turbine project then solar and hydrogen are interesting for us, we want to cooperate with any state of art companies who has the best companies. German and French companies are here, the Italians are approaching us, they are coming around and we did a lot of talk with Ansaldo. The most interesting thing about Italian companies is that they are coming along with the financing which is interesting for us. Uzbekistan is considering a lot of proposals and we have a proverb "we are not that rich to buy cheap things" so it is key to pick best practices. We are trying now to do more PPP's because we have already experience about that, our goal is to transform our energy sector.

NE: What is your evaluation about the nuclear power?

AA:Taking into account how rapid our industry grows, we do consider that, we didn't exclude this idea, we are thinking about security issues and every tiny issues bring to negative results but we never stopped this agenda. In this period we need something that could give us huge energy capacity that can be used. The nuclear power is in our development strategy 2030 so it is always considerable.

NE: How do you see the energy relations with the other countries in the region?

AA: My country is trying to keep best possible relations with our neighboring countries, we are not playing politics, we want to do pure business. Uzbekistan is the most populated country in the region therefore the government must think to our people, we are taking care about that rather than to become a super power in the region.