

Visas for Skilled Workers Simplified

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December 01, 2010

The  Moscow Times

Federal Migration Service Director Konstantin Romodanovsky said Wednesday that the number of highly qualified foreign specialists who have received documentation to work in Russia since the introduction of eased restrictions in July has reached 2,610.

Under legislation that took force on July 1, employers can apply for visas for highly qualified foreign specialists — defined as those who earn more than 2 million rubles (\$63,500) per year — under a preferential work permit and work visa regime.

“We receive almost 50 applications for this type of migrant every day,” Romodanovsky said.

Romodanovsky said the types of firms using the new law varied widely, but singled out French companies and banking institutions as particularly active.

The 2 million ruble salary threshold only exists “for the time being,” Romodanovsky said.

He said his department is looking to differentiate further: both to widen the category of

foreign specialists that the new law encompasses and increase the preferential nature of their immigration status.

“We are moving in a direction where we can widen the circle of possible participants — companies working in Russia — to attract intelligent, talented and willing people,” he said.

The Federal Migration Service’s role is to check that the applications meet the requirements. Romodanovsky encouraged employers to take advantage of the new system. “The rest is in your hands,” he said.

Russia has traditionally fared poorly in comparison with the visa regimes for skilled workers of other emerging markets, which companies frequently cite as an obstacle to investment and expansion.

About 20,000 foreign specialists arrive annually, Romodanovsky said, but as part of the modernization drive, the migration service foresees a need for up to 46,000.

Romodanovsky also touched on discussions with the European Union concerning a mutual relaxation of visa conditions — an issue that has been repeatedly raised by President Dmitry Medvedev and, more recently, by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on a visit to Germany last month.

“It is not a simple relationship,” Romodanovsky said, bemoaning the fact that while Russia was prepared for a “more intimate” interaction, little apart from reassurances were forthcoming from the EU. An announcement, however, of some positive steps forward could be expected before the end of the year, he said.

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