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Belarus Wants Appliance Import Duty Hikes

By The Moscow Times

November 26, 2012



Belarus has proposed increasing import duties on household appliances to boost local manufacturing, but Russian producers say higher tariffs will result in more import violations.

In December, the Eurasian Economic Commission, or EEC, a governing body of the customs union comprising Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, will consider a proposal from the Belarussian Foreign Affairs Ministry to raise duties on common electronic appliances imported into the customs union, an EEC representative told Vedomosti on Tuesday.

In the proposal, submitted to the EEC in November, Belarus recommends raising import tariffs for TVs and LCD screens from 10 to 16.7 percent, for microwave ovens from 15 to 18 percent, for air conditioners from 0 to 13 percent and for vacuum cleaners from 5 to 12.5 percent, saying that the move would help local manufacturers to be more competitive in the context of Russia's accession to the WTO.

According to the draft proposal, higher duties would boost sales of locally manufactured appliances — almost doubling sales of Belarussian-made TV sets, for example.

But a Russian association representing manufacturers and dealers of computers and appliances said raising customs duties would encourage smuggling instead, which would be dangerous for local producers, Vedomosti reported Monday.

Mikhail Platonov, a commercial director of LG Electronics in Russia, told Vedomosti that Russia does not have large-scale production lines for air conditioners, microwaves or vacuum cleaners, and that hiking duties beyond an acceptable threshold would result in higher retail prices and a disruption of deliveries.

"We would like tariffs on these goods to remain as they are," he said.

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