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Despite Putin's English Appeal, Yekaterinburg Loses Expo Bid

By Andrew McChesney

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Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich, third right, and Sverdlovsk Governor Yevgeny Kuyvashev, second right, attending the presentation of the finalist cities in Paris on Wednesday night. **Benoit Tessier**

President Vladimir Putin's English lesson didn't pay off.

Putin recorded a rare video appeal in English for Yekaterinburg to be chosen as host of the 2020 World Expo.

But Russia's fourth-largest city was soundly defeated by Dubai in three rounds of voting in Paris late Wednesday. Dubai won 116 votes, while Yekaterinburg trailed with only 47 votes. The other two contenders — Izmir, Turkey, and Sao Paulo, Brazil — were eliminated in the first two rounds.

The loss was likely to reverberate throughout Russian officialdom, which had viewed the bid as a state priority, and it dealt a personal blow to Putin. Bid organizers, who flew journalists

on multiple trips to the city, had presented lavish plans to build 103 pavilions for the six-month event as well as housing for participants that would later be converted into private apartments.

Putin, whose hands-on approach helped Russia win bids to hold the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2018 World Cup, made no immediate comment on the expo failure.

But Sverdlovsk Governor Yevgeny Kuyvashev, whose Urals region includes Yekaterinburg, was clearly disappointed.

"All of our work and our lobbying efforts will be analyzed seriously, and we will make the appropriate conclusions," Kuyvashev told reporters in Paris, according to Interfax. "We must first learn how to lose, and then we will learn how to win."

He emphasized that Yekaterinburg had faced serious competition from Dubai, a booming metropolis in the United Arab Emirates that earmarked $8.4 billion for the event.

"Our opponents were more than worthy, and it was an honor to compete with them," Kuyvashev said, adding that Yekaterinburg might lodge a bid to hold a future expo. The World Expo is held every five years.

As fireworks lit the night sky in Dubai, its ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rahid promised to organize an expo that would "astonish the world."

"Dubai Expo 2020 will breathe new life into the ancient role of the Middle East as a melting pot for cultures and creativity," he said in a statement carried by Reuters.

The expo will be the first organized by a Middle Eastern city in its more than 150-year history.

President Putin delivering an English-language appeal for Yekaterinburg to hold the World Expo 2020.

Vicente Loscertales, the secretary general of the Bureau International des Expositions, praised Yekaterinburg's bid and said he looked forward to seeing an expo held in Russia one day.

"All forces were mobilized — regional authorities, the Russian government, as well as city residents and the business community," he said, according to Itar-Tass. "In recognition of this work, Russia was able to reach the final round of voting."

Putin created a minor sensation in June when the Kremlin website published his appeal for Russia to hold the expo.

Putin appears tense in the video, and he strains to pronounce each word correctly.

"Russia has a long and rich experience of participation in the World Expo movement," Putin says, standing in an ornate Kremlin hall for the 2 1/2-minute speech. "We took part in the very first universal exhibition in London in 1851. At the Paris exhibition in 1900, our pavilion won the coveted gold medal and grand prix. But in all this time, Russia has not hosted

the world expo. Not once. Surely [the] time has come to change this."

The Washington Post newspaper described Putin's English as "a bit awkward" and the presentation as "a somewhat strange display for those of us accustomed to seeing Putin's carefully maintained tough-guy air."

Putin, who speaks fluent German after being posted as a KGB officer in East Germany in the 1980s and has taken English lessons in the Kremlin, rarely speaks English in public. In one of the few exceptions, in 2007 he delivered a speech in English when presenting Russia's bid to hold the 2014 Winter Olympics. He spoke with a noticeable German accent and abruptly switched to French at the end.

Meanwhile, in Yekaterinburg, some residents were already finding humor in their loss of the expo. Earlier this week, local media reported that an adviser to the president of Equatorial Guinea had named his daughter Yekaterinberg Yenoukounmey in honor of the city. The girl was born on Nov. 17, shortly after the adviser returned home from a visit there .

Yekaterinburg IT entrepreneur Leonid Volkov said wryly on Twitter: "The Guinea dude is probably already at the registry office, renaming his daughter Dubai."

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