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Tourism across the EU-Russian Border: Official Strategies vs Unofficial Tactics

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Abstract

Tourism is a vaguely defined phenomenon that includes a wide group of short-term visitors coming to destination countries not only for pleasure but also for other purposes; it is very difficult to distinguish between “true” and “false” tourism. As for tourism across the EU-Russian border, a key factor is the type of visa that a traveler has. This paper focuses on those “traditional” and “non-traditional” activities widely associated with tourism; on EU and Russian immigration policies designed to control such activities, to select and exclude tourists; and on practices used by tourist visa applicants to resist rigid sorting and selection policies of consulates. Finally, the paper explores other options apart from “tactical tricks” that cross-border travelers have for protecting their interests.

Background

Defining tourism clearly and precisely is not an easy task for those who are responsible for visa and immigration policies, taking into account that many visa applicants would like to represent themselves as tourists irrespective of the true purposes of their trips. How successful are Russian and EU visa and immigration services in limiting the range of those who would like to represent themselves as tourists? Vice versa, how successful are potential tourists in avoiding or negotiating restrictions? What are widespread alternative unofficial representations of tourism across the EU-Russian border?

There is a well-known problem concerning the definition of tourism. The established definition describes it as an “activity of traveling to a place for pleasure”¹ but such interpretation looks rather vulnerable both as the meanings of pleasure and leisure are rather subjective and, more important, as many trips are multipurpose (e.g. to participate in an academic conference and to enjoy sightseeing). It is also possible to define tourists as consumers of specific products and services (e.g. products, excursions etc.) but it doesn’t solve the problem of multipurpose trips and other borderline situations. Another definition is much broader: for instance, some authors and practitioners identify tourism as a phenomenon, occurring “outside the normal place of residence,” having “a temporary short term,” involving “the intention of returning home within a few days, weeks or months,” and “destinations are visited for purposes other

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¹ “Tourism,” *Merriam Webster Online*. Accessed October 28, 2013: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tourism/>



Figure 1: Europe and Russia

than taking up permanent residence or employment remunerated from within the places visited.”² Yet these kinds of broad definitions leave “a chaotic collection of ... motivations related to the overnight stay” and may be confusing, for example, for conceptualizing such phenomena as “migrant tourist workers’, who combine leisure, discovery and labor market participation.”³ Both from a theoretical and from a practical standpoint, preferring a wider or narrower definition depends on the key purpose that users of a definition have. While some users would like to target as many travelers as possible (as potential clients or valuable research objects), others prefer to narrow their range as some categories are useless, not interesting, or not desirable.

When it comes to tourism that involves obtaining visas before entrance, it is not so much the researchers or tourism business actors but rather immigration services that have the power to produce the most practically important meanings. Usually consulates do not provide visa applicants with clear definitions of a tourist trip but require specific sets of documents (e.g. hotel confirmation). Sometimes tourism is amalgamated into a single application category with other kinds of reasons for travel, such as private or business trips.

All of this doesn’t mean that after being qualified as a tourist by a visa issuing consulate a traveller can’t pursue other activities in her or his destination country. Since it is difficult for border guards or immigration authorities to determine whether tourism is the main or the only purpose of an entrant, a tourist visa usually gives its holder more flexibility than other types of visas in terms of allowed activities and movement inside receiving countries (or common immigration spaces). Thus, the range of non-criminal

² Allan Williams and Colin Hall, “Tourism and Migration: New Relationships between Production and Consumption,” *Tourism Geographies: An International Journal of Tourism Space, Place and Environment* 2:1 (2000): 6.

³ *Ibid.*

activities of tourists that are not tolerated by immigration authorities is usually very narrow, including not being allowed to be employed, or to participate in suspicious political activities.⁴

With such flexibility to those granted tourist visas, authorities of receiving states often make strict demands for applicants, especially in terms of available funds. Specifically, wealth becomes one of the main factors distinguishing between desirable and undesirable visa applicants and determining the extent of their eligibility for transnational mobility.⁵ To have large sums of money is far more important for an applicant than to belong to a respected social group or not to be involved in some high-profile compromising scandals not involving criminal conviction. Thus, for the consulates of EU member countries rich Russian officials notorious for corruption scandals or plagiarizing their doctoral dissertations are more welcomed as tourists than formally respectable but suspiciously poor Russian university professors.

While governments and consulates of receiving countries try to play a decisive role in the process of selecting/disqualifying potential tourists, often using vague and arbitrary applied criteria, they are not always and completely successful in this respect. If a Certeauvian conceptual framework⁶ is employed, various tricks (e.g. obtaining fake income certificates, choosing easier Schengen consulates etc.) applied by applicants in order to be qualified for tourist visas can be conceptualized as tactics, as opposed to strategies of sorting out and excluding, applied by officials of destination states.⁷ As consulates are hardly able to neutralize at least some of these tactics, it may be deduced that visa applicants co-produce the meaning of the term “tourist” together with officials and that meaning covers not only those who are eligible according to some criteria but also those who succeed in pretending to be eligible.

Taking into account the above-mentioned considerations, the current paper focuses on developments of tourism across the EU-Russian border, specifically on how such tourism is framed by those who define visa and immigration policies and on practices that are used by tourists to comply with, to avoid, or to negotiate restrictions. First, I consider how the interpretation of the word tourist was changed in the EU and in Russia in the post-Soviet period. Second, what practices are used by potential tourists to adjust to or circumvent the official order? Finally, I examine other ways in which tourists can challenge the overly harsh official immigration control strategies.

