

New Visa Rules for Airline Crews Take Effect

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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European airlines have criticized new visa rules for aircrews that took effect Thursday, but there were no reports of canceled or delayed flights because crew members had no visas.

Moscow slapped visa requirements on European airline staff following a spat over negotiations for a visa facilitation agreement with the European Union. The Foreign Ministry has also introduced a new process for obtaining them.

Because many EU member states have bilateral agreements with Russia on crew visas, the dispute affects only a group of at least 11 countries that have no such agreements, according to EU officials.

A representative of Portuguese carrier TAP Portugal said Thursday that the company has so far failed to get visas under the new rules, which require airlines to send applications to the Transportation Ministry instead of the Federal Air Transportation Agency.

"Nobody has instructions on how to apply the new rules," said Valery Yepifanov, sales manager in Russia for TAP.

He added that TAP crew members currently have visas, because the carrier has needed visas since it started operations in the country in 2009. "But the situation might become difficult soon," he said, explaining that new visas were required for rotating crew members.

Representatives of Czech, Finnish, Belgian and Latvian carriers said their crews have been equipped with visas under the new rules.

It was unclear Thursday what Alitalia would do. A representative of the Italian carrier had said at a Foreign Ministry briefing Tuesday that the company had failed to get visas so far. Alitalia spokespeople could not be reached for comment on Thursday, a national holiday in Italy.

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