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Lavrov Backed Efforts to Get Deripaska a U.S. Visa

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has asked U.S. lobbying firm Endeavor Group to help billionaire Oleg Deripaska obtain an American visa.

The U.S. Department of Justice has published on its web site a letter dated Sept. 15 from Lavrov to Adam Waldman, the managing partner of Endeavor Group. U.S. law requires companies and individuals hired by foreign clients to represent their interests before government agencies to report on their activities.

In the letter, Lavrov expressed full support for the company's efforts to get a multi-entry visa for Deripaska. The minister refers to Deripaska as "an outstanding business leader who creates jobs for hundreds of thousands of people in Russia and the world and is an engine of the Russian and world economies."

A Justice Department report for the first half of 2009 states that Deripaska paid Endeavor

Group $212,694 for consulting services about resolving the visa issue.

"We are indeed working with Endeavor Group. They advise us on a number of matters — including visa issues," a spokesman for Deripaska told Vedomosti. The businessman has no specific travel to the United States planned in the near future, the spokesman said.

The Russian Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the letter.

United Company RusAl said in its initial public offering prospectus that Deripaska, the company's CEO and largest shareholder, was denied entry to the United States in 1998. No reasons were given.

Last year, Deripaska received a short-term visa to visit General Motors factories. According to The Wall Street Journal, the visa problems are related to suspicions by U.S. authorities that Deripaska has links to organized crime.

In an interview with French newspaper Le Monde in May 2008, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin expressed indignation that the U.S. State Department was denying Deripaska entry.

"He's neither my friend nor my relative. He is a representative of Russian big business. He has commercial activities — a multibillion-dollar global business. Why is his travel restricted?" Putin said in the interview.

Deripaska previously tried to resolve his visa problems with the help of law firm Alston & Bird, which in 2003 was paid $300,000, the Journal reported.

The Foreign Ministry generally helps solve visa problems for famous people, said Alexei Mitrofanov, former chairman of the State Duma's Geopolitics Committee. Mitrofanov said that in early October 1993, when there was an ongoing confrontation between the parliament and the president, a delegation from the Liberal Democratic Party was not allowed into Germany to attend a congress of the German right. The situation was resolved by a call from then-Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev to the German ambassador, he said.

The Foreign Ministry also interceded on behalf of Duma Deputy Iosif Kobzon, who had problems getting a U.S. visa, Mitrofanov said.

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