

Joining WTO Brings OECD Closer

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November 17, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Russia could complete talks on joining the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development by the end of next year, as its membership in the World Trade Organization paves the way to entry, the Economic Development Ministry said Thursday.

"Completing the WTO negotiations will undoubtedly push the process of joining the OECD forward," said Vladimir Tkachenko, deputy head of the ministry's trade negotiations department.

"We can finish this process in 2012," he told a news conference.

For Russia to become a full-fledged OECD member, a consensus decision by all its 34 member states is needed, but the timeline for this decision largely depends on how quickly Russia responds to all the OECD requirements, said Anthony Gooch, chief spokesman for the organization.

"The timing of that is absolutely dependent on the speed at which the Russian government

but also the ... experts at the technical level within ministries ... are able to respond to the questions, needs and requirements expressed to them," he told a small group of journalists in Moscow.

He added that taking a "political decision" is a matter of a month after the technical phase — which normally takes two years and involves the organization's commissions scrutinizing and amending a country's legislation — is completed. Russia has been seeking membership in the OECD since 1996 and started negotiations on accession in 2007.

Tkachenko, who represents Russia in the negotiations process, said two major conditions need to be fulfilled for the country to become an OECD member — accession to the WTO and joining the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. "The year of 2012 will be crucial for us, and our further success will depend on how we'll work," he said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Russia completed talks to join the WTO earlier this month after resolving its dispute with Georgia, which had blocked its accession. The ministerial conference of the WTO is slated to approve Russia's accession on Dec. 15 to 17, with the country becoming a full member in the middle of next year.

Russia should join the WTO before entering the OECD, according to the roadmap for its accession to the OECD, Gooch said. He also said there is hope that with the completion of WTO talks Russia will be able to focus more on its negotiations to enter the OECD, which will become "a priority issue."

Meanwhile, Russia might get involved in OECD activities rather soon, as it is due to join the Anti-Bribery Convention in December, Gooch said. That means that, unlike the case with the WTO, the country will become "practically involved in the OECD ... work" without being a full-fledged member, he said.

Russia signed onto the forum's Anti-Bribery Convention in late May, removing one of the major hindrances on the way to full membership. By joining the convention, Moscow will take on obligations to combat bribery by state officials in international business transactions.

President Dmitry Medvedev ordered the government in June to oversee work to join the convention and accede to the OECD.

Tkachenko said the necessary amendments to Russian legislation have been made, and that more are on deck for the country to comply with OECD standards. The negotiators will also have to discuss a number of issues, some of which, including Russia's investment environment, trade and services, are bound to its WTO obligations, he said.

Gooch said Russia's benefits from accession to the OECD, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, could be "multiple," including its citizens' confidence in the high level of the country's public policy standards and the government receiving access to international expertise on a variety of issues.

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