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U.S. Embassy in Moscow Announces Closure of FLEX Student Exchange Program

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John Tefft

Russia has chosen to end a popular exchange program that has brought thousands of Russian students to America, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow said in a statement released Tuesday.

"We deeply regret this decision by the Russian government to end a program that for 21 years has built deep and strong connections between the people of Russia and the United States," the newly appointed ambassador to Moscow, John Tefft, said in the statement.

FLEX, which stands for "Future Leaders Exchange," has sent more than 8,000 Russian high school students to the United States in an effort to foster ties between the ex-Cold War foes.

The program aims to introduce new generations of Russians to American culture and values.

FLEX students would spend an academic year living with American families and attending local high schools. The selection process was tough, with many candidates repeatedly

applying to gain entry into the coveted program.

The program was administered by the U.S. Department of State and established in 1992 by the Freedom Support Act.

Many prominent Russians have participated in the program, including Margarita Simonyan, current editor-in-chief of Russia's state-run international broadcaster RT, according to a publication released by the Eurasia FLEX alumni program.

Russian government officials have not yet publicly announced or commented on the program's closure.

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