

Eurasian Political Studies Network

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The freedom of movement in forms of travel, studies and meetings with friends and relatives in other countries with no doubt makes life of a personality more harmonic and interesting, the realization of this basic right also makes an individual more adaptive to the very fast changes in the social and economic spheres, it is especially true for people lived for many years behind the “iron curtain”.

In contemporary wider Europe, such basic right as a freedom of movement cannot be realized in a full scale until there is a visa regime for the biggest European country, for the Russian Federation. Modern visa regimes for border crossing appeared in Europe only in the XX century (for example in the XIX century, Russians did need just foreign passport to cross the European borders), they were originated from two bloody world wars and from the cold war, which separated our continent into two camps. With the disappearance of the “iron curtain”, the visa regimes in Europe for Europeans could be seen as an anachronism.

Nowadays the citizens of more than 50 countries can cross the border the EU Schengen states with no visa and stay up to 90 days during 180 days. Among these countries are Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador. Common Russians are glad that the citizens of these countries can go to the EU states with no visa. But they ask a legitimate question why we cannot do the same.

Per capita GDP in Russia is higher than in the majority of the countries benefited from the non-visa regime with the Schengen zone and even higher than in 6 EU states. At present there is no any significant number of the illegal immigrants in Europe from Russia. On contrary, Russia do expect bigger inflow of

the guest workers from some EU states if one day non-visa regime of the border crossing with the Schengen zone is introduced.

Sorry, but the situation with the Schengen visa issuing looks a bit ridiculous for the citizens of the Russian Federation. We are happy of course that this regime is soft for us. The rejections to issue the Schengen visa for Russian citizens last year was just about 1%. In the majority of the Schengen zone states the rejections were even less than 1%. In this regard Russians consider the Schengen visa as a some kind of tax or entrance fee. Russia is a huge country, there are many places where there is no any EU consulate or visa center, going to Moscow or other big city where it is possible to get the Schengen visa is a difficult enterprise for many of our citizens. Russians pay for the Schengen visa from 35 to 81 euro (including extra payment for the visa centers service). The EU states are opening a lot of visa centers in Russian big cities, it is a good investment, during one touristic season money goes back. For many states the issuing of the Schengen visa is a good business, some of them receives tens of millions euro per year, just from the visa fees from Russians. We can talk even about the competition between EU states consulates in increasing the number of the issued visas for Russians. Russian people frequently travelling to the EU states have to receive the visa each 6 or 12 months (depends on the country issuing the visa) already during quite a long period of time. They consider it as an unnecessary administrative barrier, which has nothing to do with the security and safety of the EU people.

Dear friends, Russians are generous tourists, in several EU states they are spending per day more than the citizens of any other nation. Let's give Russians a chance to spend their money in the restaurants, hotels and museums of the EU countries not in the consulates.

The negotiations on the abolishing of the visa regime for Russia last for many years since last century. This year the USA consulates in Russian Federation started to issue for the Russian applicants 3 year multiple visas, it is valid for all who receives the US visas in Russia. Even for those who receive the US visa for the first time. It is a very good development. Russia is close to abolish the visa

regime with the USA. Unfortunately, the EU Schengen states still issue single visa for those who did not visit the Schengen zone for last 3 years, at the same time Russians who visited Schengen states during last 3 years usually receive multiple 6 or 12 months visas. It cannot be considered as a normal situation, it is rather some kind of segregation dividing people of one country by two sorts.

In December 1989, Germany made a unilateral decision on the abolition of visas for Poland without any consultations with his EU partners (they should follow the decision of course). The decision was made on the humanitarian basis, it even did not take into account that the average salary in Poland was equal to 40 DEM, 30 times lower than the average salary in Germany at that time. Germany, abolishing visa regime with Poland, stressed the strategic necessity of this step, which could symbolically close the last page of the post war history connected with German-Polish contradictions.

Dear colleagues, it is time to do similar for Russian people, who are living in the European country with a quite a competitive economy. Abolishing the Schengen visa regime for Russia will definitely close the sad page of our history. Common people in Europe need to be closer for the better future.