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Russia Prepared to Cease 'Milk War' With Lithuania

By The Moscow Times

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Russia is prepared to lift its ban on imports of Lithuanian dairy products following successful negotiations with Lithuanian authorities, acting head of the Federal Consumer Protection Service Anna Popova said Tuesday.

Popova commented on Lithuania's "very serious approach to eliminating" the violations that Russian inspectors had noted and said that documents permitting the products onto Russian territory were being prepared, Interfax reported.

Last week, Lithuania promised to intensify its routine inspections of dairy products prior to deliveries to Russia.

The consumer protection agency halted dairy imports from Lithuania on Oct. 7 citing "numerous infractions" of consumer protection and sanitary laws, including labeling discrepancies and the discovery of phthalate plasticizers in certain products.

Lithuania soon after threatened to complain to the World Trade Organization over the so-called 'milk war,' denouncing the ban as a political maneuver.

Former Russian chief sanitary inspector Gennady Onishchenko responded that the restrictions would remain intact "for an incalculably long time" if Lithuania took the case to the WTO for arbitration.

Russia has imposed a series of trade sanctions against former Soviet republics this year in what has widely been viewed as an attempt to dissuade the countries from further developing trade relations with the European Union.

The 'milk war' with Lithuania only further escalated a conflict that began in September, when Russian officials scaled up inspections of Lithuanian shipments, sometimes holding them on the border for up to 20 days.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius then said that his country could "theoretically" block Russia's road and rail access to the Russian exclave Kaliningrad, which shares a border with Lithuania, if the trade impediments continued.

Negotiations resumed despite the tense relations, and in early November the Russian consumer protection agency said that it was optimistic about the return of Lithuanian milk products to the market.

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