Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 17.11.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

Germany under pressure from Russia regarding visas

On 1 November, the Russian Federation introduced additional conditions for granting visas to German citizens. Now they must meet similar criteria to Russian citizens applying for a Schengen visa. No restrictions of this kind have been imposed before or now on citizens of any other Schengen Area/EU member states (except for British citizens). For this reason they can be seen as a form of Russian pressure on Germany which, despite its declarations for establishing closer political co-operation with Russia, has taken a cautious stance in the visa dialogue between the EU and Russia.

In addition to insurance covering the period of stay in Russia and hotel reservation or private invitation, which German citizens had to attach to a tourist/business visa application before, they are now required to provide proof of 'intention to return' to Germany and financial information connected with their stay in Russia. Depending on the kind of visa, this is an employment certificate, including information about earnings, and, if applicable, the reason for the business trip, a certificate of the registration of one's own business or a bank account statement. The German association of travel agencies has officially protested against the imposition of these stricter requirements, indicating that the number of Germans visiting Russia is constantly increasing (in 2009 it reached half a million), and the recent Russian moves could inhibit this trend.

The official reason for the introduction of such measures is the principle of reciprocity in consular relations between Russia and Germany. However, it in fact seems to be a sign of impatience in Russia, which has been receiving from Germany merely assurances of a desire to liberalise and lift the visa regime. However, such assurances have not been reflected in Germany's cautious stance in the visa dialogue between the EU and Russia. Germany does not support preferential treatment in negotiations with Russia and, moreover, opposes the automatic lifting of the visa requirement should Russia formally meet the agreed conditions. In consular relations between Germany and Russia, internal security policy aspects seem to prevail over the 'strategic partnership' priority. This is so because German public opinion and local politicians fear an upsurge in illegal immigration, organised crime and an uncontrolled influx of cheap workers from the East. <jus>