



## The United Arab Emirates in the debate on climate change

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# An opportunity for Spain

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"An era of change or a change of era?" asked Frenchman Edgard Morin in 2007 when commenting on an exceptional new phrase, coined during his country's presidential elections. That phrase, "politics of civilization", has made its mark since then. A year later the media machine insists on one hand in accumulating adverse stories about the current world economy and its immediate perspectives and, on the other, a fresh outbreak of warnings, ever more sombre and dramatic, about the degradation of the biosphere, about global warming, about a whole series of various events that put the continuity of the world, as we see it today, in danger in the very near future.

Every fourth of February, the United Arab Emirates carries out the annual ritual of commemorating the National Environment Day. There is perhaps an all too easily forgotten tradition of care for one's surroundings among Arab people, as is referred to in their own sacred book, the Quran, by a person well known to the Spanish, Ibn Khaldoun, or in a strictly Emirates context, by the late 'Father of the Nation' Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Well, it was a ninth of February, this year, when some 40 kilometres from Abu Dhabi, near the international airport, that the first stone was laid for what will be the future Masdar City, a prime example of a multi-use initiative that firmly underscores the UAE's compromise to the sustainability and custody of the environment.

It represents a meticulous move in the right direction that has similarities with limited and much smaller experiences such as the 'eco-districts' of Limeil-Brévannes (Val-de-Marne) in France, Germany's Vauban in Freiburg or the British Bedzed or, on a scale closer to Masdar itself - with a future population of around 50,000 inhabitants - of the one planned for east of Shanghai in China.

It coincides with the appearance, as mentioned above, of serious calls to order emanating from very different sources, underlining that these warning calls are by no means coincidence. Among them is one from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). After stressing that by 2030 there will be over eight billion people on this Earth (compared with 6.5 billion today), its report identifies the four major axis that cannot be put off when it comes to combating climate change, the loss of biodiversity, lack of water and the impact of pollution on human health. Another one is the document presented jointly to the Council of Europe on 13 March by the services of the High Representative of the European Union and the Commission, where they refer to climate change as a "multiplier of threats that exacerbate existing tensions and instability." They reiterate the dangers noted by the OECD, and add some more. That's the way things are going. Returning to the United Arab Emirates Masdar, in

“ Masdar makes a decisive bid for alternative and renewable technologies, for the reduction of carbon emissions and points to the creation of a model self-sustainable city ”



Courtesy of Masdar



*The future Masdar City, a model self-sustainable city project in Abu Dhabi.*

the dark setting in which we move today (the next work of Matt Simmons, one of the theorists behind an imminent 'peak oil', is appropriately titled "Darkness in the desert"), represents one of the few bits of good news in the energy field to be counted on our threatened planet. A decisive bid for alternative and renewable technologies, for the reduction of carbon emissions, pointing to the creation of a model self-sustainable city, one that is clean and will make Abu Dhabi a future producer of technological innovation. Organized jointly by several different organizations, it does not hide its ambitions. It will have an Institute of Science and Technology where, for example, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology will offer masters and doctorate courses in advanced and sustainable science and technology programmes, and establish an academic scheme to attract high calibre scientists and researchers; a research network with

leading world partners, among them Spain's energy research centre (Centro de Investigación de Energía – CIEMAT); a Carbon Management Unit focused on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that will help achieve a regional economy reduced in carbon; a Special Projects Unit, and another one for Innovation and Investment... in short, a compact block of inter-related and interactive actions combined to offer answers to some increasingly sharp and urgent questions. And all of this taking place in a country that is rich in oil and gas, as is the UAE, yet at the same time one that embraces nuclear energy, having agreed with France the launching of two third generation power stations. This implies

“Masdar is a great opportunity for Spain and Spanish companies”

that the country is equal to the task of facing up to the challenges that confront this collective fatherland that is Earth, and provides a brave demonstration of responsibility and solidarity. The United Arab Emirates, conscious of the great impact of their ecological footprint in 2007, are putting in place the necessary measures to correct a trajectory that was judged erroneously and is now heading a regenerated movement.

Masdar is, moreover, a great opportunity for Spain and Spanish companies. There are many points of contact between the people of the Emirates and the Spanish, although the majority are still far from being explored and further still from being jointly exploited. Renewable energy would, without doubt, be one of the most attractive and immediate. Both

governments coincide in seeing in them a particular usefulness in which, although there is no panacea (which does not exist individually, as neither bio-combustibles nor renewable energy does on their own), they undoubtedly constitute one of the chief tools in counter-acting a disturbing drift. That is why the Torresol Energy company launched on 12 March, the new joint venture between SENER Grupo de Ingeniería, S.A. and Masdar, the alternative energy company in Abu Dhabi, is such wonderful news. Of its operability and synergies, we expect the best. And let us hope it will have the pulling power to multiply the growing Spanish presence in this sector, capable of lighting the way for others and multiplying the volume of Spanish – UAE relations and interchanges to the levels demanded of those special bonds of friendship between both countries that have existed since time immemorial. Inshallah! ❖