
Georgian leader says veto on Russia joining WTO could be lifted

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STRASBOURG, January 24 (RIA Novosti) - Georgia's veto on Russia's admission to the World Trade Organization can be lifted if the sides negotiate, the Georgian president said on Thursday.

"Georgia is not set on the idea of creating problems for Russia," Mikheil Saakashvili told journalists when asked when Tbilisi planned to lift the veto.

The president said he had made proposals to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the issue, but did not specify what they entailed.

Saakashvili also said he welcomed Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's statement on Wednesday that Russia has no plans to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Georgia insists before it lifts its veto Russia must implement commitments undertaken as part of a protocol signed by Georgia and Russia in May 2004. In line with the deal, Russia was to settle customs administration issues at Georgian-Russian border checkpoints before joining the global trade body.

Georgia insists on the legal and correct operation of two checkpoints it deems illegal - Gantiadi-Adler (Abkhazia) and Roki-Nizhny Zaramag (South Ossetia).

South Ossetia and Abkhazia declared their independence from Georgia following bloody conflicts in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. Georgia's current pro-Western leadership has been seeking to recover its influence in the separatist regions and secure international support on the issue.

Saakashvili, recently reelected for a second term as Georgia's president, admitted that what he regrets most from his first term is the deterioration of relations with Russia.

Asked whether he planned to visit Russia to normalize relations, he said he is always ready to do so. "If I am invited, I am always ready to travel to Moscow."

The acting foreign minister of Georgia said on Tuesday that the ex-Soviet republic is ready for compromise with Russia, but not to the detriment of its national interests.

"Equality should first be restored in relations first, i.e. all obstacles including embargos should be removed, and borders opened," Gela Bezhuashvili said.
