

View from Moscow

Russia's green Olympics

| by Jeroen Ketting



In 2014 Russia will host the 22nd Olympic Winter Games and the 11th Paralympic Winter Games in the city of Sochi in the Southern Russian Region of Krasnodar.

Much has already been said about these Olympic Games that are to take place in a city with a temperate continental climate and located less than 50 kilometres north of the border with Georgia, where Russia fought a five-day war during last year's Summer Olympics. The Sochi Olympics have, however, also hit the headlines because of the Russian government's commitment to make these Olympics wholly carbon neutral. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Kozak, the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Sochi 2014, have vowed that the Sochi 2014 Winter Games will live up to the highest international environmental standards. To underline this commitment, the Sochi 2014 organization committee signed an agreement on World Environment Day last June with the United Nations Environment Programme.

The Sochi Olympics organizing committee plans to invest at least \$1.75 billion in fulfilling the prime minister's promise. On the budget of \$6.3 billion that Dmitry Kozak said last July that the games would cost this seems to be a hefty sum. The money will be invested in capitalizing on the Krasnodar Region's considerable potential for renewable energy sources such as geothermal heat, wind, sun, water and biomass.

But the Russians also plan to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by applying energy efficiency measures in all of the new infrastructure and buildings to be constructed. They also intend to retrofit existing energy production facilities to make them suitable for biofuels and to offset the remaining greenhouse gas emissions from the use of electricity, air travel and ground transportation with emission reduction credits.

Last may the Sochi Olympics organizing committee announced that Sochi currently consumes 424 Megawatt (MW) of energy

and that an additional 340 MW will be needed for the operation of Olympic venues and infrastructure. This extra generating capacity will come from the construction of a 360 MW thermal power station, the conversion of four heating boiler houses into mini-thermal power stations and the upgrading of several power substations and power lines to increase transmission and generation efficiency.

Stakeholder groups are anxiously awaiting what the next five years will bring in concrete results. While Russia's track record in energy efficiency and environmental awareness is downright poor, the 2014 Olympic flame offers a small glimmer of hope. Genuinely energy efficient and carbon neutral Olympic Games will do much to enhance environmental and energy efficiency awareness among ordinary Russians. And with some of Russia's biggest energy and metallurgical companies such as Gazprom, Norilsk Nickel and Basic Element footing a large part of the Olympic bill, one would hope that this green initiative will also rub off on industry and positively influence the Russian industry's energy policies.

With Russia's notoriously poor carbon and environmental track record it seems hard to believe that the Sochi Olympics will actually attain this green goal and the Government's commitment to it may be mere political window dressing. However, as German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck once famously stated: 'Russia is never as strong or as weak as it appears to be'. And as I often, but less famously, stated: 'In Russia what will usually happen is what you least expect'. The Russians may just do what nobody expects them to do and fulfill their environmental pledge. ■