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Negotiations to Resume on Bridge Between Russia and Ukraine

By The Moscow Times

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Plans to build a bridge across the Kerch Strait date back to 2004, when the project had to be halted for political reasons. **Jesus Solana**

First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov has ordered the Transportation Ministry to begin negotiations with Ukraine on building a bridge across the Kerch Strait, according to text published Monday on the government's website.

State road builder Avtodor, or Russian Highways, will conduct a feasibility study with a view to taking on the project, which would link eastern Crimea with Russia's Krasnodar region, a source within the company confirmed, Vedomosti reported.

The cost of the bridge's construction has yet to be finalized, though Crimean republic deputy head Rustam Temirgaliyev said last week that costs were estimated at $3 billion with construction slated to take at least five years.

Plans to build a bridge across the Kerch Strait, which lies at the base of the Azov Sea, date back to 2004, when the project had to be halted for political reasons. Talks were resumed in 2010, and construction of the bridge has been included in the ministry's transportation strategy up to 2030.

Russian state development bank VEB has been pushing for the project's go-ahead and would consider financing the preparatory work, a spokesman for the lender said.

Kerch — one of the oldest cities in Ukraine — is an important industrial and tourist center, and the Ukrainian government hopes that construction of a bridge between the area and Russia would provide a large financial boost to the country.

In 2012, Kerch Ferries transported 1.2 million passengers between the Crimean port and the Russian port of Kavkaz, while Russian company Anrusstrans carried 590,500 tons of goods between the two ports in 2011.

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