

# Black Sea Project 'Bigger Than Suez Canal' Planned

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ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's prime minister on Wednesday announced what he called a "crazy and magnificent" plan to build a new waterway to the Black Sea, promising that the tanker-clogged Bosphorus through Istanbul would soon be used for sports and boat trips.

The waterway, to be named "Canal Istanbul," would link the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara, which leads to the Aegean Sea. It would be 40 to 45 kilometers long, some 25 meters deep and about 150 meters wide, Recep Tayyip Erdogan said during campaigning ahead of elections on June 12.

"We have today embarked on the greatest project of the century," Erdogan said, adding that it would be a bigger undertaking than the Panama or Suez canals.

The new waterway would be located on the European side of the Bosphorus, he said, but would not disclose its exact location or the cost of the gargantuan project. It would be completed by 2023, when Turkey will be celebrating the centenary of the founding of the Turkish republic after the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

The 30-kilometer-long Bosphorus strait that bisects Istanbul is, in conjunction with the Dardanelles, the sole passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and is heavily congested with tanker traffic to and from Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine and southern Russia. It has been the scene of ship accidents in the past, and environmentalists warn a major disaster is waiting to happen. In December 1999, a Russian-made tanker split in two at the mouth of the strait, spilling 900,000 liters of fuel and blackening several kilometers of coastline.

"Bosphorus' traffic will be reduced to zero," Erdogan said. "Water sports will take place on the Bosphorus, transport within the city will be established, [Istanbul] will return to its former days."

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