

Putin Signs Pact to Ease Visa Rules With U.S.

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin's signature formalizes the Russian-U.S. agreement simplifying visa procedures.

President Vladimir Putin has signed a landmark visa agreement with the United States, the Kremlin said Monday, allowing the long-delayed reform to come into force in September.

The Kremlin did not say when Putin had signed the agreement, but according to a scan on the official pravo.gov.ru portal, the document was dated July 28 — last Saturday.

To become law, the document needs to be published in the government newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta, which is usually a formality.

But the new rules will come into force only 30 days after a final diplomatic exchange of notes takes place between officials from both countries.

Reached by telephone Monday, a U.S. Embassy spokeswoman said the agreement should be implemented by mid-September.

The agreement was originally supposed to enter into force last year, but it was ratified by the State Duma and Federation Council only this month after being held up by government bureaucracy. Under U.S. law, no ratification is required.

The new rules make three-year multiple-entry visas allowing a maximum stay of six months the norm for both tourists and business travelers, provided their applications are approved.

The new rules will be felt by Americans more than by Russians because U.S. consulates already give two-year visas to many successful applicants. However, first-time applicants will still be asked to appear for personal interviews, a practice not required by the Russian side.

The rejection rate for Russian applicants is roughly 10 percent, according to State Department figures.

The agreement also scraps the requirement of a written invitation from a host-country citizen or organization, something that has not been required by the U.S.

In a statement late Monday, the U.S. Embassy welcomed Putin's signing of the agreement, saying that it would strengthen ties between both countries in the biggest segments of tourism and business.

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