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## Foreign Ministry Complains About New U.S. Visa Rules

The Moscow Times

The Foreign Ministry complained Tuesday that it was not informed about new procedures for U.S. visas that come into force Aug. 1 and said it would demand an explanation from the U.S. State Department.

Washington, however, announced the changes months ago, and many Russian newspapers, including The Moscow Times, have written about them.

The U.S. Embassy officially announced Friday that from Aug. 1 almost all Russians seeking nonimmigrant visas will have to be interviewed by consular officers and that applicants should apply at least six to eight weeks before their departure date, rather than the previous four to six weeks.

The embassy said the changes are being introduced worldwide to raise security after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and are not intended to make it more difficult for legitimate travelers.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said Tuesday that the ministry has received a number of complaints about the extended processing time and the high number of rejections.

The U.S. Embassy says about 25 percent of all applicants are rejected.

Yakovenko said the demand for in-person interviews will be particularly difficult for those who live far from the U.S. consulates in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg and Vladivostok.

"Organizations and enterprises are more frequently having to postpone or change important business visits, not to mention private journeys," he said.

He said the State Department did not consult Moscow about the changes and the Foreign Ministry would demand an explanation.

In particular, he said, an answer would be sought as to how the new measures fit in with declarations by President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President George W. Bush that visa rules would be eased to improve contacts between Russia and the United States.

The new U.S. rules are posted on the U.S. Embassy's web site at

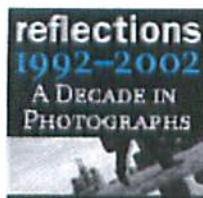
[www.usembassy.ru/consular/wwwthcmpe.html](http://www.usembassy.ru/consular/wwwthcmpe.html).

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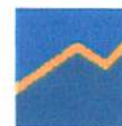


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