

Turkey launches construction of first nuclear power plant

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The Akkuyu plant has become a bete noire for environmentalists who have raised alarm about safety issues and the building of the power station in an area rich in wildlife

Turkey on Tuesday launched the construction of its first nuclear power plant, a controversial \$20 billion project slammed by ecologists which Ankara hopes will begin a new era of greater energy self-sufficiency.

The [nuclear power station](#), in Akkuyu in Mersin province on the shores of the Mediterranean is being built, like Iran's first nuclear power plant, by Russia's nuclear agency Rosatom.

"Development cannot happen in a country without [nuclear energy](#)," said Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz at a ceremony attended by the head of Rosatom, Sergei Kiriyyenko and other top officials.

It is the first of three [nuclear power](#) plants Turkey currently plans to build to reduce its dependence on importing energy from exporters like Russia and Iran.

A second plant is due to be built by a French-Japanese consortium in the Black Sea city of Sinop while a third plant whose location is yet to be finalised is also planned.

"If we had built this power station 10 years ago, we would have saved \$14 billion in natural gas purchases," said Yildiz.

Yildiz and Kiriyyenko were to lay the foundation stone for the construction of the power station, which is expected to be completed by 2020 and will have four power units with a capacity of 1200 MW each.

The Turkish authorities have swatted away concerns that the Akkuyu facility lies in a seismic zone, saying it can resist quakes registering up to nine on the Richter scale.



Anti-nuclear protesters demonstrate outside Turkey's energy ministry in Ankara on July 24, 2014

However the Akkuyu plant has become a bete noire for environmentalists who have raised alarm about safety issues and the building of the power station in an area rich in wildlife.

Environmental campaign group Greenpeace in January lodged a complaint in court against the awarding of an environmental impact licence to the plant and says it should not be built.

"Turkey is not ready to build nuclear reactors—the country is still missing the key pieces of necessary legislation," Jan Beranek, the director of Greenpeace Mediterranean, told AFP, saying that the seismic assessment had been "totally inadequate".

The launch of the power plant comes two weeks after Turkey suffered

its most serious nationwide power cut in 16 years which exposed the shortcomings of its [energy](#) system.

The project is strongly backed by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as part of his plan to make Turkey one of the world's top ten economies.

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