

European Union suspends its visa agreement with Russia

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The 27 governments of the European Union have agreed on a “complete suspension” of the visa agreement between the EU and Russia. As a result, the number of new visas for Russian citizens will be “significantly reduced”, declared EU foreign affairs commissioner Josep Borrell last Wednesday at a summit of EU foreign ministers in Prague.

The measures include doubling the visa fee from 35 euros to 80 euros and eliminating the standard processing time of ten calendar days after receipt of an application. A freezing of the current 12 million valid visas is also being considered by EU officials. Borrell justified the aggressive move by citing a “significant increase in border crossings from Russia to neighbouring countries”, which allegedly pose a “security risk”.

In addition to the millions of holidaymakers directly affected, Russian middle-class and working-class citizens are also to be systematically excluded from Europe. Only a few days after the war began, the EU imposed an airspace ban on Russian planes and airlines, which has since forced holidaymakers from Russia to enter the EU by land via Finland, Estonia and Lithuania, where they face open hostility from governments and authorities.

The visa agreement between the EU and Russia had allowed easier visa issuance for travellers since 2007 but, following the start of the war, it was initially suspended for businesspeople, government representatives and diplomats. The German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock (Green Party)—who is said to have played a key role behind the scenes in negotiating the agreement between EU states—explained that in future, visa applications from Russian citizens would take “several months in cases of doubt”.

For pro-European oligarchs, however, all doors

remain open. According to a report in the daily *Die Welt*, front companies and offshore registrations are routinely used to disguise the owners of aircraft and circumvent the airspace ban. Those able to invest between 1.15 and 2 million euros can also obtain citizenship documents in Malta, Cyprus and Bulgaria which guarantee freedom of movement throughout the Schengen area.

A number of EU states had called for even more comprehensive measures, up to and including a complete halt to the issuing of visas. These included the Baltic countries as well as Poland, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and the Czech Republic—which currently holds the EU Presidency—have already announced or introduced such travel bans. According to the magazine *Der Spiegel*, Baerbock warned that the aim of Western sanctions must be to ensure the Russian people turn “against their own president”.

In reality, the measures are an escalation of the collective forms of punishment against Russia deployed by EU states since the start of the Ukraine war. The measures are aimed at fuelling the war and strengthening the most right-wing forces in Russia, Ukraine and the countries of the EU.

The war is a murderous proxy war, triggered by the invasion of the Russian military but systematically provoked and planned by the main Western powers over many years. Contrary to the deafening propaganda of governments and bourgeois media, the NATO powers, in arming Ukraine and weakening Russia, are pursuing an imperialist agenda aimed at bringing Ukraine under Western control and dividing up Russia.

The visa restrictions are part of the EU states’ efforts to foment nationalist agitation and attack anti-war sentiments, which have deep roots in the working class

following two world wars. By pressuring and attacking Russian artists, scientists and now travellers, the aim is to prepare the people of Europe for even more brutal wars, up to and including nuclear war with millions of lives at stake.

Baerbock made clear to the press that the end of the visa agreement was the prelude to an aggressive “strategic reorientation” of the European Union’s policy towards Russia. This comprises “four points”: further “support for Ukraine”, “support for Russian opponents of the regime”, “strengthening our own defences” and “cooperation with global partners to defend international law”.

When a German foreign minister speaks of “working with global partners to defend international law”, this must be understood as a thinly veiled threat. It means that the NATO powers and their allies—who have been responsible for countless wars, mass bombardments, coups d’état and drone terror all over the world in recent decades—are to have the sole right to break “international law” in order to enforce their imperialist interests.

What Baerbock, Borrell and the European capitalist governments have in mind is a comprehensive militarisation strategy that subordinates all aspects of social life to a policy based on war. As Baerbock herself stressed, there must be “no let-up” vis-à-vis Russia, “neither in support for Ukraine nor in sanctions”. Since “social peace” was at stake as a result of Europe’s energy dependency, a “more resilient” society was needed in addition to “new technologies and equipment”.

The “four points” were elaborated in a paper by Baerbock and French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna and presented to the other member states for the informal EU foreign ministers’ meeting in Prague as a “proposal for discussion”. The paper, classified as “confidential” but made available to the Deutsche Presse-Agentur, states that “Russia’s war against Ukraine must turn into a strategic failure”. This failure is defined in the “broadest sense” and includes a “decoupling from Russia in the field of energy”.



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