

U.S. Presses Russia, Ukraine on Trade Concerns

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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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 USTR, 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.

Russia is the newest member of the WTO, but the U.S. Congress has to repeal a Cold War provision known as the Jackson-Vanik amendment for the two countries to establish "permanent normal trade relations."

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill earlier this month to establish PNTR, 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 U.S. Senate would soon act on the bill, but emphasized the importance of "Russia abiding by all its WTO obligations," the U.S. trade office said.

U.S. manufacturers such as Caterpillar Inc and Boeing Co 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 on Thursday urged U.S. Agriculture Under-Secretary Michael Scuse to press on 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 on 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.

That group included Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the European Union, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, Liechtenstein, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Paraguay, Singapore, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

The United States Senate has 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 would take effect once President Barack Obama signs off on the defense budget. Republican Senator John Cornyn of Texas wrote the amendment. "American taxpayers should not be indirectly financing mass killings of Syrian citizens, especially since purchases [of equipment for Afghanistan] can be made from American companies," the senator said.

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