

Russia Wants Visa-Free Travel With EU From 2014

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russia wants to begin drafting a deal on visa-free travel with the EU early next year, a senior Russian diplomat said Thursday.

That deal, however, requires the EU to make a "political decision to begin negotiations on drafting the agreement," Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Meshkov said.

The deal is to be limited to short-term travel, he said, adding that Russia urged Brussels to begin work on the draft following a Russia-EU summit in December.

Russia has been pushing for easing of travel regulations with the European Union for years, but the deal has been repeatedly postponed. Moscow blamed unspecified "skeptics" in the bloc for stalling the process.

"We await a positive signal from the EU," Meshkov said. He gave no timeframe for the deal's

possible signing.

Moscow is also hoping for a reorientation in the operations of another European body, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), whose Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is tasked with monitoring elections in the 57 member states, Meshkov said.

The ODIHR currently focuses on elections in states "east of Vienna," Meshkov said, but Russia wants it to pay as much attention to polling in western Europe as in the territories to the east.

The watchdog has repeatedly criticized elections in Russia and the former Soviet republics, including the presidential elections in Russia in 2012 and in Azerbaijan last week.

The OSCE is currently working to revise its strategic objectives, but Russia "has no excessive expectations" about the process, given the internal tensions between the bloc members, Meshkov also said.

The organization includes Western European countries, the United States, Canada, the former Communist states of Eastern Europe and most former Soviet republics.

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