

American

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President Obama: U.S. Strongly Backs Russia's World Trade Organization Bid

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington – President Obama urged U.S. and Russian trade negotiators to accelerate their talks on Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) with the goal of finding agreement on the remaining technical issues by September 30.

"We think it is not only in the interest of the Russian Federation but in the interest of the United States and in the interest of the world that Russia joins the WTO. So this is something that we want to get resolved," the president said in remarks with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev at the White House June 24.

Obama said approximately 90 to 95 percent of the technical differences have already been resolved, although the remaining issues "are going to require some significant work."

The Russian and U.S. governments are putting the same pressure on their negotiators as they did in 2009-2010 to finalize the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), and Obama is instructing the U.S. side to "try to come to terms with the technical issues that remain by the fall," in order to create "a sense of urgency on the part of our team," he said.

Some agreements would require modifications in Russian law to meet international standards, the president said, and the U.S. delegation "will be very specific and very clear about the technical issues that Russia still faces." But Obama expressed confidence that the agreements will be reached and said President Medvedev's vision of "an innovative, modernized, energized economy" is "entirely consistent with Russia's joining the WTO."

According to a June 24 White House fact sheet, the United States and Russia intensified their discussions on Russia's WTO accession after Moscow finished work on forming a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. A Russian delegation led by First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov arrived in Washington on April 27 to meet with senior Obama administration officials, and the visit resulted in a road map of steps Russia would need to take to accelerate its accession. According to the fact sheet, the United States also pledged additional technical assistance to help Russia revise its WTO Working Party Report by taking its new customs union into account.

The fact sheet said that Obama and Medvedev agreed to try to settle remaining issues on Russia's WTO accession by September 30, anticipating Russia's full

implementation of a mutually agreed-upon action plan, as well as taking into account the progress it has already achieved, including an agreement with the United States on the treatment of Russian state-owned enterprises.

President Obama said the June 24 agreement to resolve a multibillion-dollar trade dispute over U.S. exports of poultry to Russia is "an indication of the seriousness with which President Medvedev and his team take all of these trade and commercial issues."

With more favorable Russian views of the United States, the two countries have moved beyond "resetting" their bilateral relationship to broadening their ties, including in trade, commerce and collaboration on energy efficiency and clean energy technologies, he said.

"[Twenty] years after the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-Russian relationship has to be about more than just security and arms control. It has to be about our shared prosperity, and what we can build together," Obama said.

President Medvedev said most of the substantive issues concerning the WTO accession talks, including discussions over encryption and intellectual property, have already been resolved.

"There are some remaining technical minor problems. And our teams have been instructed to work as fast as possible. And we hope ... that the work will be finalized by the end of September this year," he said.

The Russian leader encouraged U.S. investment in his country's new center of innovative developments in Skolkovo, located outside Moscow, and said Russian business leaders are carefully studying how to apply the best practices and some examples from California's Silicon Valley technology hub.

"We should provide a stimulus to our businessmen to be more attentive and helpful toward each other, to invest funds in each other's economies," Medvedev told Obama, with the goal of taking steps "so that the level of economic investment cooperation is in line with the potential of the U.S. and the Russian economies."

Homeland Security Head Urges Immigration Reform, Border Security

By Merle David Kellerhals, Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington – While the U.S. government seeks to enhance security along the border between Mexico and the United States, it is also implementing effective law enforcement strategies with state, local and tribal partners, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano says.

“Over the past 18 months, this administration has devoted more resources — including manpower, technology and infrastructure — to the southwest border than at any point in America’s history,” Napolitano said. “We are committed to further bolstering our cooperation with our state, local and tribal law enforcement partners as we continue to implement strong, smart and effective enforcement strategies.”

The United States is also working closely with Mexican authorities to keep communities on both sides of the border free from border-related violence and crime, and violence associated with illicit drug trafficking, she said.