⁴ Of course, in authoritarian states the range of actions that could be perceived as suspicious political activities can be much wider. For example, in Russia there were cases when foreign scholars or practitioners who entered Russia with tourist visas (that are much easier to obtain than business visas) and delivered lectures criticizing Russian political realities, were deported for violation of immigration rules. See for example: Tony Halpin, “British Lawyer Sent Home as Kremlin Takes Tough Stance on Visa Laws,” *Sunday Times*, November 23, 2007. Accessed November 28, 2013: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article2596285.ece/>

⁵ Elspeth Guild, “The Legal Framework: Who Is Entitled to Move?” in *Controlling Frontiers: Free Movement into and within Europe*, eds. Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Allan Williams and Colin Hall, “Tourism and Migration,” *Tourism Geographies* 2:1 (2000): 5–27.

⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁷ According to de Certeau, a strategy can be described as systematic control of space by those who are powerful while tactics is the use of time by those who are weaker for gaining some tactical advantages on alien territory. See: De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix.

“Traditional” and “Non-traditional” Tourism across the EU-Russian Border

As in other regions, there is a wide range of activities involving trips across the EU-Russian border that are called “tourism.” Many such trips fit the common-sense narrow meaning, involving leisure, hotel stays, excursions, visiting specific events, and purchasing consumer goods for personal use. Yet, some of these trips do not fit the stereotypical pattern of a tourist trip. For example, so-called “nostalgic” tourism, that targets historic memory sites, is popular, on the one hand, among EU residents having Russian ancestors,⁸ such as Germans and Finns, visiting territories ceded to the USSR in the 1940s (Kaliningrad province and Karelian Isthmus),⁹ or, particularly in the case of Germans, visiting territories where their ancestors fought during World War II. On the other hand, “nostalgic tourism” is also popular among those Russians visiting Baltic states, who traveled to these states’ territories freely and frequently when they were a part of the Soviet Union.

While “nostalgic tourism” still more or less fits tourism in its traditional sense, there are some other kinds of trips that strictly speaking cannot be classified as tourism. Nevertheless, such trips are still associated with tourism by the mass media and public. Here are examples of such “non-traditional tourist activities:”

“Fuel tourism” (or “gasoline tourism”) is widespread at all EU-Russia’s borders. As in Russia gasoline prices are essentially lower than in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, or Poland, already in the 1990s this activity became an important source of income for many borderlanders from depressed areas of these countries. “Fuel tourists” have become a major problem not only for the legal fuel business but also for cross-border movement: huge numbers of private cars crossing a border daily (sometimes even several times a day) cause severe traffic congestions.¹⁰ While Russia has a rather liberal attitude towards fuel shuttle traders who buy its production and contribute to creating new jobs, the Baltic states and Poland, after tolerating this activity for many years (as it helped to alleviate the problem of unemployment), have started to suppress it in the 2010s by levying a fuel excise duty on those who cross the border too frequently.¹¹

“Alcohol tourism” (or “vodka tourism”) is a phenomenon that is specific to the Finnish-Rus-

⁸ Already before the collapse of the USSR such people were one of the most significant kinds of tourists visiting the Soviet Union. See: Aleksei Butuzov, “Sootechestvenniki Rossii kak faktor Razvitiia Nostalgicheskogo Turizma v Rossiiu [Russian Compatriots as a Factor for Developing Nostalgic Tourism to Russia],” *Servis v Rossii i za Rubezhom* 4 (2009): 20.

⁹ See for example: Iekaterina Nikolaeva, ““Nostalgicheskii Turizm’ v Kaliningradskuiu Oblast’ Podkhvatyvaiut Nemtsy: Mnenie [Nostalgic Tourism to Kaliningrad Province by Germans: an Opinion],” *Newsbalt.ru*, October 28, 2011. Accessed April 30, 2014: <http://www.newsbalt.ru/detail/?ID=2101/>

¹⁰ See for example: “Benzinovyie Vampiry [Gazoline Vampires],” *Rosbalt*, August 24, 2011. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/piter/2011/08/24/882681.html>

¹¹ See for example: “Pribaltika Otgorazhivaetsia ot Kontrabandnogo Benzina [Baltic States Fence off from Smuggled Gazoline],” *Kommersant.ru* April 24, 2012. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1918668>

sian borderland.¹² As the high price for alcohol is maintained by the Finnish state, many Finnish tourists go to Russia for cheap alcohol and often for heavy drinking. However, it is not easy for Russia to compete with visa-free Estonia in this respect, taking also into account that it is much easier to bring alcohol to Finland from the latter, than from outside the EU.

“Pharmaceutical tourism” is less common but also a widespread phenomenon involving cross-border trips of Russian-speaking EU residents (primarily inhabitants of the Baltic states¹³) with the primary aim to buy Russian pharmaceuticals. Such activities are driven by the fact that many Russian drugs are significantly cheaper and easily accessible without producing a prescription (even in cases when a prescription is needed). Many people prefer to buy such drugs in Russia at their own risk than to wait for many days for an appointment with a doctor or to pay a private doctor just to get a prescription. On the other hand, Russians also have some incentives to go to neighboring EU countries (e.g. to Finland) for buying drugs as it is widely believed that drugs sold in the EU are of better quality and that the risk of buying counterfeit drugs in the EU is much lower than in Russia.¹⁴

“Medical tourism” (including “birth tourism”) is a phenomenon of a different kind from the previous one that involves cross-border trips for receiving medical treatment. Many Russians go to the EU to access better quality medical services. Among all, there is a developing phenomenon of “birth tourism” in Pskov province (one of the poorest regions of the European part of Russia): each year dozens of its inhabitants choose to give birth in Tartu University Hospital, which is the leading medical center in Estonia.¹⁵ At the same time, there is also a reverse flow of medical tourism: some EU residents (especially russophone Balts) prefer to get cheaper medical treatment in Russia. In particular, it concerns dental treatment that is often not covered by medical insurance. Some Finns, Germans, and other citizens of EU member countries go to Russia for cheaper in vitro fertilization.¹⁶

