



Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) Status for Russia and U.S.-Russian Economic Ties

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Summary

The change in Russia's trade status will require legislation to lift the restrictions currently applied to Russia under Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974, which includes the "freedom-of-emigration" requirements of the Jackson-Vanik amendment. The process for Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) is proceeding and may be completed soon. As a result, Members may confront the issue of whether to grant Russia permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status during the 112th Congress.

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Granting Russia permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) status requires a change in law because Russia is prohibited from receiving unconditional and permanent NTR under Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974. This provision includes the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment. Extension of PNTR has implications for Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). This report examines this legislative issue in the context of Russian accession to the WTO and U.S.-Russian economic ties.

What are NTR Status and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment?

“Normal trade relations” (NTR), or “most-favored-nation” (MFN), trade status is used to denote nondiscriminatory treatment of a trading partner compared to that of other countries.¹ Only two countries—Cuba and North Korea—do not have NTR status in trade with the United States. In practice, duties on the imports from a country which has been granted NTR status are set at lower rates than those from countries that do not receive such treatment. Thus, imports from a non-NTR country can be at a large price disadvantage compared with imports from NTR-status countries.

Section 401 of Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974 requires the President to continue to deny NTR status to any country that was not receiving such treatment at the time of the law's enactment on January 3, 1975. In effect this meant all communist countries, except Poland and Yugoslavia. Section 402 of Title IV, the so-called Jackson-Vanik amendment, denies the countries eligibility for NTR status as well as access to U.S. government credit facilities, such as the Export-Import Bank, as long as the country denies its citizens the right of freedom-of-emigration. These restrictions can be removed if the President determines that the country is in *full compliance* with the freedom-of-emigration conditions set out under the Jackson-Vanik amendment. For a country to maintain that status, the President must reconfirm his determination of full compliance in a semiannual report (by June 30 and December 31) to Congress. His determination can be overturned by the enactment of a joint resolution of disapproval concerning the December 31st report.

The Jackson-Vanik amendment also permits the President to *waive* the freedom of emigration requirements, if he determines that such a waiver would promote the objectives of the amendment, that is, encourage freedom of emigration. This waiver authority is subject to a annual renewal by the President and to congressional disapproval via a joint resolution. Before a country can receive NTR treatment under either the presidential determination of full compliance or the presidential waiver, it and the United States must have concluded and enacted a bilateral agreement that provides for, among other things, reciprocal extension of NTR or MFN treatment. The agreement and a presidential proclamation extending NTR status cannot go into effect until a congressional joint resolution approving the agreement is enacted.

¹ MFN has been used in international agreements and at one time was used in U.S. law to denote the fundamental trade principle of nondiscriminatory treatment. However, “MFN” was replaced in U.S. law, on July 22, 1998, by the term “normal trade relations.” (P.L. 105-206). MFN is still used in international trade agreements. The terms are used interchangeably in this report.

Russia's NTR Status

In 1990, the United States and the Soviet Union signed a bilateral trade agreement as required under Title IV of the Trade Act of 1974. The agreement was subsequently applied to each of the former Soviet states. The United States extended NTR treatment to Russia under the *presidential waiver* authority beginning in June 1992. Since September 1994, Russia has received NTR status under the *full compliance* provision. Presidential extensions of NTR status to Russia have met with virtually no congressional opposition.

Russian leaders have continually pressed the United States to “graduate” Russia from Jackson-Vanik coverage entirely. They see the amendment as a Cold War relic that does not reflect Russia’s new stature as a fledgling democracy and market economy. Moreover, Russian leaders argue that Russia has implemented freedom-of-emigration policies since the fall of the communist government, making the Jackson-Vanik conditions inappropriate and unnecessary.

While Russia remains subject to the Jackson-Vanik amendment, some of the other former Soviet republics have been granted permanent and unconditional NTR. For example Kyrgyzstan and Georgia received PNTR in 2000, and Armenia received PNTR in January 2005. Perhaps what has irked Russian leaders greatly is that the United States granted permanent and unconditional NTR status to Ukraine in 2006.

U.S.-Russian Economic Ties

During the Cold War, U.S.-Soviet economic ties were very limited. They were constrained by national security and foreign policy restrictions, including the Jackson-Vanik amendment restrictions. They were also limited by Soviet economic policies of central planning that prohibited foreign investment and tightly controlled foreign trade.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, successive Russian leaders have been dismantling the central economic planning system. This has included the liberalization of foreign trade and investment. U.S.-Russian economic relations have expanded, but the flow of trade and investment remains very low, as reflected in **Table 1**, which contains data on U.S. merchandise trade with Russia since 1999.