“We are not satisfied. There is more work to do,” Napolitano said at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, a public policy research organization, June 23.

While at the center, Napolitano announced additional measures to shore up the border region. These include new working partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies; expanded information sharing among law enforcement agencies; enhanced technology and targeting to crack down on cross-border smuggling; additional tools to enforce U.S. immigration laws while also setting priorities for the arrest and removal of dangerous criminal aliens; and expanded cooperation with Mexican authorities.

President Obama announced the deployment of up to 1,200 Army National Guard troops along the southwest border in support of federal law enforcement officials in May, and on June 22 also requested \$500 million in emergency supplemental funds from Congress to further enhance border security.

The Department of Homeland Security is also creating a new partnership with the Major Cities Chiefs Association, which represents the largest police departments in the United States and Canada, to create the “Southwest Border Law Enforcement Compact,” which is designed to boost law enforcement at the border by permitting nonborder state and local law enforcement agencies to detail officers to state and local law enforcement agencies along the border.

Napolitano also said that while efforts are under way to bolster border security and enhance assistance to law enforcement, Congress must move forward on comprehensive immigration reform.

“There is no silver bullet. It will require Congress to enact changes,” she said.

Holding up reform legislation until the southwest border is sealed is not the answer, she added.

“The border is as secure now as it’s ever been, but we know we can always do more and that will always be the case,” the former Arizona governor said. “It’s a big border. It is 1,960 miles [3,154 kilometers] across that southwest border. It’s some of the roughest, toughest geographical terrain in the world across that border.”

Repairing the nation’s immigration system is something Congress must do because the immigration system is a responsibility of the federal government, Napolitano said.

A Winning View of Democracy from Iran

Video Challenge winner had to leave his country to deliver his message

By Jeff Baron
Staff Writer

Washington — In a way, Farbod Khoshtinat has been preparing for the Democracy Video Challenge for years, which would help explain why the 21-year-old Iranian is the 2010 winner for the Near East and North Africa region.

Khoshtinat, also known as Fred, has been making videos since his early teens, when a stop-motion animated short of his won prizes in national competitions for student filmmakers. He grew up in Tehran and studied cinema in high school and college. He was also active in Tehran’s underground music scene; his videos include a popular one for Iranian hip-hop artist Hichkas, and he edited the music videos for a feature film about the Iranian music underground, *No One Knows About Persian Cats*.

Khoshtinat said that his work on music videos and other underground, unauthorized short films led to an order by the Iranian government about a year ago that he stop making films. Instead, he said by e-mail, he moved to Malaysia to continue his studies. “I am sure now that I cannot go back to Iran, but here I am safe and sound to work and publicize my art,” he said.

He is one of six winners of the Democracy Video Challenge. His powerful winning video, a combination of live action and animation, offers comments on democracy from a prisoner. The government that oppresses its people is depicted as a powerful arm that crushes the stick figures who speak up or need help. With the image of the arm putting a box over a crowd of protesters, for example, the narrator says, “Democracy is not choking the voices so that no harsh word could aggrieve your ears.”

In a statement submitted with his video, Khoshtinat calls himself a “freedom fighter” as well as an artist.

“I believe that one of the greatest things about art is that it gives us the ability to see, imagine and feel things in a

certain way," he said. "This belief was the main reason I wanted to participate in this challenge, to give the opportunity to the people around the world to see how democracy is practiced in my country, so I visualized it through art; I wanted them to see it through my certain way of visualizing. As a young student who is studying abroad, this was the least thing I could do for my people since we all are in the quest for democracy."

These are the other winners of the Democracy Video Challenge:

- Adhyatmika from Indonesia: www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGIVYm-v3kM
- Joel Marsden from Spain: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rK2WPtzAnk
- Juan Pablo Patiño Arévalo from Colombia: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVW-9wGXrrw
- Anup Poudel from Nepal: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52mmgGmuMmo>
- Yared Shumete from Ethiopia: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqWFb852eDk

The Democracy Video Challenge is a project involving an array of public and private groups: the Center for International Private Enterprise, the International Republican Institute, the International Youth Foundation, the Motion Picture Association of America, NBC-Universal, the National Democratic Institute, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, the Recording Industry Association of America, TakingITGlobal, the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, the U.S. Department of State, WME and YouTube.

