
HUNGARY TO SERBIA RAILWAY NOW WELL ON TRACK

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Construction of the first stage of the Hungary-Serbia railway, China's debut rail line in Europe, will start in November, a top Serbian official said on Tuesday.

Zorana Mihajlović, Serbia's deputy prime minister and minister of construction, transport and infrastructure, said in an interview that the project will be completed in two to two-and-a-half years.

The 350-kilometer flagship railway will link Hungary's capital Budapest with Serbia's capital Belgrade, with 166 km on the Hungarian side and the rest in Serbia. With a designed maximum speed of 200 kilometers per hour, it expects to reduce the intercity travel time from eight hours to just two-and-a-half hours.

"China and Serbia are set to sign an agreement to construct the second phase by the end of this year," said Li Manchang, Chinese ambassador to Serbia.

The original Hungary-Serbia line was a monorail built at the end of the 19th century. Upon completion, it will be upgraded into an electric railway.

In November 2013, China, Hungary and Serbia signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly build and refurbish the rail line. Almost one year later, the three sides reached an official agreement.

Construction of the Hungarian section started in late 2015. It was financed by the Export and Import Bank of China, and undertaken by a consortium of China Railway International and China Communications Construction Co.

The Hungary-Serbia railway project, with a total investment of \$2.89 billion, is projected to serve as a shortcut for transporting Chinese goods from Greece to Western Europe.

Prior to the rail line, China had completed the 250 million-euro (\$292.5 million) Zemun-Borca Bridge, across the Danube and its approach roads in Belgrade, Mihajlović said.

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