

Federation Council Speaker Vladimir Shumeiko calmly said on Tuesday that Ilyushenko can serve as acting prosecutor "as long as he wants" until a candidate is approved by the upper house.

"The most important thing for the interests of society is for the [State] Duma and the Federation Council quickly to pass a law on the General Prosecutor's Office, which unfortu-

when the President is likely to act. While Yevgeny Krestyanin, chairman of the commission on regulations and parliamentary procedure, said on Tuesday that he expects a new candidate to be named by the next session in November, his deputy Alexander Titkin said the chances of this happening were no better than "fifty-fifty."

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## WORKING CLASSES

Muscovites of all ages are at work. A McDonald's employee sweeps the area near the Pushkin Square restaurant while a pensioner sits on the bus stop bench and watches cars in the parking lot for a 1,000 roubles a day.

Photo by Vladimir Suvorov/The Moscow Tribune

Moscow Tribune Oct 27

# Problems Persist at US Visa Office

By Richard Lein  
The Moscow Tribune

In this two part series, The Moscow Tribune will examine recent complaints and allegations charging the Consular Section of the United States Embassy in Moscow with rude and unprofessional treatment of its visa applicants. In this, the series' first installment, several specific cases

will be recounted. The second part, to be presented on Oct. 27, will deal with problems US consular officials believe are costing their Embassy its efficiency — and its reputation...

Despite a roasting by the Russian media this summer over alleged rude and unprofessional conduct by consular officials, as well as subsequent complaints, the US Embassy in Moscow continues to maintain that a problem does not exist.

"Rudeness is definitely a problem,"

a former consular employee said, however. "Rudeness towards applicants is almost considered a joke."

"People almost congratulate each other for being rude," the former employee said on condition of anonymity. "They make it into a joke and the whole office laughs at it."

But US Embassy officials fail to acknowledge the problem.

"There has been no change in the attitude of consular officers," countered an American diplomat, adding,

"I think we have been correct and professional the entire way through."

This summer the issue of impolite behavior by American consular officials splashed onto the pages of Moscow papers after a prominent Russian journalist, Evgenia Albats of *Izvestia*, accused a consular official of treating her rudely. Even the Foreign Ministry jumped into the fray after some of its diplomats were denied visas.

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## OIL

Most of the spilled oil has been already collected and a new 52-km-long pipeline will be constructed by December, said Dementyev on Tuesday.

About 200 holes have been found in 40 kilometres of the aging pipes stretched across the oil-damaged area.

But Bugrina said: "There are more oil stains floating in the Moscow River than in the two rivers."

She said that crews have already cleaned 80 per cent of the spilled oil, but have suspended their work until April because of cold weather.

"Authorities ordered every enterprise around there to collect oil..." Viktor Yegorov of the Ukhta-based Komineft company which operates the pipeline, told *The Moscow Tribune*.

"Yes, there were oil leaks but they didn't pollute the rivers much," Nikolai Losev, another official of the local Emergency Ministry department said on Tuesday.

He said that aircraft conduct surveillance flights along the Pechora River and "so far no oil has been spotted."

Although the river was contaminated by the spill, no threat was posed to the local population because no drinking water was drawn from these rivers, Bugrina said.

According to Yegorov, who heads the control and operative information department at the company, 88,000 roubles per each spilled tonne of oil will be paid to compensate for damages done to the environment.

The ill-fated pipeline has been periodically leaking since 1988, but the most disastrous dumping of oil into the grounds of the region occurred during the last few months.

Tsyplenkov said that up to 200,000

tonnes of oil could have spilled from the aging pipeline over the last three months.

The latest of massive leaks occurred in the beginning of this month triggering a Tuesday report in *The New York Times* that the spill was eight times the size of the Exxon Valdez disaster. But the Ministry for the Environment said on Tuesday that the 60,000 tonnes of oil leaked from the pipeline was only twice the size of the Valdez incident.

The Komi republic declared a state of emergency earlier this month after the spilled oil leaked into the two rivers. "This spill must be serious because the Komi authorities declared a state of emergency," Tsyplenkov stated.

The Ukhta-based Komineft denied that any wide-scale ecological disaster was created by the oil leaks.

"This is pure disinformation. These papers are making mountains of mole hills," stated Yegorov.

