

EU Is Expected to Ease Visas

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BRUSSELS — The European Union is expected to agree this week to visa-free travel between Kaliningrad and its EU neighbors, and on steps toward offering this to the rest of Russia, diplomats said.

The visa deals are being prepared in time for Thursday's EU-Russia summit in Brussels, said Vladimir Chizhov, Russia's ambassador to the EU. EU officials, too, said they expected the agreements.

"That green light seems to be forthcoming at a very late hour before the summit," Chizhov said of the Kaliningrad pact. "Together with Poland, we appealed to the European Commission to extend that zone to be able to cover the whole of the Kaliningrad region, which is about 100 kilometers wide."

Kaliningrad already has a special arrangement that allows some Kaliningrad residents living within 30 kilometers of the border to travel into these EU countries without visas. Under the new accord, this would apply to all residents.

"It's expected that the summit will approve and launch the implementation of the common

steps,” an EU official said. “It’s basically a roadmap on things that need to happen” for the EU to agree visa-free travel with Russia.

On Kaliningrad, the European Commission and the European Parliament are in favor of amending an EU law which makes the region and certain Polish districts officially a single “border zone.” That status will ease cross-border travel by people living within the zone. The European Council, which represents member state governments, is expected to approve the plan this week, an EU diplomat said.

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