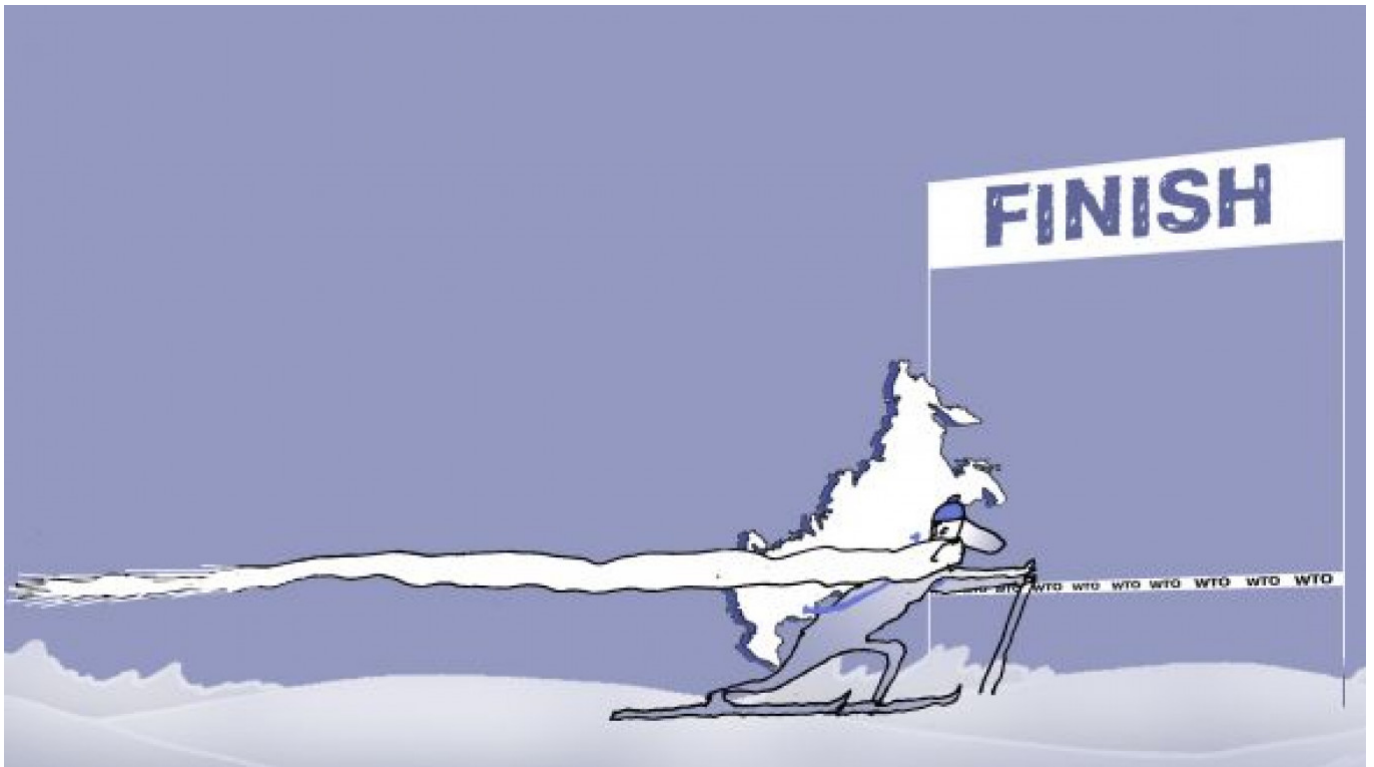


WTO at Last

By [John Beyrle](#)

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On Thursday in Geneva, Russia completed negotiations on its accession to the World Trade Organization. Stop for a minute and reread that last sentence with me: Russia's negotiations with the WTO are completed.

It is truly a historic milestone, and, yes, it has taken 18 years to achieve. That is far too long, in my view, but I will await the doctoral dissertations and "case studies" that are no doubt already being written to analyze the many reasons for the long process.

Right now, I am thinking back 18 years to 1993, when I was working on the staff of the National Security Council at the White House as director for policy toward Russia during the administration of President Bill Clinton. I remember the discussions between Presidents Clinton and Boris Yeltsin and between Vice President Al Gore and Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, in which they first established WTO membership as a goal. And I recall the hours of internal discussions among those of us responsible for making that goal a reality — former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott; Larry Summers, a former chief economic adviser to President Barack Obama; Nicholas Burns, former undersecretary of state for political affairs; and Vladimir Lukin, Russia's former ambassador to Washington. So I feel a

sense of personal satisfaction that over the past three years as ambassador, I have been able to help conclude what we began.

I took part in the meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House in June 2010 when President Dmitry Medvedev visited Washington. It was there that Obama reaffirmed that the United States strongly supported Russia's WTO bid. At the news conference after that meeting, Obama said WTO membership would be good for Russia, the United States and the world and called upon our negotiating teams to accelerate their work.

"Guys," he told us later in private, "we have to get this done."

Obama found it incomprehensible that a country the size and importance of Russia was outside the WTO. And he made it clear that it was his priority to work to resolve the outstanding bilateral problems with Russia, which meant, of course, that it was our priority, too. Obama and Medvedev established a deadline for that bilateral agreement — Sept. 30, 2010, which at that time was only nine weeks away. This required Russia to draft and pass key pieces of legislation in a very short time. It also meant that we had to solve the always difficult problems surrounding U.S. meat and poultry exports to Russia. Through an incredible outburst of political will, and thanks to hours and hours of hard work by experts on both sides, most of the work was done by that deadline.

In October 2010, when Summers returned to Moscow for talks with First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov and others, it was practically all finished. Like me, Larry remembered those early conversations in 1993 vividly — and believed, like me, that it was long past time to finish the job.

There were many other discussions after that, too many and too long to recount. The visit by Vice President Joe Biden to Moscow in March and his discussions with Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin were also absolutely indispensable to progress, as was the work of top trade experts Maxim Medvedkov and Chris Wilson, who personally negotiated many of the most important details of the agreement.

The bottom line was the announcement in Geneva on Thursday and the formal invitation that will follow in mid-December. Once Russia ratifies and signs the agreement, it will benefit from opportunities in the global economy.

Everywhere I travel in Russia, I meet people who want to make connections and do business in that global economy. Russians made more than 36 million trips abroad last year, and more Russians now receive visas to travel to the United States than ever before.

With Russia now poised to join the WTO, it will have the chance to benefit as a full participant in the global trading system. For the first time, Russians will be able to benefit from the WTO rules that provide open, free, transparent and fair global economic competition. Predictable tariff rates and an enforceable dispute resolution mechanism will give Russia and its partners more certainty and encourage the kind of commerce that creates opportunities for both Russians and Americans.

And the country's economy will grow. The Higher School of Economics has forecast that opening Russia's services markets alone will increase gross domestic product by 14 percent.

The connections and relationships that our two countries will create as a result of this will not only directly benefit U.S. and Russian companies, workers and farmers, but they will also go a long way toward ensuring that both countries remain on the road to increased partnership and cooperation.

I have long said that the best and most sustainable foundation for stronger relations between our two countries is economic, and our shared success on WTO shows us that we are building that foundation together.

John Beyrle is U.S. ambassador to Russia. This comment appeared on his LiveJournal [blog](#).

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