Table 1. U.S. Trade with Russia, 1999-2009

(Billions of U.S. dollars)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Exports	2.1	2.1	2.7	2.4	2.4	3.0	3.9	4.7	7.4	9.3	5.4
Imports	5.9	7.8	6.3	6.8	8.6	12.6	15.3	19.8	19.3	26.8	18.2
Balances	-3.9	-5.6	-3.5	-4.4	-6.2	-8.9	-11.3	-15.1	-11.9	-17.4	-12.8

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. International Trade Administration.

The table indicates that U.S.-Russian trade, at least U.S. imports, have grown appreciably. U.S. imports from Russia have largely consisted of oil products, crude oil, and various metals. U.S. exports span a range of products including meat, machinery parts, and aircraft parts. U.S. imports increased more than 350%, from \$5.9 billion to \$26.8 billion from 1999 to 2008, and U.S. exports

rose 343%, from \$2.1 billion to \$9.3 billion. However, U.S. exports and imports with Russia declined substantially in 2009, as a result of the global financial crisis and economic downturn. Russia accounted for 1.2% of U.S. imports and 0.5% of U.S. exports in 2009, and the United States accounted for 3.6% of Russian exports and 5.7% of Russian imports.² Russia was the 32nd largest export market and 20th largest source of imports for the United States in 2009.

U.S. exports to and imports from Russia are heavily concentrated in a few commodity categories. The top five 2-digit Harmonized System (HS) categories of imports, accounted for about 70% of total U.S. imports from Russia and consisted of precious stones and metals, inorganic chemicals, mineral fuels, aluminum, iron and steel, and fish and other seafood. About 60% of U.S. exports to Russia consisted of products in three 2-digit HS categories: aircraft, machinery (mostly parts for oil and gas production equipment), and meat (mostly poultry).³

Issues in U.S.-Russian Trade

Russia's treatment of imports of U.S. meats—poultry, pork and beef—is one of the most sensitive issues in U.S.-Russian trade relations. Russia's agricultural sector, particularly meat production, has not been very competitive, and domestic producers have not been able to fulfill Russia's expanding demand for meat, especially as the rise of Russian incomes has led to a rise in demand for meat in the Russian diet. U.S. producers, especially of poultry, have been able to take advantage and have become major sources of meat to the Russian market. At the same time, Russia has become an important market for U.S. exports of meat. For example, in 2009, Russia was the largest market for U.S. poultry meat exports.⁴

On January 1, 2010, the Russian government implemented new regulations on imports of poultry, claiming that the chlorine wash that U.S. poultry producers use in the preparation of chickens violates Russian standards and is unsafe. These regulations effectively halted U.S. exports of poultry to Russia. The United States claimed that the wash is effective and safe and that Russian restrictions are not scientifically based. U.S. and Russian officials conducted discussions to resolve the issue. At their June 24, 2010, press conference that closed a bilateral summit meeting, President Obama and President Medvedev announced that the dispute over poultry trade had been resolved and that U.S. shipments of poultry to Russia would resume. However, the full resumption of shipments was delayed over Russian demands to inspect U.S. poultry processing plants before they can be certified for shipping to Russia. On September 30, 2010, the two countries reportedly reached a compromise on this issue whereby Russian inspectors would examine and certify U.S. plants on an expedited basis.⁵ However, as a result of the Russian restrictions, U.S. exports of poultry to Russia plummeted 89% as of the end of September 2010 compared to the same period in 2009.⁶

² *World Trade Atlas*. Global Trade Information Services, Inc.

³ *World Trade Atlas*.

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. FATUS, *Export Aggregations*. Accessed on March 18, 2009.

⁵ *World Trade Online*. September 30, 2010. For more information on issues pertaining to U.S. exports of meat to Russia, see CRS Report RS22948, *U.S.-Russia Meat and Poultry Trade Issues*, by Renée Johnson.

⁶ Derived from U.S. Department of Commerce data.

The lack of adequate intellectual property rights (IPR) protection in Russia has tainted the business climate in Russia for U.S. investors for some time. The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) consistently identifies Russia in its Special 301 Report as a “priority watch list” country, as it did in its latest (April 30, 2010) report. While the USTR report acknowledges some improvement in IPR protection, it also finds that implementation of IPR laws has been slow and enforcement weak. In particular, the report cites the failure of Russia to fulfill its commitments to improve IPR protection made as part of the 2006 bilateral agreement that was reached as part of Russia’s WTO accession process.⁷

Russian economic policies and regulations have been a source of concerns. The United States and the U.S. business community have asserted that structural problems and inefficient government regulations and policies have been a major cause of the low levels of trade and investment with the United States. Russia maintains high tariffs on some goods that U.S. manufacturers try to export. For example, tariffs on cars plus the excise tax that is prorated for engine displacement adds close to 70% on the price imported U.S. passenger cars and sports utility vehicles. U.S. exporters have also cited problems with Russian customs regulations that are complicated and time-consuming.

