

U.S. Says One Year at Most for WTO Entry

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia could join the World Trade Organization within a year, after talks on Moscow's 17-year-old bid made good progress, U.S. President Barack Obama's senior economic adviser said Wednesday.

"We are certainly hopeful that well before 12 months from now, this process [Russia's WTO accession] will have been completed," outgoing White House National Economic Council director Larry Summers told reporters.

Summers, in Moscow for talks with officials including Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's senior adviser on foreign economic relations, cautioned that it was "not yet time for celebration. ... But, we can take extraordinary satisfaction in the progress that has been made."

"The end is in sight," he added.

Russia has been seeking WTO membership since 1993 and with a gross domestic product of \$1.2 trillion is by far the largest economy outside the 153-member organization. Full U.S. support for Russia's bid — the longest accession talks in the WTO's history — would pave the way for entry and mark Russia's integration into the world economy 20 years after the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union.

"In many ways this is the final bit of business completion from a post-World War II architecture in which Russia had not been included," Summers said. Getting Russia into the WTO has become a goal of the "reset" in ties that Obama has forged with President Dmitry Medvedev, after the arguments that characterized the presidency of George W. Bush.

Talks on Russia's WTO entry accelerated after a June summit in Washington when Obama and Medvedev urged negotiators to buckle down and reach a deal by the end of September 2010. Officials on both sides say that deadline has been broadly met but have given few details on what exactly has been agreed or on what remains to be agreed.

U.S. officials said the issue of meat import quotas remained as well as the diplomatic complexities of the multilateral accession process in Geneva, the headquarters of the WTO. Summers' comments about the potential accession timeline indicate that officials are seeking Russian entry ahead of Russia's March 2012 presidential election and the November 2012 presidential election in the United States.

Summers said talks in Moscow with Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov had been "enormously constructive" and that they had touched on the hurdle of getting Georgian assent. Georgia, which lost two rebel regions after it was defeated in a 2008 war with Russia, could theoretically veto Russia's accession, though the United States and European Union are likely to push Tbilisi to accept Russian entry.

Summers said Shuvalov had recognized the need for "some sort of creative solution" to overcome the impasse with Georgia. Russian officials say talks on WTO are continuing but that they are still waiting for the United States to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a Cold War-era provision that tied U.S. trade relations to emigration rights for religious minorities. Summers said Jackson-Vanik had served its historic purpose and indicated that Congress could repeal it as early as next year.

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