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Isolated Crimea to Get Second Airport as Russia Seeks to Boost Ties

By The Moscow Times

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Crimea will get a second commercial airport in 2016 as Russia seeks to improve transport links with the peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine last year, news agency TASS reported Monday, citing local government officials.

The new airport will be located in the former military airbase of Belbek, near the Crimean naval city of Sevastopol. It will begin receiving chartered business aircraft by the end of this year and regular passenger flights by March or April 2016, airport director Vadim Bazikin was quoted as saying.

Crimea is currently dependent on a single airport in the regional capital, Simferopol, which was swamped by demand when Russia's annexation of the region closed the overland route though Ukraine.

The Russian government has promoted travel to Crimea, whose economy relies on tourism. But Russians can only reach the peninsula by air or over-scheduled ferry from mainland

Russia.

The Sevastopol government has estimated that the Belbek airport will be able to take half a million passengers annually from numerous Russian cities following renovations, which it expects to cost 1.5 billion rubles ($27 million), according to TASS. Under a federal development plan for the airport, however, it will get even more — 1.8 billion rubles ($32 billion), the report said.

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