

Putin, in Crimea for Annexation Anniversary, Launches Power Stations

By [Reuters](#)

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Mikhail Klimentyev / TASS

President Vladimir Putin inaugurated two new power stations in Crimea on Monday after flying into the Black Sea peninsula to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Russia's annexation of the region from Ukraine.

The power stations, in the cities of Sevastopol and Simferopol, were partially launched last year, but Monday's inauguration marked the moment they began working at full capacity.

The same facilities were at the center of an international scandal after German engineering company Siemens said its power turbines had been installed there without its knowledge and in violation of European Union sanctions. Russia denied that.

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Putin, who has poured billions of Russian taxpayer dollars into Crimea since Moscow seized control of it in 2014, attended the launch of the Sevastopol power station and oversaw the launch of the Simferopol facility by video conference.

"Today another important step has been taken to strengthen the energy security of the Crimean Peninsula and of the whole south of the Russian Federation," said Putin.

The two new power stations generated as much electricity as Crimea used to get from Ukraine pre-annexation, he added, and could cover 90 percent of Crimea's power needs.

Ukraine says it wants Crimea back and most countries still recognize it as Ukrainian territory.

Russia says the matter is closed forever, however, and that a 2014 referendum held after Russian forces secured the peninsula showed Crimeans want to be part of Russia.

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Putin is due to speak at a music concert later on Monday and to hold talks with local people about what Russia has achieved in Crimea in the last five years and where it has fallen short.

Russia has spent heavily to try to integrate Crimea, including building a bridge to link the peninsula to southern Russia. But Western sanctions designed to punish Moscow for its annexation have helped isolate the peninsula, pushing up prices and slowing its development.

Putin's approval rating soared on the back of Russia's Crimean annexation, which stirred national pride in many Russians. But despite remaining high at over 60 percent, his rating has since declined due to public unease over falling wages, rising prices and unpopular pension reforms.

Russian public enthusiasm for the annexation also appears to have cooled with an opinion poll from the FOM pollster this month showing that only 39 percent of Russians believe it brought more good than harm, down from 67 percent in 2014.

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