



Investments in Kazakhstan's Space Agency

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Kazakhstan has been working to develop the country's space agency, KazCosmos, since its creation in 2007. While it has been slow to develop, the accompanying excerpted article reports on an agreement between the governments of Kazakhstan, Russia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that could make significant changes to the agency. The article comes from *Central Asia Monitor*, a Russian-language website based in Kazakhstan, and includes a report on how the UAE government will be investing in the Baikonur Cosmodrome (in southern Kazakhstan) and an interview with an expert on the Kazakh space industry on the impact that the UAE's investments could have on the development of KazCosmos.

The article notes how a "lack of funds" caused "the delay with the construction of the Bayterek space rocket complex." The governments of Kazakhstan and Russia started work on Bayterek a number of years ago as a project to refurbish an unused launch site at Baikonur. Bayterek is slated to be KazCosmos' own launch site as Russia reduces its presence at Baikonur. The statement on Bayterek that "stacks of money were channeled into nowhere" reflects the perspective many in Kazakhstan have of the project, even if expectations of it have not been very high. It is unknown if the UAE's investments will be channeled into Bayterek or another project, but the article notes that some see it as "an excellent opportunity for Kazakhstan to rejuvenate its space programs." KazCosmos' successes to date include three communications satellites and the Kazakh government has indicated that future projects could have military applications. While this is not likely to take place for at least a few years, how the government of the UAE invests in Baikonur will be worth watching. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

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Soyuz TMA-10M spacecraft at the Baikonur Cosmodrome launch pad (2013).

Source: By NASA/Carla Cioffi [Public domain], [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soyuz_TMA-10M_spacecraft_at_the_Baikonur_Cosmodrome_launch_pad_\(4\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soyuz_TMA-10M_spacecraft_at_the_Baikonur_Cosmodrome_launch_pad_(4).jpg).

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Source: Isabayeva, Saule. "Зачем Эмиратам казахский Байконур? И что от этого получим мы? (What is Kazakhstan's Baikonur to the Emirates? What do we get from this?)," *Central Asia Monitor*, 15 April 2018. <https://camonitor.kz/30987-zachem-emiratam-kazahskiy-baykonur-i-chto-ot-etogo-poluchim-my.html>

A turning point in Baikonur's fate may be coming soon...a protocol signed by representatives of the relevant agencies of Kazakhstan, Russia and the UAE on 21 March envisaging expansion of trilateral cooperation in the field of space exploration...It is not known yet what specific projects it might involve. Today we will attempt to slightly remove the veil of secrecy and speculate on how realistic it is to breathe a new life into Baikonur and whether the Emirates have the capacity to do that...

As is known, so far the country (UAE) has not been able to celebrate any serious achievements in the sphere of space exploration...By the way, in terms of investments in space research, the UAE ranks among the leading nations of the world...The lack of funds was indeed one of the main reasons behind the delay with the construction of the Bayterek space rocket complex, which actually was meant to open the door for Kazakhstan to the club of space powers...

One of our specialists, who was involved in the origins of Kazakhstan's space program, noted that for the UAE this was nothing more than a purely prestige project...“Just look at how skillfully Russia ‘tricked’ the Kazakhs with Bayterek. It gave numerous promises, even laid the foundation stone...Stacks of money were channeled into nowhere. In fact, our money helped to finish the purely Russian project Angara - these rocket carriers will be flying from Plesetsk and Vostochnyy, but not from Baikonur”...“Therefore, we need to find our own place in the space industry, while taking into account our real capabilities. A bright example is Sweden. It does not have its own cosmodrome, its budget is fairly modest, but the country actually assembles its own satellites for both civil and military use, which are aimed at solving specific issues, and it generates a multiplicative effect affecting everything around,” our interlocutor concluded...

Another expert, editor-in-chief of the Space Research and Technologies magazine Nurlan Aselkan, holds to a fairly different point of view. In his opinion, the UAE's coming to Baikonur is an excellent opportunity for Kazakhstan to rejuvenate its space programs and even receive commercial benefits...

(Isabayeva) Nurlan, which specific projects are we talking about? Could it be the Bayterek complex, considering the fact that the UAE had earlier expressed interest in it?

(Nurlan Aselkan) The meeting on 21 March discussed prospects for the creation of joint space programs on a commercial footing. The UAE voiced readiness to invest quite serious financial resources in the Baikonur cosmodrome's infrastructure...Kazakhstan itself is still not sure entirely whether the Bayterek program, which is being carried out together with the Russian Federation, will be completed as planned. As you know, they have been trying to implement the project for nearly 15 years now, and over this period of time it has gone through a lot...Especially considering the fact that the (current economic) crisis resulted in serious budget cuts for Roskosmos (Russian Space Agency), and it is planning further cost reductions on the maintenance of facilities at Baikonur...

(Isabayeva) How is it going to look technically?

(Aselkan) The scheme will probably be as follows. Kazakhstan, as the owner of the land and the complex (Gagarin's start) itself, will terminate the latter's lease to the Russian Federation and hand it over to a joint venture, which will use the UAE money to implement a trilateral project on the modernization of the launch pad to adapt it for the new Soyuz-2 rocket...For its part, Roskosmos daughter company, Glavkosmos, may perform commercial launches, the revenue from which will be divided between the three parties. It will also operate as the supplier of the rocket...The development of such a huge project as Bayterek might keep getting postponed for years...Especially considering the fact that it will be under the complete control of those who invest big money, and these people do not like protracted and uncertain scenarios.

(Isabayeva) What exactly Kazakhstan is going to gain from that?

(Aselkan) ...it is a real chance to adapt the new project to production of Kazakh satellites. As is known, the Soyuz-2 rocket is capable of putting about eight tonnes of cargo into orbit, whereas our assembly testing center in Astana is designed to produce space vehicles weighing up to six tonnes...it will serve as a certain cushion for the Bayterek project, just in a more modest and less risky way...

(Isabayeva) Everything is clear with Russia and Kazakhstan. What benefits the UAE?

(Aselkan) The Emirates are keen to obtain access to space in the shortest possible period, and not to spend decades to this end. Furthermore, they will not be satisfied with simply buying and launching a satellite, let us say, on a European rocket. They strive to become co-owners, a regulating side and operator and want to be able to make money from that. That is why the Arabs decided to invest in the already tested Russian rocket on a reliable Kazakh cosmodrome...