

...ne to return to Makhachkala.  
 Early reports said there was a sin-  
 e hijacker, while counter-intelli-  
 gence officials said later two armed  
 en appeared to be aboard the plane,  
 ick had been heading for the south  
 ssian city of Rostov.

(Continued on Page 2)



Photo by David Brauchli/AP

US President Bill Clinton looks on as Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, left, and King Hussein of Jordan, right, shake hands before signing a peace treaty on Wednesday. The treaty brings to an end a 46-year state of war between the two countries.

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# Perceptions Cloud US Visa Process

**By Richard Lein**  
*The Moscow Tribune*

*Second of two parts.*

As an ever-increasing-number of Russians apply for visas to travel to the United States, American Embassy officials here claim a problem of "perception" clouds the application process.

"Most Russians have the misconception that the US visa system is like the Russian," an American diplomat

told *The Moscow Tribune*, "but the invitation is not the key to getting an American visa."

Consular officers are constrained by strict immigration laws which, in response to the American public's paranoia about illegal immigration, Congress drafted to assume every visa applicant intends to immigrate illegally. It is up to the applicant to prove otherwise.

The key to getting a visa is proving an intent to return to Russia, by demonstrating "social" or "economic"

ties to the country. In personal interviews, consular officers ask questions regarding applicants' incomes, property ownership, relatives and so forth in order to establish strong ties and reason to return.

The diplomat charged with investigating complaints of rude behaviour by consular officers said she has "found it really interesting because it is not usually what you think that Russians find offensive."

The diplomat said it is not the manner of questioning by consular

officers that many Russians find impolite, but the questions themselves about their incomes and possessions. Indeed, Evgenia Albats, in her first article in *Izvestia* regarding the consular office, cited such questions as objectionable.

"Applicants have very specific expectations," the diplomat explained, "and when these aren't fulfilled they find the process humiliating."

But others disagree.

(Continued on Page 2)

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## VISA

"The policy is understandable," said the Russian wife of a British journalist working in the US, who was initially refused a visa to join her husband. "I am angry about the way I was treated."

She and others recount tales of how consular officers refused to listen to them, to look at documents, or to answer questions, and slammed windows closed in their faces and yelled at them to leave.

The diplomat disputed accusations of rude or disrespectful behaviour by consular officers.

"We have had language trainers from the US sit in and listen to determine if any of them were rude, but they didn't find anything," the diplomat said.

The *Moscow Tribune* visited the Non-Immigrant Visa Office last week to independently verify claims of disrespectful behaviour, and observed two female consular officers being curt with applicants.

"I said good-bye!" one officer barked at an applicant attempting to ask a question after being refused a visa. "Good-bye!" she repeated firmly.

The loud, often contemptuous voices carried throughout the room audible to all who were waiting their turn.

"You could see it on people's faces," the wife of the British journalist said about people waiting to be interviewed by consular officers. "They were frightened."

An almost palatable sense of apprehension and exasperation hung in the air as those waiting watched applicants be rejected in the space of several minutes and without so much as getting a question answered. In the course of 20 minutes one officer denied 10 applications and approved only one.

With an average of 550 applications a day and a commitment to process visas the same day as documents are submitted, the diplomat admitted that consular officers have only a few minutes to spend with every applicant, but contended that each case could be thoroughly reviewed in that time.

However, a former employee at the consular section feels the crush of applicants and the long hours officers have to work — sometimes up to 12 hours a day in order to process all the visas — affects their demeanour.

"There are so many people and they have a quota to fulfill. I think that is why they are so rude and curt."

The former employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity, suggested that consular officers may use rude behaviour to take control of the interview process and keep them brief. "If you are deroga-

tory, they listen to you more attentively...it puts them in their place."

Consular officers have the added pressure of knowing that cases of people overstaying their visas and immigrating illegally can be tracked back to them. A recent Embassy survey showed about 20 per cent of people granted visas overstay them.

The diplomat said officers are held responsible for them like "bank loan officers who make a lot of bad loans."

On the other hand, the former consular employee reported, there is little fear among workers they will be held accountable for inappropriate behaviour. There have been no specific memos or meetings to impress upon the staff the need to be polite.

The American diplomat told *The Moscow Tribune* that the consular office is attempting to reduce the number of people who wait to be interviewed by consular officers. While half the visas granted are now being submitted by ministries or other organisations and interviews are not usually required, the Embassy hopes to increase this figure to 60 per cent.

"We'd like to spend more time on interviews with people who really need them," the diplomat said.

The consular section recently inaugurated an "express window" where applicants who have a history of legitimate travel to the US or who have relatives in the US and applicants for educational or government sponsored programmes can drop off their applications and the interview is waived. Russian employees of American firms have been able to have their visa applications submitted through the Foreign Commercial Office for some time already.

The Embassy would also like to take steps to rectify the problem of people having to stand and wait in lines outside, but the city and federal governments have been slow to approve the Embassy's request to expand its facilities. So Russians will have to queue in the snow again this winter.

Another problem appears to be the lack of information about the visa process.

"The Evgenia Albats story [in *Izvestia*] has made us realise that most applicants don't understand the procedures," said the diplomat.

The consular section has issued revised information sheets in order to try to correct this information problem, the diplomat reported.

This move seems timely because the former employee said the consular section has not been adequately informing applicants, many of whom come to interviews without knowing what to expect and who are given only "vague" answers to their questions.

"It's kind of a big misunderstanding," the former employee concluded.

# Gorba

By Vladimir Isa  
The Associated

**MOSCOW** — On the elementary vote on confidence government, former Soviet Mikhail Gorbachev issued blasting the current regime of "coups ... social misery

Gorbachev's letter specifically to the no-confidence scheduled by the opposition in the lower house of parliament.

But he joined the chorus accusing President Boris Yeltsin government of "rapaciousness, squandering of public funds, brazen criminal outrages.

"The country is being pushed into the abyss of political coups, into a protracted

(Continued from Page 1)

## TREATY

They gathered on a new plaza in a former military building the border — Israeli combat fatigues; Jordanians in red keffiyeh; diplomats in ties and farm necked shirts; former Prime Yitzhak Shamir and Israeli statesman Abba Eban, all people invited because the ones in the wars.

As they waited for the start, the leaders presented harmony — stoop-shouldered President Ezer Weizman fighter pilot, chatting with brother Hassan; Hussein, a of the prophet Mohammed hands with Rabin, the son Jewish immigrants.

Military bands from the tries filled the air with came together in a moving tion of *The Star-Spangled*

The grey-bearded Hussein that "it will not be simply paper ratified by those res will be real... no more death misery, no more suspicion fear, no more uncertainty."

In a speedy demonstration fruits of peace, Israel announced it opened direct phone Jordan.

Rabin, the 72-year-old who fought two wars against spoke directly to the Jordanian mothers giving historic day.