The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

2 Jailed in Russian Marriage Scam

July 28, 2010



COLUMBUS, Ohio — Men from Estonia and Uzbekistan were sentenced to prison on Wednesday for participating in a fraud ring that charged a $17,000 fee to arrange sham marriages for Russian and other East European nationals seeking permanent residence in the United States.

The brides typically were young, poor women desperate for cash.

Dmitry Pani, who is from Estonia, and fellow ringleader Hasan Salohutdinov, who is from Uzbekistan, were the first to be sentenced. Seven co-defendants were to be sentenced on federal fraud charges later in the day.

While prosecutors documented 11 fake marriages, they say Pani may have perpetrated substantially more.

In all, 11 people were indicted and pleaded guilty to arranging fraudulent marriages to evade immigration laws. Two were sentenced earlier.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials say more than 800 people nationally

have been convicted in similar marriage fraud schemes since 2006.

Pani started a scheme in 2007 by recruiting Russians who were looking to stay in the country permanently, Dan Brown, an assistant U.S. attorney, said in a court filing.

Pani would arrange marriages at a Columbus wedding chapel — ceremonies from $60 to $275, photos extra — and advise the women who agreed to participate on how to file immigration papers on behalf of their new husbands, the filing said.

U.S. District Court Judge Algenon Marbley sentenced Pani to a year in prison with deportation to follow.

Salohutdinov joined Pani after the scheme was under way and helped recruit other Uzbeks to participate, Brown said in a court filing. He was sentenced to 15 months in prison.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/07/28/2-jailed-in-russian-marriage-scam-a221