

Federation Council Approves WTO Entry

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Federation Council senators voted near unanimously for WTO entry.

The Federation Council ratified Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization on Wednesday, voting nearly unanimously to join the global trade rules body.

In contrast to voting in the State Duma, where the ratification bill passed by a slim margin, 144 senators backed the legislation in the parliament's upper house and only three opposed it, Interfax reported.

Members affiliated with the United Russia party and the government have almost complete control of the Federation Council, while in the lower house the ruling party holds only half of the seats.

The bill must now be signed by President Vladimir Putin before it takes effect.

Economic Development Minister Andrei Belousov told the Federation Council after the vote that Russia would begin to fulfill WTO commitments Sept. 1 and that import tariffs would be

scaled down every year on that date up until 2015, from the current average of 9.5 percent to about 6 percent, the news agency said.

On July 10, 238 deputies in the State Duma voted to ratify the WTO accession bill, while 208 voted against it. Belousov conceded during the Duma vote that the country would lose 188 billion rubles (\$5.7 billion) next year due to declining customs duties.

Opposition politicians have said WTO entry will cause major damage to whole sectors of the economy, including the agricultural and timber industries. The Communist Party sent a request to the Constitutional Court in late June to check whether the organization's membership criteria complied with Russian law, while several opposition groups have recently held rallies against the country's accession to the WTO.

Russia began accession talks 18 years ago.

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