“Sex tourism” to Russia is directed mainly to Moscow, St. Petersburg, and some smaller borderland cities. This activity is particularly flourishing in cities near the Russian-Finnish border.¹⁷ Overall, Russia is not among the top destinations for EU sex tourists as it loses to some destinations inside the EU itself and to visa-free Ukraine. As Marttila argues considering the case of Finnish “sex tourists” coming

¹² This phenomenon was rather widespread even in the Soviet era. See: Auvo Kostiaainen, “The Vodka Trail: Finnish Travellers' Motivation to Visit the Former Soviet Union,” *Genealogia.fi*. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article263e.htm/>

¹³ See for example: “Litovtsy Skupaiut Sovetskie Lekarstva,” *Bol.ru* August 8, 2006. Accessed April 29, 2014: http://www.bol.ru/bol/news/19889.html?SECTION_ID=341

¹⁴ See for example: “Apteki Finliandii,” *Fin2.ru*. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://fin2.ru/suomi/info/18-apteki-finlyandii.html>

¹⁵ See for example: Sergei Nekrasov, “Moda ili Neobkhodimost. Pskovitianki Edut Rozhat v Estoniiu [Fashion or Necessity: Female Inhabitants of the City of Pskov Go to Give Birth in Estonia],” *Argumenty i Fakty*, December 3, 2012. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://www.pskov.aif.ru/health/events/156137/>

¹⁶ Nina Rusanova, “Reproduktivnyi Turizm v Rossii: Vozmozhnosti i Problemy [Reproductive Tourism in Russia: Opportunities and Problems],” *Servis Plus* 6 (2009): 86.

¹⁷ See for example: “Granitsa Tserpimosti: Seks-turizm [The Border of Tolerance: Sex Tourism],” *Echo Moskvy*, August 8, 2004. Accessed April 29, 2014: <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/svoi-glaza/26573/>

to the city of Vyborg, the majority of sex tourists do not come to Russia exclusively for that purpose, and many of them are businessmen.¹⁸

The wording “**academic tourism**” may be used as an umbrella term for activities of several kinds, starting with student mobility and ending with the fondness of some researchers and university administrators for traveling formally for academic purposes but in fact predominantly for leisure, sight-seeing, and shopping. One possibility involves organizing Russian academic events (which include excursions) in the EU; in this case organizers arrange for participants not business but tourist visas in order to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic problems. As far as the author knows, similar practices are sometimes also used by EU academics and other professionals because, as it will be discussed below, a Russian tourist visa is easier to obtain than other kinds of visas.

“**Official tourism**” is somewhat close to “academic” tourism in its negative connotation. It is a common problem in Russia that officials seek opportunities to take luxury trips (flying business class or by charter flights and staying in luxurious hotels) to the EU at public expense supposedly for negotiations and concluding agreements but actually predominantly for private purposes. Similar motivation may also affect EU officials’ visits to Russia but probably to a lesser extent due to stricter anti-corruption legislation and practices in the EU member countries. “Official tourism” may influence many bilateral and multilateral cooperation programs, including cross-border cooperation and the establishment of twin cities. For instance, several somewhat strange agreements, that were concluded in the 2000s between large Russian cities and tiny towns in the EU (having populations less than 10,000 inhabitants but, at the same time, situated at a short distance from world famous shopping and culture centres), may be affected by hidden motives.¹⁹

The mentioned forms of “non-traditional tourism” are not just cases when the word “tourism” is used metaphorically. First, tourist infrastructure, at least partially, still targets “non-traditional” short term visitors, offering them shopping, hotel stays, catering etc. Second, in many cases visitors to the EU or Russia use tourist visas to cover commercial, academic, or some other activities or, vice versa, use non-tourist (business, private etc.) visas or other grounds for entry (e.g. diplomatic passports²⁰) for tourism in its more traditional sense.

In this light it is especially important to consider the EU’s and Russia’s immigration policies, sorting potential tourists into eligible and ineligible categories, and also to examine informal practices used by tourist visa applicants to be qualified as eligible. These issues will be considered in the next two sections.

¹⁸ Anne-Maria Marttila, “Desiring the ‘Other’: Prostitution Clients on a Transnational Red-Light District in the Border Area of Finland, Estonia and Russia,” *Gender Technology and Development* 12:1 (2008): 9.

¹⁹ Serghei Golunov, *EU-Russian Border Security: Challenges, (Mis)Perceptions, and Responses* (London: Routledge, 2012), 106.

²⁰ EU and Russian holders of diplomatic passports do not need visas to enter Russia or the EU.

Visa Regime as a Regulator of Tourism

Both those Russian nationals who enter EU member countries and vice versa have to obtain visas. Tourism is one of the main categories for such visa applicants. According to Russian statistical data (that, as it should be noted, is not perfect and complete) in 2011 tourism was the reason given for one-third of the more than 13 million trips to the EU member states undertaken by Russian visitors²¹ and more than one-fifth of the 5 million trips taken by the EU nationals to Russia.²² It should be noted that not in all cases of those who are called “tourists” enter the EU or Russia using tourist visas, as some (especially inhabitants of borderland regions) obtain private or other kinds of visas or small cross-border movement permits.

