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Scientists Target Visa and Customs Headaches

By The Moscow Times

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A new group of U.S. and Russian scientists is seeking to ease burdens on cooperation such as visa headaches and customs procedures, Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov said Thursday.

"One of the main objectives of the subgroup is to remove barriers — to eliminate the problems and obstacles that we have — so that we can ensure the availability of scientific resources for scientists from the two countries," Livanov said at the fourth meeting of the U.S.-Russian bilateral presidential commission working group on science and technology cooperation in Moscow.

The U.S. delegation to the meeting was led by John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Livanov deplored the bureaucratic formalities that hinder scientific cooperation between U.S.

and Russian scientists and said he hoped that the new subgroup would find ways to cut the red tape.

"Scientists should run up against fewer bureaucratic barriers," he said, Interfax reported.

Holdren's visit comes amid stresses in U.S.-Russian relations related to the passage in the U.S. of the Magnitsky Act, which allows punishment of Russians implicated in human rights violations, and a Russian ban on U.S. adoptions of Russian orphans, a measure passed in response to the Magnitsky Act.

The new bilateral subgroup, led by Jonathan Margolis, acting U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for science, technology and health, will work to remove customs duties and taxes, identify mechanisms to facilitate coordinated research, and discuss ways the U.S. and Russia can work together to promote research integrity, the U.S. State Department said in a statement.

The subgroup held its first meeting via video conference on Wednesday, Livanov said.

The Russian minister also praised current scientific cooperation between the two countries, saying scientists are working together on about 40 projects. He said his ministry had invested 240 million rubles ($7.5 million) into 16 joint projects, while the U.S. side had contributed a similar amount.

The U.S.-Russian agreement on cooperation in science and technology, which started in 2009, ends in 2015, and Livanov invited the Americans at Thursday's meeting to start talks on prolonging it.

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