

Putin signs bill confirming Kyoto ratification

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Moscow — President Vladimir Putin signed a bill confirming Russia's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, the Kremlin said Friday, clearing the way for the global climate pact to come into force early next year.

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Both parts of parliament voted last month to ratify the protocol, which aims to stem global warming by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Putin signed the bill on Thursday, the Kremlin said.

Without Russia's support, the pact — which has been rejected by the United States and Australia — could not have come into effect. It needed endorsement by 55 industrialized nations accounting for at least 55 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions in 1990.

The United States alone accounted for 36 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions in 1990, while Russia accounted for 17 per cent.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi praised Russia's move as “a fresh start for policies to combat global warming. I warmly welcome it.”

British Prime Minister Tony Blair also hailed the ratification. He said he looks forward to working with Mr. Putin during Britain's presidency of the Group of Eight industrialized nations next year, “when climate change will be a major theme.”

After years of hesitation, Mr. Putin pledged in May to speed up approval in return for the European Union's support of Russia's bid to join the World Trade Organization. The 1997 pact will take effect 90 days after Russia notifies the United Nations of its ratification.

Japanese Environment Minister Yuriko Koike said Tuesday that Tokyo — one of the pact's biggest promoters — would “continuously urge the United States, Australia and other countries which have not ratified the protocol” to do so.

The approval followed fierce debates among Russian officials. Opponents, led by Mr. Putin's economic adviser Andrei Illarionov, warned that it would frustrate the nation's economic growth. Kyoto backers, however, rejected the assertion, saying that even after a five-year recovery, the post-Soviet economic meltdown has left emissions 30 per cent below the baseline.

Russian officials have voiced hope that the treaty's provisions allowing countries to trade greenhouse-gas emission allowances would enable Moscow to attract foreign investment for its crumbling industries.

Under the treaty, Russia can sell unused emissions credits to countries that have exceeded their limits.

Once the deal takes effect, industrialized countries will have until 2012 to cut their collective emissions of six key greenhouse gases to 5.2 per cent below the 1990 level. Greenhouse gases are believed to trap heat in the atmosphere, warming the Earth and changing the climate.

The next round of international climate talks is scheduled for next month in Buenos Aires, and negotiations on curbing emissions after 2012 are due to start next year.

Russia's parliament has said that Moscow's decision on post-2012 emission cuts would be contingent on the outcome of those talks.

