



# **The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Meetings in Vladivostok, Russia: Postscript**

*Michael F. Martin*

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Russia hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's (APEC) week-long series of senior-level meetings in Vladivostok on September 2-9, 2012. The 20th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting, the main event for the week, was held September 8-9, 2012. It was the first time that Russia had hosted the APEC meetings, as well as the first APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting at which all the members were also members of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

U.S. expectations for the 20th APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting were relatively low for a number of reasons. First, several of the members' leaders either did not attend (e.g., President Obama), were effectively lame ducks (e.g., President Hu Jintao of China), or were facing political uncertainty at home (e.g., Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda of Japan), making it difficult for the members to consider major commitments. Second, in the eyes of U.S. officials involved in the preparations for the meetings, Russia's lack of experience and past lack of commitment to APEC weakened the pre-meeting preparations for the Leaders' Meeting. Third, by holding the Leaders' Meeting in September (rather than in November, as in previous years), Russia foreshortened the time to work on various initiatives. Fourth, recent events and initiatives, including the ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement negotiations, have raised questions within the Obama Administration about APEC's role on the promotion of greater economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the low U.S. expectations, U.S. officials indicate that they think the week-long event in Vladivostok was relatively productive. Below is a summary of the main results of these meetings, according to senior officials in the Obama Administration:

- The 21 APEC members agreed to lower their tariffs on 54 categories of environmental goods to no more than 5% by 2015.
- The APEC members endorsed a model chapter on transparency for reference when negotiating multilateral or bilateral trade agreements.
- The APEC members agreed to cooperate in developing policies and technology to promote sustainable agriculture, including encouraging the harmonizing of domestic regulations on food safety.
- An APEC report concluded that its members had improved the ease of doing business by an average of 8.2% between 2009 and 2011, fulfilling nearly a third of APEC's goal to obtain a 25% improvement by 2015.
- The APEC members agreed to continue to promote technological innovation by developing non-discriminatory, market-driven innovation policies and fostering greater communication between academia, businesses, and governments.

U.S. officials are apprehensive, however, about APEC's prospects for the next two years when first Indonesia and then China will be the host members.

This report also examines the role of Congress with respect to APEC, including appropriations necessary to finance APEC's secretariat and U.S. support of APEC activities.

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