

VOA News

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Russian Duma Ratifies Kyoto Protocol

Russia's lower house of parliament Friday ratified the Kyoto Protocol on global warming.

The action by the State Duma means that the long-delayed treaty may soon come into force despite opposition from major countries, including the United States.

Duma deputies voted overwhelmingly to adopt the Kyoto Protocol just a few weeks after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced he backed the long-delayed treaty aimed at easing the problem of global warming.

The Kyoto ratification bill must still be approved by the upper house of parliament and signed by Mr. Putin, but this is considered a virtual certainty.

The vote follows several years of often-heated debate within the Russian government, with many prominent politicians saying the treaty would cause harm to Russia's economy.

Moscow signed the protocol five years ago and had come under strong pressure to ratify from the European Union, which has long been a strong proponent of the agreement.

As an incentive, the EU last May promised it will back Russia's admission into the World Trade Organization in exchange for Moscow's ratification of the Kyoto treaty.

Russia might also earn billions of dollars by "selling" excess emissions from its allowable quota to other countries with greater emission levels.

But Valery Dragonov, chairman of the Duma committee on economic policy, says most deputies viewed their action both in political and ecological terms.

He says in his opinion Russia bears responsibility for the state of affairs in the world's economy, and in the world's ecology. This responsibility, he says, has been confirmed by this ratification.

Named for a conference in Kyoto, Japan, where it was drafted more than a decade ago, the document seeks to roll back greenhouse gas emissions to below levels in 1990.

With Russia's ratification, the Kyoto protocol would secure the backing of countries accounting for at least 55 percent of 1990 global level emissions, and allow the pact to go into force.

Scientists around the world agree on the worrisome rise in global temperatures, but there is a continuing debate about the causes of global warming.

Both the United States and Australia oppose the treaty, saying it is flawed and would be detrimental to economic growth.