In its first two years, it has attracted entries from 1,600 people in 110 countries. The videos of the 18 finalists were posted on the Challenge's official website, its Facebook page and its official YouTube page. The winners were chosen through online voting via YouTube.

Economic Summit Focuses on Sustaining Current Recovery

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States will take steps at two major economic summits in Canada June 25–27 to ensure that the current global recovery is self-sustaining, say senior U.S. advisers.

"Engagement with the [Group of 20 major economies] has been a key component of the administration's strategy to defuse the global financial crisis and ensure economic recovery," Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and National Economic Adviser Lawrence Summers said in a June 23 commentary in the Wall Street Journal.

Geithner and Summers said the G20 is critical to ensuring that global growth continues and that three priorities are part of the U.S. agenda at the Toronto summit. The priorities are that the G20 do the following:

- Work to secure the global recovery.
- Accelerate efforts to establish a global framework for financial regulation.
- Make progress on other global challenges essential to future security and prosperity — raising living standards across developing countries and making better investments in agricultural development and food security.

The Group of Eight (G8) meets June 25–26 in Muskoka, Canada, and the Group of 20 (G20) follows June 26–27 in Toronto. The G20 will hold a second summit November 11–12 in Seoul.

President Obama will open the main session of the G20 on a framework for maintaining and advancing "strong, balanced and sustainable growth," a senior administration official said during a June 23 White House background briefing. This component of the multinational talks follows from the 2009 Pittsburgh Summit and from a time when the global recession was beginning to bottom out and the recovery phase was beginning.

Then the talks will turn to international financial institutions, trade and protectionism, climate change and energy security, and, at the end of the session, regulatory reform. A joint House-Senate conference committee is completing work on a U.S. financial reform bill that will put in place measures to prevent a repeat of the 2008–09 recession, which economists regarded as the deepest since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Senior administration officials said there will also be a discussion about economic events in Europe. European leaders have begun austerity initiatives to gradually reduce substantial debts that had been necessary to stimulate sagging domestic economies.

"Global coordination is essential to fostering the kind of balance and sustainable growth that we will be pursuing through the G20," an official said.

In addition to the economic talks, Obama will also hold face-to-face talks with leaders from South Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom, China, Indonesia and India, and a possible seventh bilateral meeting with the new prime minister from Australia. Obama has also spoken with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the run-up to the two summits, discussing the agendas for the talks and the scope of the meetings.

Seven African leaders have been asked to join the talks

during the G8 meetings on economic development and maternal and child health, a favored initiative by Harper, who is host for the G8 and G20 summits. And leaders from Haiti, Jamaica and Colombia will join G8 discussions on the illicit drug trade between Latin America and Africa.

Canada is also expected to address preventing a worsening debt crisis among nations, while seeking agreement on reducing those debts by 50 percent over the next five years.

And it is expected that some discussion will be directed at reducing fossil-fuel subsidies, which had been raised at the Pittsburgh summit, senior administration officials said. Member nations have been analyzing their policies and have begun to submit lists of subsidies they want to phase out over time.

"It's going to be an ongoing process. We said the phaseout was to be done over the medium term, and each country will do it in their own way and consistent with its own particular circumstances," an administration official said.

ROLE OF ECONOMIC FORUMS

The G8 advanced economies — established informally in November 1975 in France — are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. One of these nations hosts the economic forums annually and sets the agenda after consultations with other member nations. The G20, which was formed in 1999, includes the G8 members plus Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey and the European Union (EU).

In addition to the nations represented at the summits, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank president and the chairmen of the Financial Committee and the Development Committee also participate in the summits.

