

The Crimean Rail Bridge Will Contribute to the Peninsula's Economic Rejuvenation

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The opening of the Crimean rail bridge completes Russia's physical connectivity initiative with the peninsula and will greatly contribute to rejuvenating its economy after the region languished in neglect for nearly two and a half decades under Ukrainian rule.

President Putin [inaugurated](#) the Crimean rail bridge on Monday, which was a monumental event signifying the completion of Russia's physical connectivity initiative with the peninsula. Construction on this modern marvel began shortly after its reunification with the mainland following the democratic referendum of early 2014 that was conducted in the aftermath of the EuroMaidan coup in Ukraine. The bridge's road component was opened a year and a half ago in May 2018, but it's only just now that its rail counterpart entered into operation. This latest development is significant because it will greatly contribute to rejuvenating the region's economy after it languished in neglect for nearly two and a half decades under Ukrainian rule.

Historically speaking, Crimea was always one of the jewels of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, but everything about it drastically deteriorated during the years that it was controlled by post-Soviet Ukraine. That new state refused to develop the region because doing so wasn't in the short-term financial interests of its ruling oligarchic class, though this ultimately proved to be strategically counterproductive in the long run because it further weakened the sense of attachment that its majority-Russian people felt towards Kiev. Had Ukraine respected Crimea's residents and sought to improve their living standards after independence, then they might not have identified more with Russia than with their "new country".

Nevertheless, what's done is done (or rather, what wasn't done wasn't done!), and an underdeveloped Crimea later reunified with Russia. It was then incumbent on the Russian authorities to prove to the people that this was the right decision to make and not one that was driven by immediate security concerns stemming from the sudden rise of neo-fascist sentiment in post-coup Ukraine. Proverbially putting its money where its mouth is, Moscow invested billions of dollars into restoring Crimea's economy, which naturally involved pioneering direct connectivity with the Russian mainland in order to reduce the time and cost of trade. The Crimean Bridge is the embodiment of that effort, and its recently completed rail component is the crowning economic achievement.

Tourists and businesses alike can now connect with Crimea like never before, which will improve people-to-people contacts and catalyze a revival of the peninsula's economy that was already ongoing since reunification but will accelerate in the coming years as a result of this project's completion. President Putin understands the importance of this event, which is

why he was personally present to inaugurate the rail bridge. Crimea's residents can now see with their own eyes that their homeland truly appreciates their historic decision to reunite with them nearly six years ago, which by contrast deepens their antipathy for Ukraine after realizing that there was no reason at all why they had to languish in poverty for almost two and a half decades.

The Ukrainian state took Crimea's 1954 attachment to their republic for granted after independence, which provoked the population into resenting that unilateral decision by former Soviet leader Khrushchev. The Russian Federation, meanwhile, is doing everything that it can to correct those mistakes by pumping billions of dollars into developing the peninsula. The successful completion of the road and rail corridor between Crimea and the mainland will go a long way towards strengthening its incorporation into the country, as well as of course bringing tangible benefits to the local population. Crimea's economic rejuvenation is only just beginning, and it's quickly returning to its historic role as Russia's crown jewel.

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