Russia’s Accession to the WTO

Russia first applied to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT—now the World Trade Organization (WTO)) in 1993. Russia has been in the process of completing negotiations with a WTO working party (WP), which includes representatives from about 60 WTO members, including the United States and the European Union (EU). WP members have raised concerns about Russia’s IPR enforcement policies and practices, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) regulations that may be blocking imports of agricultural products unnecessarily, and Russia’s demand to keep its large subsidies for its agricultural sector. The United States has also raised issues regarding the role of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the Russian economy and Russian impediments to imports of U.S. products containing encryption technology.

Prime Minister Putin’s June 9, 2009 announcement that Russia would be abandoning its application to join the WTO as a single entity and would instead pursue it with Belarus and Kazakhstan as a customs union seemed set back the accession process. However, after meeting resistance from WTO officials, Russia and the other two countries decided to pursue accession separately but with common proposed tariff schedules of the three countries. On June 24, 2010, during their meeting in Washington, D.C., President Obama and President Medvedev pledged to resolve the remaining issues regarding Russia’s accession to the WTO by September 30. The United States also pledged to provide technical assistance to Russia to speed up the process of Russia’s accession taking into account its customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. On October 1, 2010, in a heavily nuanced statement, the USTR announced that, “...the United States and Russia have reached agreement on the substance of a number of Russian commitments...” He noted that Russia had enacted amendments to laws related to the protection of IPR and that the United States “...looks to the effective implementation of these laws...”⁸ However, it was unclear whether all of the issues had been resolved. On November 26, 2010, Russia concluded an

⁷ Office of the United States Trade Representative, *Special 301 Report*, April 30, 2010, p. 23.

⁸ Office of the United States Trade Representative, *USTR Kirk Welcomes Bilateral Resolution of Key WTO Issues with Russia* press statement, October 1, 2010.

agreement with the EU that resolved bilateral issues in the WTO process and seems to indicate that Russia's accession to the WTO may be completed soon, possibly sometime in 2011.⁹

Implications and Legislation

Granting Russia permanent and unconditional NTR status will have little direct impact on U.S.-Russian trade. Russian imports have entered the United States on a NTR or MFN basis since 1992. The initiative would be a political symbol of Russia's treatment as a "normal" country in U.S. trade, further distancing U.S.-Russian relations from the Cold War. It would also be a step in the direction of Russia's accession to the WTO. For investors and other business people, permanent NTR may mean a more stable climate for doing business.

With the signing of bilateral agreement on WTO accession with the United States on November 19, 2006 and with the follow-up agreement reached on October 1, 2010, Russia completed a major step towards joining the WTO. It still must complete negotiations with a WTO WP on conditions for its accession. Members of the Working Party, including the United States, have raised concerns about Russia's position on agriculture subsidies and the failure to enforce intellectual property rights, among other issues.

Legislation to grant Russia PNTR was not introduced in the 111th Congress to date but could emerge during the 112th Congress. Russian leaders consider the absence of PNTR status an affront and the Jackson-Vanik amendment to be a relic of the Cold War that should no longer apply to U.S.-Russia trade relations, especially since such still ostensibly communist countries as China and Vietnam are afforded PNTR status by the United States.

Congressional consideration of legislation to grant Russia PNTR status would likely generate debate not only on the pros and cons of PNTR status for Russia per se, but also on U.S. economic policy towards Russia and Russia's economic policies and practices. For example, Russia's treatment of imports of U.S.-produced poultry has been a contentious issue and could come up during the debate, despite a recent agreement on the issue. In addition, U.S. businesses have cited Russian government corruption as a significant barrier to doing business there. Human rights and foreign policy issues might also be raised. For example, one Member of Congress has cited Russia's growing ties with Venezuela as a reason to be cautious about supporting Russia's entry into the WTO.¹⁰

⁹ *International Trade Daily*, November 29, 2010.

¹⁰ Congressman Connie Mack, *Mack to Obama: Don't Turn Blind Eye to Chavez and Russia*, press release, October 22, 2010.

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