
New ferry makes first trial run from Georgia to Russia.

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The transport ferry Smat successfully made its first trial run from the Georgian port of Poti to the Russian port of Kavkaz on Saturday.

Regular trips will start in a week or a week and a half and ``the first cargo to be carried by the ferry to Poti for Armenia will be five VK-10 electric locomotives,`` which are already arriving at Temryuk by railway, the head of the Temryuk office of the Parom Chernogo Morya (Black Sea Ferry), Yuri Timchenko, told Itar-Tass on Saturday.

``The electric locomotives will be delivered to Armenia as humanitarian aid by a decision of the Russian government,`` he said.

On Sunday, ``technical procedures of ferry loading and unloading will be practiced,`` Timchenko said, adding that similar work has already been completed in Poti.

The ferry is run by a Russian crew of 20 members. It will run at least once a week and can take up to 50 railway carriages or 34-containers or 86 automobiles.

Until recently cargoes between Armenia and Russia were transported by the Poti-Ilyichevsk (Ukraine) route, but it is longer and more expensive. The new route will reduce both travel time and costs.

>From Poti cargoes will travel on to Armenia by railway.

First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said recently in Yerevan that the launch of the new ferry service ``will at last establish a regular and extensive transport connection with Armenia``.

Ivanov considers it very important to launch a ferry link between Kavkaz and Poti to resolve transport problems.

``The launch of a new ferry running en route Kavkaz-Poti that can carry up to 50 cargo railway carriages helps to resolve one of the key problems - Armenia's transport blockade,`` Ivanov told a joint news conference with participation of Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian on Wednesday. ``The opening of the ferry link will make it possible to partially cut the Gordian knot already now,`` he said.

``By late summer a second ferry will begin operating, which will increase cargo turnover,`` he said. ``There are also long-term programmes for the development of railway transport, but it is still early to speak about them.``

``Transport is a key problem in our relations, because all the rest becomes senseless without transport,`` Ivanov said.

The agreement on the opening of the Kavkaz-Poti railway and ferry link was signed by the then Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and Russian Transport Minister Igor Levitin back in January 2005.

The first ferry shipped 14 railway carriages full of corn in March 2005. Later the ferry made several passages and this link was suspended soon.

Initially the ferry should have run between the ports twice or thrice a week.

The resumption of a ferry link is very important, as Russia and Georgia have not had direct railway link since August 1992, when an armed conflict broke in Georgia's breakaway of Abkhazia.

Since then cargoes to Armenia that has no common border with Russia have been delivered by motorways bypassing its neighbour of Georgia, which resulted in transportation price hikes.