Since the mid-1970s, leaders from the former Group of Seven (G7) nations, along with a small group of developed countries, gathered annually to discuss and coordinate global financial and economic policies, usually over a two-day period in one of the host nations.

The G20 became more prominent with the onset of the recent recession. The group leaders have met three times at the summit level to coordinate policy responses — November 2008 in Washington, April 2009 in London and September 2009 in Pittsburgh. At the last summit the leaders agreed that thereafter the G20 would be the premier forum for international economic coordination.

The G20 countries play a significant role in international economic stability because they represent about 90 percent of the gross domestic product globally and nearly 80 percent of world trade. They also represent two-thirds of the world's population.

G20 leaders in their last two summits created a balanced economic framework designed to shrink surpluses in export-rich countries such as China and boost savings in debt-laden nations, including the United States.

Fans Flock to Babylon Futbol Café for Crucial World Cup Match

Algerian and American soccer fans unite under one roof to support teams

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Supporters of Algerian football crowded into a hookah cafe on June 23 to watch their team take on the United States in the final match of Group C of the World Cup. Men, women and children, draped in the national colors of green and white, watched the match intensely as players moved the ball around the pitch.

With dozens of Algeria supporters, the scene resembled countless venues in Tizi Ouzo, Oran and Algiers. And it could have been, except for an equal number of Team USA supporters on the other side of the room.

In fact, both sides came to cheer on their teams at the Babylon Futbol Café in Falls Church, Virginia.

"I think that it is healthy that there is a good Algerian contingent here," said Patrick Lewis, a supporter of the American side. "The whole participatory culture of soccer is really healthy."

Nabil Allaoua, an Algeria supporter, was thrilled to see the Desert Foxes play in the world championship.

"I've never seen them in the World Cup," Allaoua said, wearing an Algeria jersey. "Just seeing them for the first time is totally wonderful."

Algeria's World Cup history is bittersweet. After Algeria beat Germany in 1982, the first time in World Cup play that an African squad defeated a European team, many soccer analysts believed Austria allowed Germany to win against them 1-0. Germany's win over Austria knocked Algeria out the tournament. FIFA then changed future World Cup schedules to hold final group matches simultaneously, so no two teams could plot against a third.

While the Slovenia and England match played out on a few Babylon Futbol Café televisions, hardly anyone was

watching. It was all about Algeria and America.

Despite Algeria's best efforts, a U.S. shot on goal hit the back of the net in overtime, causing half of Babylon's patrons to jump for joy while the Algerian side saw their World Cup hopes dashed. America moved on to the next round.

As Algeria's supporters exited the café past celebrating U.S. fans, both sides congratulated each other and exchanged thumbs-up signals to honor a great game played.

One Algerian fan said he backs the United States in upcoming matches.

"We live in America and we are happy also that the U.S. won," he said. "We will follow the U.S. now."

Nabil Ait, another Algeria supporter, criticized his team's management but was optimistic about the future.

"The coach seemed to be using older players, but we have a lot of fresh blood that he didn't use today," Ait said. "We think there is a future because there are a lot of good young players in Algeria."

To follow upcoming matches, Ait and other Algeria supporters likely will return to the Babylon Futbol Café. In the World Cup qualifying match between Algeria and Egypt, the café, located just moments from Washington, hosted about an equal number of supporters for each side.

Babylon regularly welcomes large parties of Algerian football supporters. Paul Hecton, managing member of International Futbol Crossroads LLC, the owners of Babylon, said he thinks Algerians frequent the club because two of his business partners are Moroccan.

For him, the Babylon Futbol Café focuses on what may be America's future premier sport, soccer.

"We are an international football crossroads," Hecton said of his establishment.

"There may be basketball, [American] football on, but when in doubt it is soccer first here," Hecton said. "Things have changed in the past 20 years. The world has gotten a lot smaller and more international. If you are not in touch with this you are obsolete."

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