

Belarus to Get Nuclear Power Plant

By [Roland Oliphant](#)

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Work will begin on Belarus' first nuclear power plant in September, Rosatom chief Sergei Kiriyenko told reporters in Minsk late Tuesday.

Minsk will pay state-owned Rosatom between \$6 billion and \$7 billion to build a nuclear power plant that should come into service by 2017, Kiriyenko said following meetings with Belarussian Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikovich and First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko.

"We hope the general contract will be signed in September and that earth-clearing work will begin the same month," Kiriyenko told reporters in Minsk.

An intergovernmental construction deal, along with an agreement on parallel operation of power systems, will be signed at the next meeting of the Union State — the name for the ongoing merger of the two countries — in Minsk in late February or early March, Myasnikovich said.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said last week that the new plant in Belarus' Grodno region could cost \$6 billion and provide for at least 27 percent of electricity consumed in the country.

The new power plant will be built at “domestic” rates, Kiriienko told reporters, because of the Union State agreement that exists between the two countries. “We don't build power plants in this way anywhere [else] in the world,” he said.

Russian and Belarussian scientists are also to collaborate on research and development of “fourth generation” nuclear reactors, Kiriienko said.

Strained relations between Russian and Minsk appear to have recovered since Western criticism of Minsk's brutal crackdown on domestic opposition following a disputed election in December.

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