

Czech Republic supports free-trade zone including EU and Russia - PM TopolaneK

VIENNA. APRIL 24. INTERFAX CENTRAL EUROPE – The Czech Republic supports the idea of a free-trade zone including the European Union and Russia, Prime Minister Mirek TopolaneK said at a panel Monday during the Europe-Russia Forum in Vienna.

“We support the idea of a free-trade agreement between the EU and Russia,” TopolaneK said.

Any deal may be some way off, however, as the European Union has been unable to start negotiations on a new partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) with Russia since Poland lodged a veto to the talks in November last year. With the current PCA expiring this November, any new treaty is unlikely to be agreed in time.

“Such talks will be complicated,” Joerg-Ernst von Studnitz, chairman of the board of the Germany-Russia Forum said. “I don’t think we can talk any less than one to three years.”

In early April, Russian Economic Development and Trade Minister German Gref said his country's 2008-2010 budget had been compiled in the expectation that Russia would become a member of the World Trade Organization on January 1, 2008.

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