

Duma Rushes to Ease Rules for Foreigners

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Foreigners coming to Russia for short visits might soon no longer be required to register with authorities.

Legislation currently being debated in the State Duma says they only have to register when they stay longer than seven working days.

The amendment, due to be heard in a second reading Friday, would also abolish a new rule under which foreigners must register under their home address, according a draft [published](#) on the Duma web site.

"I am cautiously optimistic that we will have solved this problem by the end of this month," said Frank Schauff, CEO of the Association of European Businesses.

That rule, which came into force Feb. 15, led to complaints from foreign businesses because it

would oblige private landlords to register foreign tenants every time they return from trips abroad.

Under the proposed legislative change, rules would revert to the previous status quo, where foreigners are registered under their employers' addresses.

The law was initiated by Vladimir Pligin, a senior Duma deputy from United Russia, after a Feb. 17 meeting with foreign business associations at the Economic Development Ministry.

Duma deputies passed the amendment in a first reading on Feb. 25, and experts said Thursday that it could become law within weeks.

"Considering how quickly they did this, I expect the changes to become law very soon," said Valery Fedoreyev, a labor law expert at Baker & McKenzie's Moscow office.

Even with the new bill, foreigners will have to register every time they return from abroad because they will be de-registered automatically by the Federal Border Service, Fedoreyev said.

The obligation to inform authorities of a foreigner's whereabouts has troubled businesspeople and tourists for years. The European Union demands that the registration requirements be dropped if Russians are to secure visa-free travel to Europe.

In another sign that the government is trying to be conciliatory, the amendment's latest version says that the changes will be effective retroactively to Feb. 15.

"This means that violations under the current systems will hardly lead to fines," said Vladimir Kobzev, chief lawyer for the Russo-German Chamber of Commerce.

Kobzev added that he hoped another big headache, tariffs on expatriates' household goods, would soon be abolished.

Chamber director Michael Harms has sent a letter to First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov complaining that the tariffs have not been abolished despite repeated promises from the government.

The 4 euro (\$5) duty on every kilogram of household items, introduced last summer, regularly leads to bills running into the tens of thousands of dollars, greatly increasing the cost of moving to Russia.

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