

Senator Sees No 'Slam Dunk' for Trade

By [The Moscow Times](#)

March 15, 2012

The  Moscow Times

WASHINGTON — A senior Republican U.S. senator on Thursday warned the White House that passing legislation to bolster trade relations with Russia won't be a "slam dunk" because of concerns over that country's record on human rights and foreign policy actions.

"It's simply unreasonable to believe that PNTR [permanent normal trade relations] can be extended to Russia without a more thorough examination of the issues," Senator Jon Kyl, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, said at a hearing.

With Russia on the verge of joining the World Trade Organization, the United States is under pressure to repeal a largely symbolic Cold War-era provision known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment that is at odds with WTO rules.

The measure tied U.S. trade relations with the former Soviet Union to the rights of Jews and other religious minorities to emigrate freely. The Soviet Union collapsed two decades ago, and Russia has been judged to be in compliance with the Jackson-Vanik provision since the 1990s.

At a Finance Committee hearing to examine the issue, Kyl said he had very strong reservations.

“I think I understand the message that this hearing is intended to convey: American businesses want access to Russia’s market. We should repeal Jackson-Vanik, grant Russia permanent trade relations without delay and without conditions. It’s a slam dunk,” Kyl said, reiterating what he understood to be the process proposed by those who want to end trade restrictions on Russia. “But,” he added, “it isn’t a slam dunk.”

“While immigration is no longer an issue, Russia’s blatant disregard for human rights and the rule of law is every bit as relevant as it was decades ago,” Kyl said.

The Arizona Republican also raised concern with Russia’s support for Syrian President Bashar Assad’s bloody crackdown on anti-government protests.

“In recent months, Moscow has not only blocked UN Security Council action on Syria, but has continued to sell arms to Assad’s regime which is responsible for the slaughter of innocent citizens. This is not a government to be trusted to uphold its international commitments or give a fair shake to American businesses,” Kyl said.

In a letter published in The New York Times on Thursday, a former Soviet political prisoner, a former assistant to Nobel Prize winner Andrei Sakharov and a former director of the Andrei Sakharov Program on Human Rights at Harvard lambasted the Obama administration for delinking human rights from trade relations with Russia.

Vladimir Bukovsky, Alex Goldfarb and Tatyana Yankelevich wrote that “the revocation of the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which for almost 40 years has linked the Kremlin’s human rights performance to U.S. trade benefits, would add insult to the injury of President Obama’s congratulating Mr. Putin for his “victory” in last week’s “election.”

“American legislative pressure is as important today as at the time of Soviet repression, the letter said. “Appeasement of Mr. Putin would be a betrayal of this legacy [of Sakharov and Jackson].”

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