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Ukraine Postpones Construction of Chernobyl Sarcophagus

By The Moscow Times

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A staff of the Chernobyl nuclear plant attends a mass rally in front of the Ukrainian cabinet of ministers building in Kiev Oct. 15.

Ukraine has been forced to push back the commissioning of a new cover for the Chernobyl nuclear plant back two years because it has run out of money for the project, a Ukrainian official said.

The so-called New Safe Confinement, whose construction began in 2010, will be completed in 2017 instead of 2015 as originally planned, Volodymir Holosha, the official who is overseeing the government's effort in Chernobyl, said in comments to Ukraine's online news website Segodnya.ua on Wednesday.

Construction of the structure is crucial, as the protective cover that is currently in place to contain the reactor could collapse at any moment — an ecological disaster that would affect all of Europe. In 1997, the G7 nations convened to address the threat of this potential

catastrophe, and the end result of that meeting was an agreement to set up a $768 million fund to finance the construction of a new sarcophagus.

Now, however, Ukraine needs another 615 million euros ($780 million) for the project in addition to the 600 million euros it has already allocated, Holosha was cited as saying on Wednesday.

A new fundraising effort has been launched by the G7 group of developing economies, he said, without elaborating.

The steel-and-concrete sarcophagus is expected to be constructed next year but will then need to be installed over the melted reactor, Segodnya.ua reported. A representative of the Chernobyl nuclear plant was cited as saying the work will be carried out by robots because of high radiation in the area.

The Chernobyl nuclear power plant went down in history in 1986, when Reactor No. 4 went into meltdown, causing the world's largest nuclear disaster. Soviet firemen, desperate to contain the fallout, sacrificed their lives to construct an ad-hoc sarcophagus over the molten slab of radioactive waste — a measure that was meant only as a stopgap.

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