While in the 1990s Russian visitors were often framed in the EU as potential illegal immigrants or organized criminals who could invade Western countries if tough immigration controls were not introduced,²³ such perceptions started to change in the 2000s as the economic situation in Russia began to improve rapidly. Russian tourists, who spent more and more money in the EU, can be considered the main reason for this change.²⁴ The inflow of Russian tourists was especially beneficial for Finland where depressed eastern areas have received a powerful boost due to a huge number of one-day visitors from the Russian North-West entering the country to buy goods.²⁵

All of this does not mean that the image of Russian tourists in the EU is unambiguously positive. According to some surveys of EU hotel owners and tourists, the overall perception of Russian tourists is not very good, as some of them are very noisy, drink too much and cause trouble to other people after this, and steal small items in hotels, etc.²⁶ However, in the majority of such ratings Russians were not

²¹ “10.13. Chislo Poezdok Rossiiskikh Grazhdan za Granitsu po Tseliam v 2011 g. [10.13. The Number of Trips Abroad by Russian Citizens and their Purpose of Travel in 2011],” *Federal State Statistics Service* (2012). Accessed November 29, 2013: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12_11/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/10-13.htm

²² “10.12. Chislo Poezdok Inostrannykh Grazhdan v Rossiuu po Tseliam v 2011 [10.12. The Number of Trips by Foreign Citizens to Russia and their Purpose of Travel in 2011],” *Federal State Statistics Service*, 2012. Accessed November 29, 2013: http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12_11/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d1/10-12.htm

²³ See for example: Eberhard Bort, “Illegal Migration and Cross-Border Crime: Challenges at the Eastern Frontier of the European Union,” *EUI Working Paper RSC*, No. 2000/9 (San Domenico: European University Institute)

²⁴ Minna-Mari Salminen and Arkady Moshes “Practise What You Preach: The Prospects for Visa Freedom in EU-Russia Relations,” *FIIA Report* 18 (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2009).

²⁵ Heikki Eskelinen, “Geopolitics and the Market: Borderland Communities in the Making,” in *The EU-Russia Borderland: New Context for Regional Cooperation*, eds. Heikki Eskelinen, Ilkka Liikanen, and James W. Scott, (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁶ See for example: “Die Welt Izuchila Stereotipy ob Uzhasnykh Russkikh Turistakh: Vse Obiasniaetsia Traditsiiami i Proshlym [Die Welt Examined Stereotypes about the Terrible Russian Tourists: Everything can be Explained by Traditions and by History],” *NEWSru.com* February 25, 2011. Accessed October 29, 2013: <http://www.newsru.com/russia/25feb2011/tourists.html/>; Viktor Semionov, “Rossiiane Vozglavili Reiting Hudshikh Turistov, Sostavlenyi Angliiskim Turisticheskim Saitom [Russians have Topped the List of the Worst Tourists According to an English Tourist Website],” *Novaia Sibir*, June 20, 2013. Accessed October 29, 2013: <http://newsib.net/index.php?newsid=76727>

the worst in comparison to tourists from some Western countries, who were accused largely of the same misdeeds. Moreover, the experience of Finland, which routinely accepts the largest number of Russian tourists among the EU member countries, shows that the contribution of Russian visitors to the Finnish crime rate is tiny, being, for example, not more than 3% of crimes committed by Finnish citizens between 2003 and 2008.²⁷

No wonder that in the 2000s visa requirements for Russian visa applicants were softened gradually. The consulates of EU member states (especially after 2006 when the EU-Russian visa facilitation agreement was concluded) reduced the number of documents to be submitted along with a visa application. Financial requirements to tourists, who before the end of the 2000s typically had to prove possessing 100 euros per person per day, were essentially lowered by the end of the 2000s. Consulates now issue long-term multientry visas much more often than previously, and some Schengen countries (such as Finland, Greece, France, Italy, and Spain) have especially liberal policies in this respect. Since the late 2000s many visa centers opened in some regions that greatly facilitated and reduced the cost of the visa application process for many applicants living far from Moscow. A growing number of consulates from EU member states accept applications via courier service: now the list of such countries includes: Cyprus,²⁸ Estonia, Latvia, Netherlands, and Poland.²⁹ The latter actively supported a visa-free regime for inhabitants of the Kaliningrad region, and since July 2012 Kaliningraders and inhabitants of adjacent Polish territories can cross the border and travel inside a limited zone with special travel permits. This new opportunity greatly increased the activities of Kaliningrad tourist shops to attract tourists and stimulated the economic development of some small Polish cities close to the border with Russia.³⁰

Despite such facilitation and the fact that many EU member countries have already supported a visa-free regime with Russia in some long-term indefinite perspective, Russian applicants, including potential tourists, are still treated with suspicion for a number of reasons. First, there is a huge wealth disparity in the country that can be illustrated by the fact that while some regions (e.g. Moscow or Tyumen province) can be matched by their gross product per capita to such EU member states as Ireland or Italy, while some republics of the North Caucasus are comparable with poor African countries (e.g. with Benin or Zambia).³¹ In some cases tourist visas are still used by Russian nationals as the first step to illegal settlement and unauthorized employment in the EU.³² Second, individual EU member countries are interested in Russian tourists, but are concerned with the potential influx of Russian immigrants to a

²⁷ Golunov, *EU-Russian Border Security*, 93.

²⁸ Those tourists who enter Cyprus directly from Russia can get a pro-visa online. Cyprus is the only EU member country that has such a simplified visa regime for Russian citizens.

²⁹ See: *Pony Express*, "Vizy [Visas]." Accessed October 30, 2013: <http://www.pony-visa.ru/visa.php>

³⁰ Emma Saribekian, "Vse dlia Kaliningradtsev: MPP Stimuliruet Stroitelstvo Novykh Magazinov v Polshe [Everything for Kaliningraders: Small Cross-Border Movement Stimulates the Creation of new Shops in Poland]," *Russkiy Zapad*, October 1, 2013. Accessed October 31, 2012: <http://ruwest.ru/news/8392/>

³¹ Golunov, *EU-Russian Border Security*, 97.

