



INTERVIEW WITH JAMES B. WARLICK CONSUL GENERAL U.S. EMBASSY IN MOSCOW

Mr. Warlick, could you please tell us about yourself. How and when did you develop an interest in Russia?

I first visited Russia in 1973 on a student exchange as a guest of the then-Soviet Government. The history and politics of the country have fascinated me ever since, and now as a diplomat I have the privilege to live and work here. In 1973, the idea that years later I would work with Russian businessmen, tour companies, and government offices to facilitate travel to the United States and encourage greater contact between our two countries is unbelievable. Even since 1991, it is remarkable how democracy and free market principles have taken hold.

Two years ago, I also had the opportunity to live with a Russian family in Tver. It was then that I understood how much Russians and Americans share common values. This makes it particularly

important to increase business ties, encourage tourism, and promote educational exchanges. As I've said so often to Russians throughout the country, the United States and Russia are weaving a beautiful and intricate quilt of relations, which will be important for years to come.

What are the major functions of the U.S. Consulate in Moscow?

Our primary function in Moscow is to provide services to American citizens who live or who are traveling in Russia. Our consular officers are specially trained to assist Americans in a variety of situations. We help Americans obtain legal assistance when they find themselves in trouble with the police, or help them locate a doctor or contact loved ones back home in the case of a medical emergency. Our officers also assist U.S. travelers with other problems to the extent of our abilities. We also provide services such as replacing passports and assisting with voter registration for U.S. elections.

Our second function is processing immigrant visas for those Russians and others who are eligible to reside permanently in the United States. These visa applicants have been sponsored by a close relative, or in some cases by a U.S. company. Once the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the U.S. has approved the sponsor's petition, we are informed

and begin the visa process here. After our processing is complete, applicants are scheduled for immigrant visa interviews with consular officers.

An important part of our immigrant visa work is granting an ever growing number of visas to Russian orphans adopted by American families. We issue more than 5,000 orphan visas every year. This program allows families to adopt children who would otherwise likely spend their entire childhood in orphanages.

We also issue non-immigrant tourist and business visas to those Russians who seek to visit the United States temporarily for business or pleasure. This includes students, scholars, and exchange visitors, as well as long-term workers visas. Applying for a visa is as simple as visiting one of our application acceptance points, filling out a few forms, and sending in your passport and fee payment. A consular officer will review the application and determine whether an interview is necessary.

During the last several months, we have been hearing complaints about significant number of visa denials for Russians. Some even claimed that about 80 percent of applicants were turned down. Is this information accurate?

That's simply not the case. More than

three-quarters of all who apply for non-immigrant visas at our Embassy receive them. While we carefully screen out security concerns and those applicants who intend to immigrate, we issue visas to legitimate travelers who wish to visit our country. Nobody should delay submitting an application because they think that we are refusing all visa applications — the reality is that three out of four who apply receive visas.

There are many myths about the visa process. Let me say that all applications are considered individually. Under our visa laws, applicants themselves must prove their qualifications for tourist visas. They must show the consular officer that they have sufficient resources to make the trip and will return to Russia afterwards. They must also show the officer what they intend to do in the United States. We cannot accept the guarantees or assurances of third parties that a visa applicant is qualified. In determining whether an applicant is qualified to receive a visa, consular officers look at many factors, including social and family ties, employment history, and the applicant's pattern of travel outside of Russia. We issue visas to those applicants who we expect will return to Russia following a brief trip to the United States.

How did September 11 affect Moscow Consulate operations?

Following the events of September 11, we carefully evaluated our security situation and made a number of changes to our procedures. We temporarily relocated our operations to different buildings while we assessed our security situation. Naturally this posed significant challenges and disruptions, however we were able to

resume issuing visas the day after our move. Our processing operations have been running at full capacity and we are looking at ways to further enhance our productivity. I am especially proud of the efforts that my staff made to ensure that we could continue our operations under such circumstances.

We also have introduced a number of new application forms for certain types of visas. All male applicants between the ages of 16 and 45 are now required to fill out an additional form, as are all applicants for student and exchange visitor visas. These forms are a tool to help us better screen out those applicants who should not receive visas.

