

U.S. Senators Side With Georgia on WTO Issue

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 20, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Russia and Georgia failed on Thursday to come to an agreement that would pave the way for Russia to join the World Trade Organization, but the two sides will hold further talks next week, the head of Georgia's trade talks delegation said.

"This meeting ended with no result again. The situation is the same as it was after our last round of talks," said Sergi Kapanadze, deputy foreign minister and head of Georgia's delegation to the Swiss-mediated talks.

"We agreed that another meeting would be held at the beginning of next week," he said.

Two U.S. senators urged the Obama administration Wednesday not to sacrifice Georgia's security and sovereignty concerns in Washington's effort to help Moscow join the World Trade Organization.

Russia may be on the verge of joining the WTO, but it must first reach an agreement with Georgia — with whom it fought a brief war in August 2008 — on customs and border issues.

Russia still has troops in the breakaway Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which Moscow recognized as independent nations after the five-day war.

Because the WTO operates by consensus, Georgia has an effective veto over Russia's entry into the world trade body, giving it some leverage over its more powerful neighbor.

Georgia wants customs monitors on its internationally recognized borders, but has conceded they could be international officials rather than Georgian.

In a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk, Senators Roy Blunt and James Inhofe came down strongly on the side of Georgia.

"It should not come as any surprise that Georgian leaders are insisting on maintaining at least some semblance of territorial integrity through the customs process," they said.

"Without such recognition, agreeing to Russia's WTO accession could be tantamount to international ratification of a new border arrangement imposed by Russia through force of arms.

"We fail to see how this outcome could possibly be in the United States' national interest," the senators wrote.

If Russia were to join the WTO, the United States would be required under world trade rules to establish "permanent normal trade relations," or PNTR, by removing the Jackson-Vanik amendment.

The 1974 amendment denies normal trade relations to countries with command economies that restrict emigration.

Both the Senate and House of Representatives would have to approve PNTR.

That is already expected to be a difficult pair of votes, so the White House cannot afford to alienate lawmakers whose support it will need.

Blunt and Inhofe, two usually reliable votes for trade, said in their letter they could only support PNTR if Russia agrees to border and custom procedures that respect "Georgia's security considerations and future sovereignty."

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