

Presidents address ceremony inaugurating Turkey's first nuclear plant

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin joined online as a ceremony was held to mark the arrival of first fuel for the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Turkey.



Akkuyu is expected to operate for up to 80 years (Image: Rosatom)

The delivery of nuclear fuel is a significant one which marks the moment of officially becoming a nuclear power plant and also of Turkey being categorised as a country with nuclear energy capacity.

According to Turkey's energy ministry "the nuclear fuel, consisting of uranium pellets, was brought by air the night before from Russia, accompanied by high security measures ... the fuel was then loaded on three trucks and transported to the Akkuyu NPP site by land. The uranium pellets, which are transported in protective containers and whose radiation measurements are made, do not pose any security risk".

Hundreds of workers, officials and industry figures gathered in person for the event, with the two presidents addressing them via video link.

President Putin thanked his Turkish counterpart, Rosatom, other officials and Turkish and Russian engineers who had ensured that the construction work had proceeded smoothly and overcome any barriers, saying Akkuyu was set to be "the greatest nuclear power plant on earth" with the highest safety and environmental standards.

President Erdogan thanked his Russian counterpart and also congratulated all the Russian and Turkish personnel who had worked on the project which now means Turkey "joins the league of countries with nuclear power plants". He noted that the European Commission had recognised nuclear energy as green energy and said that when all four units were operational at the end of 2028 it would provide about 10% of the country's electricity needs.

The ceremony was also addressed by International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, who said the plant represents "a fundamental transformation for Turkey's economy, energy and technological future" and Rosatom Director General Alexei Likhachev, who, according to *Tass*, told reporters "We plan to carry out a physical start-up next year, bring the reactor to the minimum controllable power level in order to generate electricity steadily in 2025."

Turkish energy minister Fatih Dönmez highlighted the scale of the four-unit Akkuyu plant project, saying it was the single biggest investment in the country's history and that 30,000 people had worked on the project, with the entire plant to include 550,000 separate parts and likely to operate for up to 80 years.

The Akkuyu plant, in the southern Mersin province, is Turkey's first. Rosatom is building four VVER-1200 reactors, under a so-called BOO (build-own-operate) model. Construction of the first unit began in 2018. The 4800 MWe plant is expected to meet about 10% of Turkey's electricity needs.

In a message at the event, World Nuclear Association Director General Sama Bilbao y León, said: "I am thrilled to witness the first fuel delivery at Akkuyu, that formally brings Turkey into the global nuclear family. Congratulations - you will be key in helping Turkey reach net-zero emission targets and to strengthening energy security in Turkey.

"The completion of this first unit in about five years is a testament to international collaboration and demonstrates that we as an industry can build nuclear reactors efficiently ... I want to renew our commitment to working together with Turkey and the Turkish nuclear industry towards a sustainable nuclear future, creating a better world for everybody."

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