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# Ministers Offered WTO Training

By Roland Oliphant

January 20, 2013




Pascal Lamy, head of the World Trade Organization

Government ministers were offered a free crash course in WTO rules after one of the country's most senior financiers savaged officials for failing to understand the organization Russia finally joined last year.

Pascal Lamy, the head of the World Trade Organization, said Friday that the group would be willing to provide a course of study for Russian officials and experts who are not yet up to speed with the rules of the global trade body, which now has 157 member countries.

"It's not for me to judge Russian ministers, but if there is a need for training Russian experts, we're ready to do so," he told journalists at the Gaidar Economic Forum in Moscow, Interfax reported.

Lamy's offer came after a scathing assessment of Russian officialdom's familiarity with the WTO by Sberbank chief German Gref the previous day. Gref's comments followed a statement Thursday by Maxim Medvedkov, the head of the Economic Development

Ministry's trade negotiations department, that Russia would not assume many of the WTO commitments since it is a recently acceded member.

In an unusual outburst at the forum Thursday, Gref said Lamy was regularly telling Russian ministers that "you are always talking about the WTO as something in the future, but you're already there."

He then laid into Industry Minister Denis Manturov and Open Government Minister Mikhail Abyzov, demanding to know how much time they had spent familiarizing themselves with the organization.

"I know they haven't spent a single hour on studying the rules and norms of the WTO," Gref said. "And if you now reply yes, you have, then I'll ask you the first and most simple question because I've done this for seven years: What regulates the rules of the WTO? Don't risk trying to answer that."

Gref went on to compare Russia to a hockey player who steps onto the ice without first learning the rules.

"We simply don't know the rules we're meant to play by," he said, RIA Novosti reported. "Why do we think that we're still not in the WTO? Because in our head, we're still not in the WTO. The question then is: Where are we in our head? I'll leave it open, but everything else begins from there."

Asked about Gref's comments, Lamy told reporters that about 5,000 people receive training from the WTO every year and that "if Russia wants to raise the competence of its experts, we can help."

Medvedkov said Russian officials had already enrolled in a WTO training program that continues for another two years, Interfax reported.

It is a daunting task, however. There are about 47,000 pages of WTO rules.

"Our aim is to have one expert in each department who has read all 47,000 pages," Medvedkov said. "Today such experts exist, but not in every department."

Contact the author at r.oliphant@imedia.ru

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