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Russian Foreign Ministry Blasts U.S. Over Visas Even As Services Resume

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Sergey Bobylev / TASS

The Russian Foreign Ministry has denounced the United States for continuing to limit the number of visas issued to Russian citizens, even as it welcomed Monday's decision to resume services at U.S. consulates.

The two countries have been involved in numerous diplomatic spats since December 2016, when former U.S. President Barack Obama ordered the expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats following allegations of Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

Russia responded in July 2017 by demanding major reductions of American diplomatic staff in the country, leading to cuts in visa services provided at U.S. consulates.

On Monday, the U.S. Embassy announced that visa processing would resume in consulates in St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Vladivostok starting on December 11.

Related article: U.S. To Resume Limited Visa Services in Russia Next Week

In a commentary published on its website Tuesday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the U.S. decision to resume services "was a step in the right direction," while criticizing that "visa services will continue to be limited."

It called the decision "a deliberate move by Washington to inconvenience Russians, thus hoping to provoke social discontent."

Crews of Aeroflot planes were reportedly being denied visas, which violated bilateral agreements on air transportation, said the Foreign Ministry. Athletes were also unable to get to competitions in the U.S., which the Foreign Ministry characterized as "discrimination."

While recognizing the prerogative of countries to issues visas, the Foreign Ministry said that U.S. diplomats were "creating obstacles to Russians' travel, as if they were afraid to allow truthful information about Russia to spread to America and wanted to block their citizens from it while isolating themselves from us."

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