Have September 11 attacks slowed down a tourist flow from Russia into the U.S.?

Initially after September 11 we did experience a decline in the number of applications, however the volume of applications resumed by early 2002. We expect to see an increasing number of Russian travelers to the U.S. in years to come.

What are the travelers dynamics? Are there any special services available to expedite business visas?

Let me emphasize that security concerns remain paramount in visa processing. Given these concerns, we have taken steps to make the visa process as simple as possible. Any traveler can submit an application to us using selected FedEx offices located in Russia. We review the application, and invite applicants for an interview when needed. When visas are ready, they are sent back to the applicants by FedEx. This process minimizes the number of trips to the

Embassy for travelers. Additionally, we allow a small number of travel agencies to deliver applications to the Embassy in a similar manner to FedEx. These agencies play absolutely no role in the visa review process, as they simply deliver documents to us. All applications are thoroughly reviewed by consular officers before decisions are made.

Some of the inquiries we received were related to difficulties in obtaining information about visa procedures or visa status over the telephone. Which communication vehicles are most efficient? Are there any fee-based services your Consulate offers to expedite communication?

There are a number of ways the public can receive a wealth of information about our operations. For those with access to the Internet, we offer a comprehensive website covering visa topics, both immigrant and nonimmigrant, as well as services available for American citizens. Our website address is:

<http://usembassy.state.gov/moscow/wwwhcm.html>.

In addition, we offer visa information by telephone to those who need it. Callers can speak directly to a live representative who will answer questions and provide additional information. To access this service, dial 1 (866) 4US VISA. Representatives are available from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. M-F Moscow time, and calls cost \$1.60 per minute.

We are also able to answer e-mail inquiries. You may send your message to us at consulmo@state.gov. Depending upon demand, we are usually able to answer these inquiries within three business days.

Please understand that visa processing regulations severely restrict the amount of information that we may release to others regarding visa applications.

How do you see visa operations in the future?

We want to encourage travel between the United States and Russia. Both our countries have so much to offer to tourists, businessmen, and students that we should welcome greater interchange. In May, Presidents Bush and Putin made a commitment to greater people-to-

people exchange and its immediate consequence was that we reduced the price of student visas on a reciprocal basis from \$495 to \$65. In the interest of partnership and friendship, we look forward to an increasing level of travel between the U.S. and Russia.

I can also predict that we will likely see an increase in the number of security procedures in order to help us ensure that only qualified applicants are granted visas and allowed to enter our country. Some of these procedures will be invisible to appli-

cants, while others such as new application forms, will be more obvious. At the same time, Americans are keenly aware that we live in a global economy that is dependent upon travel in order to facilitate business. We will continue to process visa applications with an eye toward security and an understanding that there are many legitimate travelers who would like to visit our country.

For additional information, e-mail consulmo@state.gov



The Legal Framework For Leasing In Russia

By Derek A. Bloom, Partner in Coudert Brothers' Russia and Central Asia Practice Group

The legal and tax environment for leasing in Russia was greatly improved with the enactment of amendments to the Russian leasing law in January 2002. These amendments have removed numerous inconsistencies between the former version of the leasing law and other Russian laws applicable to cross border and domestic leasing in Russia. The requirement for a license to be obtained for a leasing company to engage in cross border leasing was also removed.

Several vendor-controlled, captive

leasing companies and foreign banks have created wholly-owned leasing operations in Russia during 2002, and several more domestic leasing companies are being formed at the present time. Significant new benchmark leasing transactions have been accomplished by Russian leasing companies. A leading Russian leasing company has twice successfully issued bonds for approximately US \$20 million worth of rubles on the domestic Russian capital market to finance the sale of, largely, foreign equipment.

Equipment vendors in Russia are reporting that, in 2002, there is new commercial pressure from their customers, for the first time, for lease financing to be provided. The lowering of individual and corporate taxes in Russia under the Putin administration is causing Russian companies to choose to operate in a transparent, tax-paying manner. A new premium is being placed on legitimate tax savings that may be obtained through leasing transactions.

In this environment, attention is turning, once again, to the issue of how