

2 Presidents Build Bridges – Literally

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President Dmitry Medvedev, right, and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich meeting in Gelendzhik on Monday. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

President Dmitry Medvedev and his Ukrainian counterpart, Viktor Yanukovich, discussed construction of the Kerch Strait bridge on Monday and said they hope that it will be complete in time for the Sochi Winter Olympics in 2014.

The possibility of a bridge spanning the strait between the Azov and Black seas has been on the table for many years, but bumpy relations between the two countries have delayed the start of the project.

"It would be nice [to finish the construction of the bridge] by the football championship, but it is clear that this is not realistic, so at least by the Sochi Olympics," Medvedev said during their talks at Gelendzhik, a Krasnodar region resort town on the Black Sea.

Yanukovich said he agreed but still hoped that there was a chance to complete it by the UEFA Euro Cup in 2012.

"This is a very important, momentous project," Medvedev said.

The subject "is worth presidential attention because it unites the two countries and creates the best possibilities for the citizens to cross borders," he said.

The bridge and infrastructure will cost an estimated \$1.4 billion to \$1.7 billion. Medvedev said several banks would be selected to take part, and a working group would be created to oversee the design phase, which will take a year.

"It is unrealistic to expect the project to be completed by 2012, but finishing it by 2014 seems quite doable," said Sergei Mozalyov, an official with AMOST Foundation, an association of bridge engineers. "But completion of this project by 2014 will probably not happen without a big push, given that the project is now in its initial stage."

Calculating possible environmental risks is also of paramount importance, Mozalyov said, adding, "Sometimes this assessment may take years."

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