³² Among all, it is widely believed in Russia, that young single women applying for tourist visas are treated by some consulates very suspiciously as potential prostitutes.

different extent: while for Finland, France, Greece, Italy, and Spain attracting tourists is the main priority, Germany, where many hundreds of thousands of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants reside, are much more cautious in this respect. Finally, as particular visa issuing countries consider issuing tourist visas as a way to increase sales of their domestic goods and services, they are not happy when such visas are used for trips to other Schengen member states.

Because of these and other reasons (such as periodical changes in common Schengen visa requirements etc.) policies of EU member countries' consulates towards Russian tourist visa applicants are often contradictory: facilitations are combined with the introduction of stricter requirements or adopting a nit-picking approach to applications. Although consulates typically justify imposing stricter requirements by common Schengen visa requirements, some of their practices differ. For instance, Latvia and Spain only issue visas valid for these countries (LTV visas) to a much greater extent than all other Schengen states do,³³ as a result, many of those who already submitted multi-segment tickets, involving connections in some other Schengen states, as a part of their visa applications, had their tickets lost.³⁴ Some consulates (especially the Finnish ones) sporadically and unpredictably refuse applicants whose passports contain even one illegible stamp put in any country.³⁵

Control over tourists entering the EU is not limited by visa application procedures. It also includes incidents involving border guards deciding if a person has overstayed in the Schengen space (disputable situations can appear) and if she or he travels by a legitimate route inside it, especially when a traveler has a single entry visa. Finnish border guards practice interrogations and searches of Russian tourists they suspect of lying about the true (non-Finnish) destination of their trips; if some evidence is found (plane tickets to other EU countries, goods evidently purchased outside Finland etc.) a tourist may find her or his Schengen visa canceled.³⁶ Apart from border guards, in some cases airport authorities can also decide if tourists are eligible for travel inside the Schengen space (if the route of travel lies far from a visa issuing country) and report to border guards about suspicious cases.³⁷

³³ In 2012 Latvian consulates in Russia issued 3,498 LTV visas for Russian citizens; Spanish consulates in Russia issued 2,121 LTV visas, while all other consulates of Schengen states in Russia taken together issued 3,150 LTV visas. See: "Around 6 million Schengen visas issued in Russia in 2012," *Delegation of the European Union in Russia*, March 19, 2013. Accessed April 28, 2014: http://ceas.europa.eu/delegations/russia/press_corner/all_news/news/2013/20130319_en.htm/

³⁴ See: "Dali Chisto Ispanskuiu Vizu (LTV/VTL) vmesto Shengenskoi [One was given merely a Spanish visa (LTV/VTL) instead of a Schengen One]," *Forum Vinskogo*. Accessed October 31, 2013: <http://forum.awd.ru/viewtopic.php?f=552&t=108445&sid=1c2d76db7d6dd68d5005d37d101373ff/> As applicants are usually required to submit tickets as part of a visa application package, some applicants may lose their non-refundable tickets because of such a decision.

³⁵ "Finliandiia i Velikobritaniia Nachali Pridiratsia k Pasportam Turistov [Finland and the UK Find Fault with Passports of Russian Tourists]," *Travel.ru*, March 27, 2012. Accessed October 31, 2013: <http://www.travel.ru/news/2012/03/27/199477.html/>

³⁶ See: "Vezd v Finliandiiu. Pogranichniki, Shtampy, Doprosy, Sovety [Entrance to Finland: Border Guards, Stamps, Interrogations, Advice]," *Forum Vinskogo*. Accessed October 31, 2013: <http://forum.awd.ru/viewtopic.php?f=350&t=56422/>

³⁷ See: "V Italiu Reisom iz Litvy po Litovskomu Odnorazovomu Shengenu [To Italy via a Flight from Lithuania,

Russian immigration policy towards tourists from the EU is less alarmist but in some respects is even more restrictive, still being seriously influenced by the former Soviet totalitarian system of strict control over the movement of people. On the one hand, foreign tourists, especially from wealthy countries, are welcomed as a source of income for the national economy. Though Russia generally adheres to the policy of reciprocity concerning the regime of immigration for EU nationals, occasionally it takes asymmetric steps. Since 2002 EU tourists using travel agencies accredited by the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation can enter Kaliningrad province without visas and stay up to 72 hours. In 2009 passengers of cruise ships entering several particular Russian ports were also allowed to stay in Russia for three days.³⁸ As of October 2013 a law was considered by the Russian parliament allowing foreign citizens of some countries, transiting via some Russian airports, to stay in the country for the same term. Visa regimes were lifted for visitors of specific events, such as UK football fans who visited Moscow for the UEFA final match between Manchester United and Chelsea in May 2008.

On the other hand, Russian immigration rules are rather cumbersome for tourists from the EU member states. First, it is possible to get only single- or double entry but not a multi-entry Russian tourist visa. Second, a confirmation and a voucher issued by a travel agency accredited by the Russian Foreign Ministry must be submitted as a part of a tourist visa application package. Third, tourists staying in Russia for more than seven consecutive working days must be registered by the Federal Migration Service. Actually, this can be done at hotels where foreign tourists are staying but it is not possible in some cases, for instance, such as when tourists participate in backpacking trips.

