

Kremlin Optimistic About U.S. Trade Bill

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — The Russian government remains hopeful that the U.S. Congress will approve a bill to upgrade bilateral trade relations despite a potentially tough political climate heading into U.S. elections in November, Russian officials said.

"We are optimistic. We need to be optimistic," Alexei Drobinin, senior counselor at the Russian Embassy in Washington, said Friday. "We think that expanding trade relations is a good way to broaden our overall relationship."

Congress is under pressure to lift a Cold War provision known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment and approve "permanent normal trade relations" with Russia to ensure that U.S. companies share in the full market-opening benefits of Moscow's entry into the World Trade Organization last week.

Drobinin discussed the issue during a briefing on Russia's hopes for next week's meeting of the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, which the Russian city of Vladivostok is hosting this year.

U.S. business groups hope the House of Representatives and Senate will pass the legislation in September, before lawmakers return home to campaign.

But with concerns in Congress about Moscow's support for Iran and Syria, the timing of a vote remains unclear.

Republican presidential challenger Mitt Romney accused President Barack Obama on Thursday of being too accommodating to Moscow and promised "less flexibility and more backbone" in U.S. policy if he wins the Nov. 6 election.

Mikhail Kalugin, acting head of the embassy's economic section, said that although Washington had still not approved normal trade relations, Moscow did not plan to impose higher tariffs on goods from the United States than on other WTO members.

In addition to making tariff cuts, Moscow has agreed to open its services markets and make other reforms as part of its accession to the WTO.

U.S. companies fear that those benefits are at risk and worry that they will not have protection against arbitrary Russian trade measures until the bill is passed.

In addition, some lawmakers are pushing for a nonbinding resolution of disapproval for Moscow's support for the Syrian government in its bloody battle against rebel groups.

"Of course we are against any nontrade issues to be inserted in a trade bill. ... Our opposition is very clear on that," Kalugin said.

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