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Baltic Oil Link in Service at Ust-Luga

By The Moscow Times

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin started oil deliveries through the expanded Baltic pipeline system to the Baltic Sea as Russia builds links bypassing its former Soviet allies.

Putin pressed a button at Transneft's dispatcher station in the Leningrad region Friday, symbolizing the start of the link, known as BTS-2, that has been delayed since November because of engineering deficiencies at the Ust-Luga port near St. Petersburg where it ends, according to a statement on the government's website. The port will work in "test mode," the government said.

The first tanker loaded with crude from the pipeline was to depart for Rotterdam on Friday as well, according to the statement. Loading of the next tanker is scheduled for Monday, it said.

The transportation capacity of the BTS-2 pipeline is 30 million tons of oil a year and may be increased to 38 million tons a year in December 2013, according to the government.

Russia is building oil and gas links to bypass Ukraine and Belarus, whose Soviet-era pipelines

export to the European Union, after pricing disputes have disrupted fuel supplies.

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