

St. Pete Stadium Completion Date Put Back, Again

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The completion date for Zenit St. Petersburg's \$1.1 billion stadium has been put back again, and it may not open until 2017, a decade after construction work began, the head of the government agency auditing the project said Monday.

The stadium is to host a 2018 World Cup semifinal, but the new date means there could be a rush to prepare it for scheduled Confederations Cup games in 2017.

"The terms, in the best case, are the end of 2016 or the start of 2017," Audit Chamber head Sergei Stepashin said.

The city government's existing estimate of December 2015 was inflexible and failed to take into account any "operational decisions" that may need to be made, he added.

One area of concern, he said, was that parts of the stadium that have already been built could

have been affected by "damp air" on its island location.

In March, St. Petersburg's city construction committee cut its cost estimate from \$1.3 billion, which had put the troubled arena in line to overtake London's Wembley as the world's most expensive. Stepashin said this should be treated as a success for his auditing operation.

"We've reduced the cost of the stadium, but it's like Wembley, it's very expensive," he said. Like the St. Petersburg construction committee, Stepashin did not say how exactly the money had been saved. The revised figure remains almost three times the project's original budget.

The stadium started construction in 2007 and was originally supposed to open in 2008. It has faced a litany of problems, including a partial redesign to comply with by FIFA's World Cup specifications. The latest plans for the arena were rejected last month by Russia's federal agency for major infrastructure projects, citing design changes.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev visited the site last year and said the drawn-out construction "looks disgraceful."

A criminal investigation is under way into alleged fraud on the project after the Investigative Committee said costs could have been overstated by \$16.5 million.

Auditors said in March they had also found \$4.9 million in "unnecessary costs" and a further \$9.2 million spent on unusable seats.

In the same month, a builder was killed at the site after being struck by a falling piece of metal, and prosecutors filed 15 charges against a company that they said had employed illegal immigrants on the project.

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