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# Russia activates nuclear power plant in Iran

On 21 August Sergei Kiriyenko, the head of the Federal Atomic Energy Agency Rosatom, participated in the formal procedure of the activating first Iranian nuclear power plant in Bushehr (which was built by Atomstroyeksport, a company belonging to Rosatom). The decision to finalise the power plant's construction at this moment is political in nature (the deadline for activating the plant had repeatedly been postponed), and will serve first and foremost to improve relations between Russia and Iran, which had been damaged in recent months. It is also a demonstration of Moscow's independence on the international stage, in a situation where relations between Russia and the West have been improving.

The contract (lucrative for the Russian nuclear industry) to complete construction of one 1000-megawatt block of the power plant in Bushehr (which the German firm Siemens had begun as early as 1974) was signed by Rosatom in 1995. The first deadline for turning on the plant was 2004, but Moscow frequently postponed this for political reasons. Russia treated suspensions or delays in construction as a bargaining tool, in its relations both with Iran and with Western countries, especially the USA.

The activation of the Bushehr plant will help to improve Russian/Iranian relations, which deteriorated seriously as a result of the Kremlin's support for a fourth round of sanctions against Iran in June 2010, as well as the suspension of a contract to deliver Russian S-300 missile systems. At same time, the influence of this decision on Russia's relations with Western countries in the context of the Iranian nuclear crisis remains ambiguous. On one hand, fuel for the power plant will be enriched in Russia, and Russia will also dispose of the used fuel. Towards the end of 2007, the USA withdrew its formal objection to the power plant in Bushehr, and treats its activation as an argument to convince Iran to give up enriching uranium on its own territory. On the other hand, Moscow's actions strike at the American policy of isolating Iran on the international stage. <MaK>