Because of these and of other problems the number of EU nationals taking tourist trips to Russia is not very large. In 2011 the Russian Border Guard Service registered 347,000 tourist trips to Russia by German citizens, 134,000 by Finns, 129,000 by UK nationals, 125,000 by Italians, and 101,000 by Spaniards.³⁹ As is mentioned below, probably not all were actually tourist trips, since for many foreign visitors to Russia it is more convenient to obtain a tourist visa than a visa of some other category.

In general, the EU's immigration strategy towards Russian tourists involves sorting applicants by their wealth and other categories (e.g. place of residence, social status etc.) and soft restrictions of their movement inside the Schengen area (such as requirements to stay in pre-booked hotels or to spend more days in a visa issuing country than in other Schengen countries). In turn, Russian immigration policy is not so much about identifying trustworthy and solvent tourists as about maintenance of parity with corresponding EU member states' visa requirements and about rather strict control over the movements and activities of foreign tourists inside the country.

Having a Single Entry Lithuanian Schengen Visa],” *Forum Vinskogo*. Accessed October 31, 2013: <http://forum.awd.ru/viewtopic.php?f=808&t=100284&start=0/>

³⁸ “Postanovleniie Pravitelstva Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 7 Maia 2009 g. no 397 g. Moskva [Decree of the Government of Russian Federation of 7 May 2009, no 397, Moscow],” *RG.ru*, May 13, 2009. Accessed October 30, 2013: <http://www.rg.ru/2009/05/13/parom-dok.html/>

³⁹ “10.12. Chislo poezdok inostrannykh grazhdan...” *Federal State Statistics Service*, 2012.

Tactics for Being Qualified as a Legitimate Tourist

Facing strict immigration strategies of destination countries, a tourist from the EU or Russia has three major options. The first two are polar opposites: a tourist can either ignore the restrictions as much as possible or try to fulfill all requirements scrupulously. The third option is to adjust to formal requirements both by legitimate means and (if needed) by tricks. The last option, which largely corresponds to the mentioned Certeauvian tactic, will be covered in this section.

Ignoring restrictions when possible is the most risky way selected either by those who have no other choice or by a handful of adventure seekers. There were a small number of cases involving EU or Russian nationals who crossed the EU-Russian border illegally just to get a thrill and to experience life on the other side of the border. In 2002 a UK citizen, who illegally crossed the Finnish-Russian border by bicycle to learn more about Russian life, was apprehended some 2,000 kilometers away from this border in the city of Volgograd.⁴⁰ Six years later Russian border guards apprehended a French citizen who crossed the same border illegally and intended to travel to Central Asia on foot, earning his daily bread by fluting.⁴¹

The majority of applicants choose the opposite approach, trying to be as law-abiding as possible and to observe all formal requirements. However, it is not always possible since some requirements may be vague and contradictory. It is sometimes not easy to receive clear answers from consulates or visa centers since their communication channels are overloaded or as they are afraid of being responsible for their advice. Notoriously, both the UK embassy and accredited visa centers in Russia state that they don't advise applicants on immigration issues⁴² such as selection of a correct visa category for application. At the same time, another widespread problem for law-abiding applicants is also in the careless or unscrupulous approach of some Russian travel agencies, which represent applicants' interests in consulates.

Those numerous applicants, who would like to correspond to fulfill immigration requirements but have some problems with the use of formally legitimate, semi-legitimate or illegitimate tricks in order to be qualified. Such problems predominantly concern certifying financial solvency or respectable employment status; proving a reason of the trip and its legitimacy; or the choice of a range of consulates when a travel plan covers several Schengen states.

Problems with providing proof of financial solvency or respectable employment status concern many of those Russians who desire to be eligible for tourist visas. In the majority of Russian regions the median salary in April 2013 was (after deducting the 13% income tax) just some 350 euros a month⁴³

⁴⁰ "V Volggrade Zaderzhan Nelegal, Britanskii Poddannyi [An illegal alien, a UK Citizen, was Arrested in the City of Volgograd]," *Kommersant.ru*, October 1, 2002. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/950288>

⁴¹ "Frantsuza-fleitista Deportiruiut na Rodinu [French Flutist will be Deported to his Home Country]," *Stolitsa na Onego*, January 30, 2009. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://stolica.onego.ru/news/117369.html/>

⁴² See: VFS.Global. Accessed November 1, 2013: <http://www.ukvac-ru.com/russian/callcentre.html/>

⁴³ "RIA Reiting Vyiavil Naibolshee Sotsialnoe Rassloenie v Moskve i Chechne [The Rating of RIA Revealed the

while representatives of formally respectable professional categories (such as university professors or medical and cultural workers) oftentimes receive even less.⁴⁴ It is problematic for such people to have 50 euros per day for each family member for a week-long or a longer trip, especially after buying in advance plane tickets (and sometimes prepaying accommodation) according to consular requirements. While the requirement to prove financial solvency can be circumvented through legitimate means (e.g. borrowing money from a bank or from somebody else) it is much more difficult to satisfy consulate's criteria by a non-fraudulent way when it concerns a legitimate source of income. Yet many Russian employers readily issue certificates overstating the salaries of their employees. Those for whom this option is not available (e.g. unemployed or informally employed persons) can use shadow services offered by some travel agencies that, not only issue fake certificates, but even have phone operators ready to respond to calls from consulates.

Another widespread problem concerns those trips that cover the Schengen states other than a visa issuing country. While consulates are usually reluctant to issue visas for those applicants who stay in other Schengen countries more than in a visa issuing country, applicants often prefer to apply to those consulates which are more liberal in their visa issuing policies even if their countries are actually not the main destinations. Specifically, the majority of applicants from St. Petersburg prefer to apply for Finnish visas irrespectively of their main EU destinations, as the procedure is convenient, only a minimal number of supporting documents is required and as multi-entry visas are usually given. By similar reasons applicants from Pskov province prefer Estonian or Latvian visas, Kaliningraders – Polish visas. Many Moscovites and inhabitants from other regions choose from a range of “easy” consulates such as French, Greek, Italian, or Spanish.

