

Kirk and Shuvalov Talk Trade Relations

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Senate has prohibited the Pentagon from buying Mi-17 helicopters.

WASHINGTON — U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk on Friday urged Russia to keep its market open to U.S. meat products and expressed hope the U.S. Senate would soon pass a bill upgrading trade relations between the two countries, his office said.

Kirk, who is in his final months as trade rep, also met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Gryshchenko to urge Ukraine not to proceed with actions that have alarmed many members of the World Trade Organization.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill earlier this month to establish permanent normal trade relations, and U.S. business groups are pushing hard for the Senate to pass the legislation before lawmakers adjourn at the end of the year.

Kirk told Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov he hoped the Senate would soon act on the bill, but he emphasized the importance of "Russia abiding by all its WTO obligations," the U.S. trade office said.

U.S. manufacturers such as Caterpillar and Boeing worry they will be left at a disadvantage to other suppliers if Congress does not approve the trade bill.

U.S. farm-state lawmakers are also worried about the potential for Russia to use phony food safety concerns to block imports of U.S. beef, pork and poultry.

Senator Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, in a letter Thursday urged Agriculture Undersecretary Michael Scuse to press that issue when he travels to Russia next week.

Meanwhile, Ukraine has caused an uproar by announcing it wants to raise tariffs on more than 350 product lines above the maximum level it negotiated to join the WTO.

Trade experts say the unprecedented request to change so many agricultural and industrial tariff lines poses a systemic threat to the world trading system because it could encourage other countries to follow Ukraine's example.

Ukraine's plan to raise tariffs includes cars, trucks, agricultural machinery, meat, flowers, fruit, vegetables, washing machines and even syringes.

Kirk reiterated the United States' concerns in the meeting Friday with Gryshchenko, which followed a joint statement earlier this week from a number of WTO members urging Ukraine to reverse course, the U.S. trade office said.

The U.S. Senate approved an amendment to the defense budget that prohibits the Pentagon from doing business with Rosoboronexport, including purchases of helicopters for Afghanistan, RIA-Novosti reported.

The amendment will take effect once President Barack Obama signs off on the defense budget.

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