

Westerners in Crimea Don't Need Russian Visas for Now

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Russia's Consulate General in the Crimean regional capital of Simferopol.

Western journalists reporting from Crimea and Sevastopol may have to apply for Russian visas starting Thursday, when the State Duma is expected to ratify the treaty on Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian territories. But for now, foreigners are allowed to be in the region without a visa, Russian authorities said.

By Russian law, foreigners from most nations outside the former Soviet Union, including European Union member countries and the U.S., have to obtain visas to work in Russia by applying to a Russian consulate abroad. It remained unclear as of Wednesday when and how Western citizens based in Crimea and Sevastopol would have to apply for Russian visas.

A spokesman at Russia's Consulate General in the Crimean regional capital of Simferopol said that the consulate was no longer dealing with visas for foreigners and that they would have to apply to Russia's Federal Migration Service.

But for a transition period, which will last an undetermined length of time, foreigners can stay in Crimea and Sevastopol without a Russian visa, the consulate spokesman said.

A spokesman at the Foreign Ministry redirected an inquiry from The Moscow Times to the Federal Migration Service, where another spokesman said the agency's employees were so far unaware of what the procedure would be.

President Vladimir Putin signed the treaty on the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia after almost 97 percent of local residents voted in favor of it in a referendum on Sunday. Western countries did not recognize the vote, calling it illegitimate.

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