

Georgia and Russia Sign Deal Resolving WTO Disagreement

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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GENEVA — Russia signed a Swiss-brokered deal with Georgia on Wednesday that removes the last big obstacle to Moscow joining the World Trade Organization after 18 years of negotiations.

Russia's accession will be the biggest step in world trade liberalization since China joined the WTO a decade ago, sealing its integration into the world economy two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"It's over. We've signed the document," said Sergi Kapanadze, Georgian deputy foreign minister and senior negotiator. "There are no more obstacles from Georgia to Russia to becoming a member of the WTO."

There was no immediate comment from Russia, whose \$1.9 trillion economy is the biggest outside the WTO.

But WTO spokesman Keith Rockwell said, "We are delighted that agreement has been reached between Georgia and the Russian Federation. We congratulate them, and we congratulate the Swiss mediators."

After nearly two decades of negotiations with the 153-member club, Russia's last challenge was to reach a deal with Georgia to stop its entry being blocked by the former Soviet republic with which it fought a short war in 2008.

Kapanadze said Russia and Georgia, which do not have diplomatic relations, covered the basic principles for monitoring mutual trade between Moscow and Tbilisi, including two Moscow-backed breakaway regions in Georgia.

Russia has said it hopes that a WTO working group meeting this week will draw up a final document for approval by WTO trade ministers in Geneva on Dec. 15.

Entry also needs the approval of Russian parliament, which is likely before an election next March that is expected to return Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the presidency.

Accession will send a signal to companies and investors that Russia, the world's largest energy producer, is starting to move closer to a rule-based system of doing business.

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