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Commitment

Swiss Get Own Neighborhood in Eco-City

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07.09.2009 **Switzerland will be among the first tenants to move into Masdar, Abu Dhabi. It is the only country so far to be given its own neighborhood in the eco-city. The Swiss cleantech industry hopes the move will enable it to pick up orders not only in Masdar itself and Abu Dhabi but throughout the Gulf region. Abu Dhabi intends to make Masdar a global center for renewable energy. Credit Suisse is playing an important role in the construction of Masdar and the "Swiss Village".**

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Wolfgang Amadeus Bruehlhart was preoccupied with Masdar from day one of his new job: The new Swiss Ambassador had barely taken up his post in the United Arab Emirates when Oerlikon came knocking on his door. The Zurich-based cutting-edge technology firm – which among other things makes production

systems for solar modules – wanted to have a presence in the eco-city being planned in Abu Dhabi. Other Swiss parties were also interested. In January 2008, for instance, Bruehlhart accompanied a delegation of scientists and politicians to the inaugural World Future Energy Summit in Abu Dhabi. The main sponsor of the event, which is set to become the "Davos" of renewable energy, has been Credit Suisse on both occasions so far. Credit Suisse also manages the Masdar Cleantech Fund. This 250-million-dollar fund is run by the Masdar Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, and is now invested worldwide in numerous firms in the cleantech sector. In addition, Zurich-based planning firm Maxmakers was the very first consultancy firm to be involved in Masdar and has been active in preparatory work for the project since 2006.

Masdar Chief Proposes Swiss Community

January 2008 saw Bruehlhart approach Maxmakers managing partner Nick Beglinger with an idea: What about housing the Swiss Embassy in the eco-city of Masdar in future, rather than Abu Dhabi? Switzerland would therefore have an official presence in the first city in the world to get all its energy entirely from renewable sources, a city that pumps out no carbon dioxide at all and produces no waste. The Alpine nation would be represented at a location which – if the project's founders have their way – will be developed into a global center for renewable energy. Together they went to see Sultan Al Jaber, the head of Masdar, which is a subsidiary of the Mubadala state-owned investment fund. His reaction? Why just an embassy? Why not a Swiss village too? All they needed to do was sign up a sufficient number of Swiss companies to get a whole district of their own in Masdar with embassy, school, offices, and apartments.

Ministers Do the Advertising

The idea grew in dimension. In October 2008, UAE Trade Minister Sheika Lubna Al Quasimi visited Switzerland. In January 2009, her Swiss colleague with responsibility for the environment and energy, Federal Councilor Moritz Leuenberger, attended the second World Future Energy Summit. Around 20 representatives from business and the universities accompanied him to Abu Dhabi. Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin, who holds the education portfolio, and Federal President Hans-Rudolf Merz followed in the months thereafter. The Swiss Village idea also gained the support of Osec, the official Swiss export promotion body. "With this project we see real opportunities for Swiss business," says Rolf Jeker, chairman of Osec's supervisory board. The Swiss Village could become a shop window for the Swiss economy, showcasing its goods to the Emirates and indeed the entire Gulf region. Construction of the Swiss Village was officially agreed with Masdar at the end of July. "We are interested in strong cooperation that offers strategic opportunities for Masdar City as well as for the Swiss businesses that will be represented at the Swiss Village," says Sultan Al Jaber.

More than 70 companies are now part of the Swiss Village Association. Credit Suisse is involved as a strategic partner, and other companies include Switzerland's largest construction firm Implenia, real estate firm Avireal, watch manufacturer Hublot, as well as the three big players in the Swiss solar power industry: Oerlikon, 3S, and Meyer-Burger. At a presentation on the Swiss Village at the Credit Suisse Uetlihof Forum in Zurich in mid-August, association chairman Nick Beglinger said he was confident around one hundred firms would one day have a presence in the village.

Other Countries Set to Follow

Switzerland is so far the only country to be given its own neighborhood, which Beglinger says is "a prime piece of real estate": The site, comprising around 20 hectares, lies at the heart of Masdar, between the university and the downtown area. The first buildings will be occupied from as early as 2011. But Switzerland cannot remain the only country. According to Ambassador Bruehlhart, the governments of South Korea and Canada have also officially come knocking on Masdar's door. Scandinavian countries are likewise said to be interested in a visible presence.

Right from the start, Masdar has sought to get as many different partners on board as possible. For example, the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology – which is to accept its first students in September – was founded in cooperation with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). In June, Masdar agreed a cooperation deal with Germany's Fraunhofer Institute. It has also signed a cooperation agreement with the UK government for the development of technologies used to capture renewable energy. The eco-city's first photovoltaic plant, which was hooked up to the grid in May and is the biggest in the Gulf region, was equipped by two suppliers: First Solar from the US provided thin-film modules, while China's Suntech supplied crystal modules. In mid-August, Masdar forged a strategic partnership with BASF of Germany for energy-efficient construction, and US technology giant General Electric is to set up a research center for energy efficiency.

Irena Moving to Masdar

This systematic search for partners brought its first high-profile success at the end of June: Masdar was chosen by the member nations of the new International Renewable Energy Agency (Irena) as the location for its headquarters. Masdar is on track, even if the crisis and low oil prices appear to be delaying construction slightly. The government of Abu Dhabi is standing by its plans: By 2018, the eco-city of Masdar will be home to 50,000 people and 90,000 workers, and will be setting new global standards for energy efficiency and

sustainability. The investment cost will be 22 billion dollars, nearly 4 billion of which is coming from the government resources of the oil-rich emirate. And as things stand at the moment, everything suggests that Switzerland will occupy pride of place in this new global hub for renewable energy.

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