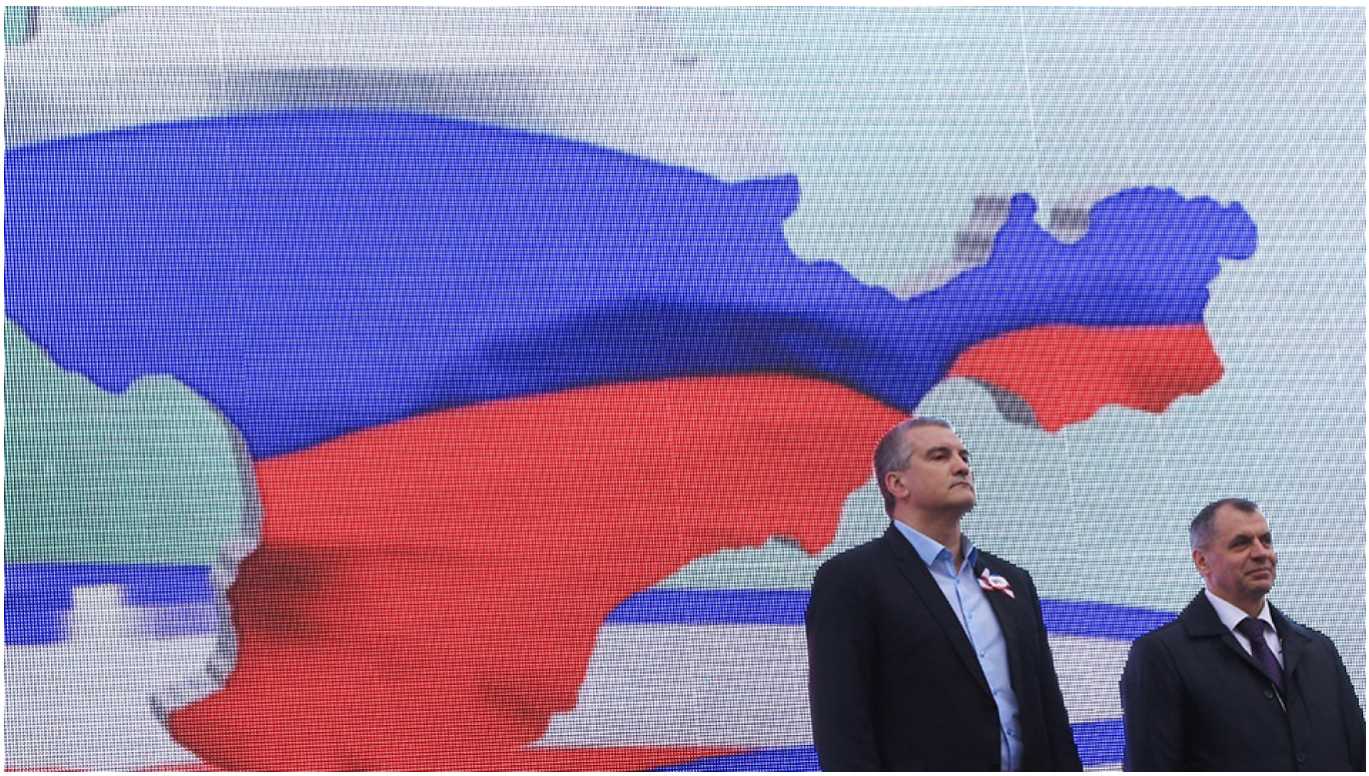
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Russia to Celebrate Crimea's 18th Century Annexation

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Aleksei Pavlishak / TASS

Russia will make the anniversary of its 18th century accession of the Crimean peninsula into the Russian Empire a public holiday, even as its more recent 2014 annexation continues to negatively impact Moscow's international standing.

Russia first absorbed Crimea in 1783 after Catherine the Great defeated the Ottomans. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev then transferred Crimea to Ukraine as a "gift" to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's union with Russia in 1954. In March 2014, Russia seized the peninsula from Ukraine in a move that provoked international condemnation and Western sanctions.

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A new bill submitted by chairwoman of the Federation Council Valentina Matvienko and

supported by dozens of lawmakers Monday would set April 19 as the day celebrating now only the historical annexation of Crimea, but also the days that the island of Taman and the basin of the Kuban River became part of the Russian empire.

The contemporary referendum to "reunify" Crimea with Russia – rejected by most of the international community – marks a "logical continuation of the history of Russian Crimea," the bill's text reads.

"I'm confident it will pass this year," Matvienko told the Vedomosti business daily, of her proposed bill.

The peninsula's de-facto leader Sergei Aksyonov said he supports the measure, and considers the annexation "one of the key events of national history."

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