This practice, sometimes called “visa shopping,” is usually not welcomed by consulates that could reject a suspicious application or punish an applicant afterwards by reducing the validity term of a next visa or by refusing to issue such a visa at all. Yet, some applicants use several options to circumvent restrictions. To make their itineraries trustworthy they submit refundable tickets and hotel reservation confirmations that can be canceled as a part of their application packages. After a visa was used “improperly,” a traveler still has some options to avoid being banned: she or he can change an international passport and receive a new one (not having compromising border control stamps) or apply to some other, more loyal Schengen consulate, after her or his application to a previous consulate is rejected.

Of course, consulates are generally aware of such tricks and are trying to prevent them through various means. The problem is that introducing new measures that make employing tricks more difficult, negatively affect law-abiding tourist visa applicants, who may be reluctant to deal with “too suspicious” embassies. Not only consulates can categorize potential tourists, but tourists themselves and their repre-

Greatest Social Stratification in the City of Moscow and in Chechnya],” *RIA Novosti* October 29, 2013. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://ria.ru/economy/20131029/973195651.html/>

⁴⁴ In the first half of 2013 a typical net salary of a Dotsent (associate professor) in provincial universities of European Russia was 250–300 euros.

sentatives (travel agencies and associations) can frame consulates in mass media and forum discussions, sometimes in very negative ways.

As can be seen above, potential tourists have a wide range of tactics that can be used to resist consulates' strategies to categorize applicants as either eligible or non-eligible. Such tourists utilize opportunities to get fake certificates (that are easily available in Russia) as well as inconsistencies in policies of the different Schengen states. It should be noted that probably the clear majority of those who use tricks do not have the intention to use a visa for illegal immigration or some other evidently illegitimate purposes. They just want to circumvent restrictions that prevent them from having visas for traveling across the EU.

The range of tricks, employed by those EU nationals who enter Russia, is probably narrower as EU applicants generally have fewer problems with proving their financial solvency and with moving between countries of the common immigration space (i.e. between Russia and Belarus). Instead, one of the most popular tricks is related to obtaining tourist visas for traveling for other purposes, as a Russian tourist visa is easier to obtain and gives more freedom of movement inside the country⁴⁵ than other types of Russian visas. While being in Russia, some tourists from the EU (e.g. backpackers) are registered in properties where they do not actually live, but this is done not by travelers themselves but by travel agencies and other host organizations. Overall, the mentioned tactics employed by travelers from the EU to Russia are usually intended for circumventing restrictions imposed by the rudimentary Soviet-style system of control over the movement of people inside the country.

Are There More Efficient Ways to Contest Excessively Restrictive Strategies?

Apart from applying semi-legal and illegal tactics against overly harsh official immigration control strategies, potential tourists can passively protest by choosing other tourist destinations, leave negative feedback about the work of consulates or some other institutions, appeal unfavorable decisions, resort to powerful intermediaries while trying to defend their interests or, finally, try to defend such interests themselves by organizing individual or collective public actions.

The first of these options is to punish EU member countries pursuing overly harsh visa policies by “voting with their feet,” in other words, by choosing other destinations. Russian tourists have a wide choice not only among those Schengen states that are “liberal” in terms of their visa policies but also among those countries that have no strict visa requirements towards Russians. In 2011, among the Schengen states, only Finland was in the top five tourist destinations for Russians. This list also included Turkey and Thailand (visa free), Egypt (visas are issued at the border), and China (visa applications can be sent via express mail service, short-term visa-free transit is allowed and no visas are required for visiting Hainan Island). Yet, some of the visa free destinations are not cheap in terms of transportation while

⁴⁵ For instance, the movement of guest Russian visa holders is generally confined to a region in which a host is resided.

others lose to EU resorts in terms of quality of service and of life in general.

Those tourists, who deal with consulates, border guards, and customs services, can leave feedback on site or online, complaining about poor service or arbitrary treatment or proposing how to improve the work of an institution. The problem is that institutions dealing with immigration issues often have insufficient personnel to process appeals and therefore it is no wonder that many consulates just don't respond to e-mail inquiries. Apart from this, such institutions simply may be not interested in dealing with complaints concerning their work and especially their general policies. Sometimes it is very difficult to find ways to leave feedback: for instance, the author, while intending to find the way to comment on the UK visa application procedures for Russian and Estonian residents, simply didn't find a way to do it via the UK Border Agency site.⁴⁶

It is not always possible to appeal against negative decisions on visa applications and especially against deportation by border guards, which leaves plenty of room for arbitrary and unjust treatment. This can be illustrated by an incident that happened to a well-known Russian blogger Ilia Varlamov, who in 2009 not only had his UK visa application refused but also was banned for entering the UK for 10 years as he was suspected of providing false information about his income⁴⁷ (he did not appeal against this decision thus supposedly admitting his fault). Though formally there was almost no room for recourse, Mr Varlamov finally managed to use a legal loophole and to reverse the ban with help from well-qualified advocates.⁴⁸

The Visa Code adopted in 2009 explicitly proclaims that applicants for Schengen visas have a right to appeal.⁴⁹ It is an important step for defending rights of applicants but, as the ground for refusal may be rather vague and based just on suspicion, room for arbitrary decisions still remains.

