

The Moscow Times.com

Opinion / Co

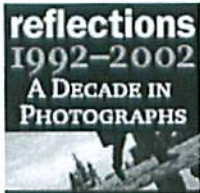
Front Page
Current Issue
News
Business
Stock Market
Opinion
Metropolis
Travel Guide
News Summary

Subscribe
Archive Search
PDF Edition
Press Review

Advertising
Jobs & Career
Conferences
Classifieds
Reprints
About/Contacts

Search Site

GO!



ВЕДОМОСТИ.
Деловая газета.



Thursday, Sep. 18, 2003. Page 8

Get Rid of Visas

By Deborah Anne Palmieri

The problem of getting visas for Russians traveling to the United States just seems to be getting worse. Certainly the number of cases of delays and denials, coming across my desk, experienced by our membership supports that contention.

Russian Ambassador to the United States Yury Ushakov accented the depth of diplomatic concerns about the restrictions in an August comment for The Washington Post. The Moscow Times raised awareness through timely coverage of visa nightmares over the summer. New Counsel General James Pettit has addressed embassy concerns to keep the visa processing system humming along, given constraints and the necessity to meet enhanced national security requirements.

But no resolution is in sight without a fundamental overhauling of the system. An already cumbersome process was made even stricter in August, requiring a personal interview and more paperwork hurdles. On each side of the issue (those who want to restrict and those who want to get in) there are legitimate requirements and interests. On the one hand, business needs the free flow of people, goods and services across national boundaries to thrive. On the other hand, governments, post-Sept. 11, 2001, must take measures to defend against the terror threat and control illegal immigration.

The sensible long-term solution to visa woes is that, ultimately, the visa system must be phased out and eliminated on both sides. Our travel relations with Russia must be normalized. The visa system is a carryover from the Cold War for both countries. We don't need a visa to go to Britain, France or Germany. Why do we need one to go to Russia now? Americans face a mountain of discouraging, cumbersome and often contradictory paperwork and bureaucracy when they want to visit Russia. Conversely, does it still make sense to require that Russians get a visa to come here?

Serious analysis of the fundamental purpose of visas must be evaluated in the context of our new relationship with Russia -- one strengthened in recent years by dialogue and cooperative initiatives between the administrations of Presidents Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush. The present visa regime is cumbersome and unnecessary for both Americans and Russians. Americans need to treat Russia like any European country, with passport travel and easy travel access. And Russians need to make it easier to travel to Russia.

It won't happen any time soon, but the reciprocal elimination of the visa requirement by the United States and Russia needs to be the ultimate goal, if we want to look ahead to what will really open up business and trade.

Meanwhile, a special "fast-track" commercial processing system is required to expedite business travel between the two countries. Special cooperation is needed to define and implement such a fast-track system. We must be able to move business travelers smoothly between both countries to minimize the negative and punitive effects of the current restrictive policies to the business community.

If we can't travel, we can't trade, and dollars are lost to unnecessary bureaucracy. It's a major trade barrier at this time. Also, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow is seriously understaffed to handle the volume of visa applications it receives, and so requires a

To Our Readers

Has something you've read here startled you? Are you angry, excited, puzzled or pleased? Do you have ideas to improve our coverage?

Then please write to us.

All we ask is that you include your full name, the name of the city from which you are writing and a contact telephone number in case we need to get in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

[Email the Opinion Page Editor](#)

H

- Central El approves I (RBC)
- Dollar rate (RBC)
- Law on at insurance (RBC)
- Delays in may cost I (RBC)
- Federation Petersburg (RBC)



On Se Co

F
TheMoscow serv
Ar
P
P
Print
Pass
Use

10 YEA
THI

A series o
the 10th
Aug

greater budget allocation and a better appreciation in Washington of its requirements and staffing needs.

The effects of visa barriers to optimal business relations should be a top agenda item at the upcoming Bush-Putin summit. Some of the examples on both sides of visa bureaucracy are horror stories. Removing unnecessary obstacles for legitimate people conducting legitimate business, education and recreational pursuits is essential to the future of positive and productive U.S.-Russian relations.

Deborah Anne Palmieri is president and CEO of The Russian American Chamber of Commerce, headquartered in Denver, Colorado. She contributed this comment to The Moscow Times.

Related Articles

Defending the U.S. Visa Regime (Aug. 26, 2003) *Archive Access Required*

U.S. Visa Mess Dashes Summer Dreams (Aug. 15, 2003) *Archive Access Required*

Space Agency Complains About Wait for U.S. Visas (Jul. 28, 2003) *Archive Access Required*

Foreign Ministry Complains About New U.S. Visa Rules (Jul. 23, 2003) *Archive Access Required*

Fewer Students Go to U.S. This Year (Jul. 14, 2003) *Archive Access Required*

Back	Email it	Next	Print	Top	Email Us
----------------------	--------------------------	----------------------	-----------------------	---------------------	--------------------------

© Copyright 2002, The Moscow Times. All Rights Reserved.
Visit our reprint rights page here.
Request reprint rights for this article.