

No 'Substantial' Georgia WTO Progress

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Georgia and Russia haven't made any "substantial" progress in three months of talks on Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization, Prime Minister Nika Gilauri said.

"We don't see any substantial progress yet even though there are some steps," Gilauri said Thursday in an interview with Bloomberg at the World Economic Forum on Europe and Central Asia in Vienna. "So far the talks are going very much in the same mode."

Switzerland in March started mediating negotiations between Russia and Georgia, which fought a five-day war in 2008 over the breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia. Georgia has cited disputes over customs checkpoints in South Ossetia and another breakaway region, Abkhazia, as reasons to withhold its approval for Russian WTO membership.

Russia, the largest economy outside the WTO, has been seeking to join the Geneva-based trade arbiter since June 1993. The United States announced last year that it had resolved most issues necessary for Russia's accession.

"The only request from Georgia's side is for transparency on border crossings, on customs checkpoints," Gilauri said. "If there is no transparency on checkpoints, how can Russia become a member of the WTO?"

Russia rejects "politicization" of WTO accession talks by Georgia, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in March.

The "political window of opportunity" for Russia to enter may "start to close down" at the end of the year as the United States and Russia enter election years, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said in an interview with Bloomberg in Miami in April, adding that he is hopeful an agreement will be reached before then.

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