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U.S. Citizens Targeted in Russian Visa Clampdown

By Ed Crowther

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An increasing number of Americans are facing visa problems or deportation from Russia due to worsening political ties, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Twenty-five U.S. citizens had their residence permits annulled in the first half of 2016, compared to just two in 2014.

Many of those deported claim that they have not been given the chance to fight against allegations made against them, or that the charges were unsubstantiated.

American Wyatt Gerard Ford launched a complaint against Russia at the European Court of Human Rights after being deported from Russia in May for violating the terms of his visa.

Ford was accused of violating migration law by staying at his future wife's apartment whilst registered at a different address, and by teaching English unofficially part-time without notifying the migration service.

“The decline in relations has definitely had an effect on the lives of Americans in Russia,” said Mikhail Troitsky, senior lecturer at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

“What is happening is definitely linked to the political climate.”

Despite ongoing political tensions, Americans are more willing than ever to visit Russia. While the number of Americans visiting the country on business has dipped, the number of American tourists is on the way up: from 170,000 in 2011 to over 213,000 in the first nine months of 2015.

Yet even for those with only a short stay in mind, visa regulations cause difficulties.

“U.S. citizens with valid visas have been refused entry to Russia on several occasions whilst others have had their visas annulled before leaving the United States,” a U.S. embassy source said.

Russia's Interior Ministry denies the accusations, saying that the sharp rise in residence permit cancellations was due to foreign citizens staying in the country past their permit’s expiry date. Russia’s Foreign Ministry also maintains that claims that Americans are being targeted by authorities are “anti-Russian hysteria created in Washington.”

Several unnamed Russian diplomats told Kommersant that the increasing pressure on Americans in Russia is designed to counter “the appalling arbitrary justice handed out by Washington,” calling the accusations of U.S. diplomats “just another attempt to demonize Russia.”

Diplomats cited the arrest of Russian businessman Dmitry Ukrainsky on the request of the FBI in Thailand in July as an example of U.S. aggression.

“The American authorities continue the unacceptable practice of “hunting” for Russians all over the world, ignoring the norms of international laws, and twisting the arms of other states,” Russia’s Foreign Ministry said following his detention.

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