The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Tajik Embassy Decries 'Atmosphere of Intolerance' in Russia

By Alexander Winning

April 29, 2013



The Tajik embassy in Moscow has set up a support group to protect its citizens from harassment on entering and exiting Russia, citing an "atmosphere of intolerance" whipped up by Russian media and nationalist politicians.

Tajik Ambassador Abdulmadzhid Dostiyev said in a statement over the weekend that the embassy would regularly send staff to Moscow's Domodedovo and Vnukovo airports and the Kazansky Station to monitor checks on Tajik nationals as they arrive and depart from the capital.

The statement said that passengers traveling from Moscow to Dushanbe by train are subject to "unjustifiably rough searches" and that Tajik citizens arriving at Domodedovo and Vnukovo are specially targeted by swindlers peddling fake registration documents.

"There is an urgent need for such a support group, since not only Russian tabloids but also

certain state-run TV channels are creating an atmosphere of hatred and intolerance toward Tajik citizens," Dostiyev said, adding that a cohort of "interested individuals" is deliberately exacerbating relations between Tajikistan and Russia.

Chauvinistic attitudes are compounded by nationalist politicians including Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the ambassador said, implying that the veteran Liberal Democratic Party leader was "short-sighted" and "unwell."

Tajikistan, a land-locked, energy-dependent country of less than 8 million people, is the poorest of the 15 former Soviet states, and almost half of its GDP is earned by migrant laborers supporting their families by wire transfers.

According to official estimates, roughly 700,000 Tajik citizens work in Russia, although activists put the real figure at closer to 2 million. The bulk of Tajik nationals living in Russia work in the construction industry or low-skilled service sector.

Karomat Sharipov, head of the Moscow-based Foundation Supporting Tajik Migrants in Russia, welcomed the embassy's decision to monitor Moscow's transportation hubs but noted that Tajik migrants have been abused across Russia for years.

"The level of abuse has not increased markedly in recent months," he said.

Sharipov, who has lived in Russia for nearly two decades, said the Tajik community comes under pressure because Tajikistan is not viewed as a sovereign state.

"For Russia, Tajikistan is a pool of cheap labor, and for this reason alone they don't shut the border," he said. "Who would work on local building sites?"

Among the most common complaints heard by his foundation, Sharipov cited police brutality, illegal arrests and efforts to restrict lawyers' access to detained prisoners. Other complaints include difficulties transporting the bodies of dead relatives to Tajikistan for funerals and problems faced by relatives back home.

Alexander Verkhovsky, director of the Sova think tank, which tracks extremism and xenophobia, agreed that Tajiks are subject to discrimination locally but said the majority of Russians find it hard to distinguish between Central Asians.

"Central Asian migrants are portrayed in Russian media as semi-literate and incapable of working anywhere other than a building site, and this affects people's mentality," Verkhovsky said, calling on authorities to redouble efforts to help migrants from former Soviet states integrate into Russian society.

President Vladimir Putin has called for "the successful integration" of migrants, and late last year lawmakers introduced mandatory Russian-language tests for migrants working in certain spheres, including housing maintenance, utilities and retail.

But Verkhovsky suggested the government should do more to combat negative attitudes toward migrants, instead of imposing language-learning courses on them.

"At present, the most marginalized Central Asians come to Russia, and they can't hope

to compete for the most prestigious jobs. By working in low-paid sectors, they reinforce the stereotype," he said. "It's a vicious circle."

Contact the author at a.winning@imedia.ru

Related articles:

- Laboring in Sochi No Slice of Heaven
- State Firm to Target Central Asia
- Tajik Opposition Leader Beaten as Election Looms

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/04/29/tajik-embassy-decries-atmosphere-of-intolerance-in-russia-a23717