

Tougher Visa Rules Foisted on Germans

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Moscow has introduced new visa requirements for German citizens in what smacks of punishment for Berlin's opposition to eased travel rules between Europe and Russia.

The rules came into force on Nov. 1, coinciding with a visit by German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle to Moscow.

A German Foreign Ministry source said Sunday that Westerwelle's delegation was surprised by the new rules, which had not been announced previously. "It came as a bit of a slap in the face," the source said, requesting anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

The new regulations stipulate that visa applicants need to provide a guarantee of their willingness to return to their country of origin.

Tourists have to produce an income or bank statement, while business travelers need to show documentation about their position, salary and purpose of travel, the Russian Consulate in Berlin said on its [web site](#).

By way of explanation, the consulate said only that the rules were introduced "because of the

principle of reciprocity."

Germany, which has some of the most stringent visa rules among the 25 Schengen countries, has long required similar scrutiny from Russians, arguing that it is necessary to keep out illegal immigrants.

Moscow has been championing visa-free travel with the European Union since Spain launched an initiative to scrap visas in January. But other EU member states say Russia should not get any favors before visa-free travel has been achieved with other post-Soviet states like Ukraine and Georgia.

This position has been strongly supported by Berlin, and Chancellor Angela Merkel said this fall that "there's yet a long way to go" for a visa-free regime with Moscow.

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