

## Deal Close With EU on Visa-Free Travel

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**The**  **Moscow Times**

Russia and Europe are close to endorsing visa-free travel, the country's top migration official told the State Duma on Wednesday.

The Federal Migration Service and the European Union are close to signing executive protocols for readmission agreements — a condition for introducing a bilateral visa-free regime, said migration chief Konstantin Romodanovsky, Interfax reported.

So far, 17 of 24 executive protocols have been signed, and six more "only need to be signed," Romodanovsky said. He did not comment on the status of the one remaining protocol.

Readmission agreements will allow European authorities to return Russian and foreign nationals who violate their period of stay back to their home countries.

Meanwhile, Russia can start issuing biometric foreign passports with fingerprints this year, Romodanovsky said. Currently, Russian biometric foreign passports only contain one biometric parameter — a 3-D photo.

In his Wednesday report, Romodanovsky also outlined the scale of foreign migration

and proposals for dealing with it.

About 4.5 million foreigners currently work in Russia, counting both legal and illegal workers, Romodanovsky said.

Migrant laborers account for up to 7 percent of Russian workers, he said.

He added that 13 million to 14 million foreigners arrive in Russia every year and that 70 percent of them come from the CIS, with another 10 percent from the European Union. One-third of the arrivals stay for up to seven days, he said.

Romodanovsky reiterated a proposal he made last month to increase from five to 10 years the maximum prison term for traffickers of illegal migrants and extend the ban for entering the country from three to five years for foreigners who repeatedly violate the Administrative Code.

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