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U.S. Doubles 3-Year Visa Fees for Russians in 'Reciprocal' Move

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Anton Novoderzhkin / TASS

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow has announced higher fees for Russians seeking multiple-entry three-year visas in 2019 as relations between the two countries continue to deteriorate over election interference allegations.

Russians seeking U.S. visas have faced waiting times of up to 300 days this year following the mutual expulsions of diplomats between the two countries on the back of U.S. allegations that Moscow meddled in its presidential election in 2016. Single-entry U.S. business and tourist visas valid for up to one year currently cost $160 to process. In October, a State Department official suggested that visa processing times for Russians could soon be reduced, estimating that 200,000 U.S. visas would be handed out in the country in 2019.

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The U.S. Embassy in Moscow said in an update on its website Thursday that applicants seeking a multiple-entry visa valid for up to three years will now have to pay an additional "reciprocity" fee of $143.

The embassy said that the fee, which will nearly double three-year visa costs to $303 as of Jan. 1, 2019, "mirrors" the fee that Russia charges U.S. citizens for a similar type of visa.

New rules will also make it mandatory for Russian nationals to appear at a U.S. embassy or consulate for interviews to renew the three-year multiple-entry visas. The embassy notes: "If your interview is waived, you will automatically receive a single-entry visa valid for up to one year."

The $303 fee is based on the State Department's review that found "discrepancies" between the Russian and U.S. visa regimes, the embassy explained.

"Given that the Russian Federation was unable to change its visa regime, the United States is required by law to reduce the validity of B-1/B-2 visitor visas and/or increase fees to match the Russian Federation's practices," it said.

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