The Moscow Times
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U.S. Embassy to Cut Staff, Most Visas for Russians as Moscow Bans 'Unfriendly' Hiring

April 30, 2021



Starting May 12, the U.S. Embassy in Moscow will only offer emergency U.S. citizen services and emergency immigrant visas. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

The U.S. Embassy in Moscow said Friday it will cut most visa services for Russians and eliminate non-emergency consular services for Americans from next month following Moscow's hiring ban on "unfriendly" countries.

The move means 75% of consular staff will lose their jobs.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last week capped the number of Russians allowed to work in "unfriendly" countries' embassies, or banning their employment entirely. Russia's Foreign Ministry has indicated that the United States, which was involved in tit-for-tat diplomatic expulsions as recently as this month, is at the top of the "unfriendly" list.

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“Effective May 12, U.S. Embassy Moscow will reduce consular services offered to include only emergency U.S. citizen services” and emergency immigrant visas, the embassy said in a statement.

“Embassy Moscow will not offer routine notarial services, Consular Reports of Birth Abroad, or renewal passport services for the foreseeable future,” it specified.

“Non-immigrant visa processing for non-diplomatic travel will cease.”

The mission urged U.S. citizens with expiring visas to leave the country by June 15 or start the needed paperwork at the Russian Interior Ministry to remain there legally.

Coming amid a flurry of diplomatic expulsions over accusations of election interference and Russian involvement in deadly explosions, Putin’s decree signed last Friday orders the government to draw up a list of “unfriendly” states subject to the restrictions. Russian state media leaked a draft list of the “unfriendly” countries throughout the week.

“We regret that the actions of the Russian government have forced us to reduce our consular work force by 75%, and will endeavor to offer to U.S. citizens as many services as possible,” the Embassy said.

Its announcement comes a month after Moscow became the only working U.S. diplomatic mission in Russia as the U.S. slashed operations at its consulates in Russia’s fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg and the Far Eastern port of Vladivostok.

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