

Lavrov Says Scrap Law for Cooperation

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Russia will not abide by its World Trade Organization commitments with the United States unless Washington scraps a trade law that dates back to the Cold War, the foreign minister said Wednesday.

The Jackson-Vanik law, which was passed in 1974 and denies Russia normal-trade-relations status, was originally used to pressure the Soviet Union to allow emigration, primarily of Jews.

U.S. presidents have granted Russia annual waivers to the law since 1994, so it hasn't materially affected the country's business interests since then. But Moscow has been growing impatient with U.S. promises to scrap what Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov described as a "Cold War relic."

Lavrov told a news conference that the United States must repeal the discriminatory law.

"Russia will not abide by the commitments it undertook as a WTO member if the Jackson-Vanik amendment remains in force," he said.

American businessmen and the U.S. administration have long lobbied to have the law scrapped in Congress, but Republicans have opposed such a move for years, using it as a negotiation tool to advance other issues.

Lavrov said the law is still in place because of "domestic American problems."

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