The central office of the emergency ministry estimated the latest spills, which occurred, according to *The New York Times* on Oct. 1 after an eight-metre high dam built to contain the leaking oil collapsed after heavy rain, as 30,000 tonnes.

However, the Komi department of the ministry stated that no leak has occurred this month.

"No leaks happened in October, these reports are based on old information," Dementyev insisted.

He also said that no huge dam was built along the pipeline.

"There were only a couple of hydrofacilities to bar the contaminated water in the nearby swamp from leaking into the river," he said.

— Marina Mytko contributed to this story.

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## VISAS

Ambassador Thomas Pickering responded to Albats' charges personally in a letter to *Izvestia*, but nowhere in the letter did he acknowledge improper behavior by his consular officials.

Yet as several recent visa applicants charge, such problems within the consular section do exist.

One such case involves the Russian wife of a former Moscow-based British journalist who has recently been assigned to the US.

Told it was a "mere formality" to receive a visa as the spouse of an accredited journalist, she brought copies of her and her husband's documents to the Embassy, which promptly — and, she complains, curtly — denied her a visa.

As the woman told *The Moscow Tribune* the consular official was interested in neither the copy of her husband's visa nor her invitation, rapidly firing off questions and marking notes on the application form before she could answer.

"I didn't ask you a question," she snapped at me when I tried to explain my situation," the journalist's wife recalled.

After her application was rejected, the journalist's wife said she once again attempted to ask questions, explain her situation and even get the consular officer's name. But the official simply laughed at her.

"[The officer] just slammed the metal divider down and yelled into the microphone, 'I told you to get out. Next person,'" she recalled.

The woman eventually received her visa after contacting the consular office later that day, but remained bitter at how she was treated.

"In my point of view [the consular official] was just absolutely unprofessional," said the journalist's wife, who has worked abroad before. "If you are in a bad mood you have no right to show it."

"I think there are some people who can work with papers but not people, or even animals. Animals need to be treated well too."

Consular officials are not cleared to speak directly to the media.

In another case, consular officers initially denied to renew a multiple-entry business visa for Dr. Elena Bourganskaya, who, as the Moscow-based director of a USAID contractor organising international hospital partnerships, was involved in finding medication and arranging for the evacuation of a brutally assaulted eight-year-old St. Petersburg boy only three weeks ago, a case which drew worldwide media attention.

Bourganskaya and her American assistant claim they were treated rudely by consular officers who failed to explain protocol clearly as the two were directed from office to office over a period of three days.

Because of her marriage to an American, Bourganskaya was informed through her assistant that she was required to come for an interview to disprove any intention to emigrate — this despite a dozen past trips to the United States.

"You think she is going over for business but she is really going over

to see her husband," Linda Poteat quoted the consular officer as saying.

"That was really offensive," said Poteat. "I felt insulted and put down even though I wasn't applying for a visa for myself."

On the following day Bourganskaya and Poteat, after being shuffled from one application window to the next, were told to go to an altogether different section the next day.

Officials there told Bourganskaya she needed to return to the first office where she was finally granted the visa without being required to present any additional documentation.

Bourganskaya, Poteat, the journalist's wife and the former employee all emphasised that most of the people they have come into contact with at the Consular section have been very nice and polite; the problem lies in what the former employee called a "few bad apples".

The Embassy cannot comment on specific cases, but the American diplomat said each complaint is investigated. No complaints of rude conduct by a consular officer in the past year have been substantiated or have led to disciplinary action, she reported.

With the number of applicants still growing, US Embassy officials acknowledge they cannot spend lavish amounts of time on each case, but claim that at the base of the problem is not the "attitude" of the American officials, but the "perceptions" and "exceptions" of Russian applicants, which will be explored in the second half of this series.

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# US, Russia Sign Accord

By Elizabeth Owen  
*The Moscow Tribune*

ing a course forward," said Summers, who is in Moscow to conduct a round of talks on economic reforms.

## SOLANGE

THE SEAFOOD RESTAURANT PRESENTS

## WEATHER GUIDE

City	Temperature	Sun	Precipitation
Moscow	+6+8		partly cloudy, rain
Republics			
Almaty	+03+05		partly cloudy, no rain
Baku	+12+14		partly cloudy, no rain