In some cases the interests of tourists can be represented by various intermediaries: by their countries (that can negotiate mutual facilitation of visa regime and defend their citizens' rights), travel agencies and their associations (which sometimes participate in joint meetings with representatives of consulates and border guard services), passenger transportation companies (that can lobby facilitation of entrance regimes before their own and foreign governments), human right activists, mass media etc. Overall, intermediaries often have more power than individual tourists themselves to attract public attention to immigration and other problems experienced by such tourists or to make these tourists' voices heard better by authorities of destination countries. However, intermediaries typically may be useful for tourists only to a limited extent and sometimes can use interests of cross-border travelers as a bargaining

⁴⁶ *UK Border Agency*. Accessed November 1, 2013: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/>

⁴⁷ According to Ilya Varlamov, he informed the consulate about his salary together with bonuses while a consular officer later managed to get information only about his net income.

⁴⁸ Ilia Varlamov, "Ee Velichestvo Koroleva protiv Vizovogo Ofitsera v Moskve (po Zaiavleniiu Gospodina Varlamova) [Her Majesty the Queen against a Visa Officer in Moscow (at the Request of Mr Varlamov)]," *LiveJournal*, February 29, 2012. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://zyalt.livejournal.com/529212.html/>

⁴⁹ "Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 Establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code)," *EUR-Lex*, Article 32. Accessed November 1, 2013: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32009R0810:EN:NOT>

chip. It is widely believed, for example, that Russian negotiators, while urging the EU to introduce a visa free regime for Russian short-term visitors of the Schengen zone, are particularly persistent in demanding that the EU lift visa restrictions as soon as possible for thousands of high-standing officials who have special passports.⁵⁰

Tourists themselves generally have little power to make their voices heard. The main problem that the entity of visa applicants (as well as the entity of frequent tourists) lacks cohesion and a common identity, therefore, its capability to organize mass actions is very limited. Another problem is that the opportunity to travel to the Schengen zone is generally not a vital interest for tourists who, as it was mentioned above, have many other options for their holidays. Yet development of interactive web resources (so-called Web 2.0) provides some additional opportunities even for such poorly organized entities, as web-based platforms reduce the cost of organizing and the cost of failure.⁵¹ There is no information about any major actions organized by “traditional tourists” though there are a lot of cases of protest actions organized by “fuel tourists” in the Baltic states and in Poland,⁵² for whom shuttle trade was a major source of income.

At least, thanks to the development of Web 2.0, potential tourists can better communicate with each other, sharing practices online, in other words creating “networks of practice.”⁵³ Such networks can elaborate advice on both how to comply to existing immigration requirements or on how to escape them using optimal tactics, largely described in the previous section. So far, while examining such discussions, I haven’t identified any calls for joint actions.

It can be concluded that apart from resorting to semi-legal tactics, tourists can react to harsh restrictive policies of destination countries, first of all, by choosing another destination or by appealing to powerful intermediaries. Other options, such as attempts to protest by organizing joint actions, look less efficient and realistic at the moment.

⁵⁰ See, for example: “Rossiia Prosit Evrosoiuz Otmenit Vizy dlia Chinovnikov [Russia Asks the European Union to Cancel Visas for Bureaucrats],” *Newsland* November 4, 2012. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/1049342/>

⁵¹ Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁵² See for example: “Aktisiznye Ogranicheniia: Latgaliia Pishet Pisma, Rezekne uzhe Protestuiet [Excise Restrictions: Inhabitants of Latgale Write Letters, Inhabitants of Rezekne Protest],” *Delfi.lv*, January 13, 2012. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/latvia/akciznye-ogranicheniya-latgaliya-pishet-pisma-rezekne-uzhe-protestuiet.d?id=42052756/>; “Benzinovaia Zabastovka. Polskie Spekulanty Perekryli Rossiiskuiu Granitsu [Benzine Strike: Polish Profiteers Shut off the Border with Russia],” *Smart News*, May 15, 2013. Accessed November 5, 2013: <http://smartnews.ru/regions/kaliningrad/7117.html/>

⁵³ John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

Conclusion

In the broad sense, the phenomenon of tourism includes a wide group of short-term visitors coming to destination countries not only for pleasure but also for conducting a wide range of other activities. It is very difficult to distinguish between “true” and “false” tourism as many trips are multipurpose, and as entrants can either represent themselves as tourists while traveling mainly for business, commercial, or other purposes, or, on the contrary, deny “tourist intentions,” pretending to be on a business trip or on a private trip.

Tourism across the EU-Russian border is largely shaped by visa and border control, determining whether visa applicants and entrants are eligible or ineligible. Such control disqualifies not only violators of existing rules but also those who arouse suspicion. Among all, the Schengen visa regime tends to make ineligible those people not rich enough even if they have a respectable status, while being rather liberal towards rich people with bad reputations if they are not blacklisted.

Some of those tourists who face the risk of being disqualified, resist such “sorting strategies” by employing various legitimate, semi-legitimate or evidently illegitimate tactics. The most widespread among the tactics employed by travelers to Schengen countries are choosing an “easy” consulate, canceling temporary hotel and ticket bookings after visas are obtained, providing false employment and salary certificates, and changing passports containing “compromising” entry and exit stamps.

Apart from applying these and other tactics, tourists have some other ways to resist excessively harsh “sorting strategies.” The most realistic way is to “vote with one’s feet” by choosing a different destination for a next trip. Another possibility, though more difficult for individual tourists, is to appeal to those intermediaries who have power to make their voices heard by authorities in destination countries. At the same time, “traditional” tourists (unlike shuttle traders and some other categories of border crossers) currently seem to be unable to organize collective actions against harsh and arbitrary immigration measures, not only because such tourists are poorly organized, but also because tourist trips are not among their primary interests that could be defended vigorously.