

A Visit to Visa Hell

Written by OCCRP

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Greek Consulate in Odessa, Ukraine

One of the most vivid examples of the treatment that ordinary people might face was the widely celebrated case of Ukrainian Valentyna Maley, who wanted to spend her vacation in Greece last summer.

As she recalled it in various media interviews, it wasn't the first time she had visited this Mediterranean country, and so she had no second thoughts and she bought a €1,300 tour from a travel agency. And yet she was refused a visa, on the ground that she goes to Greece too often; she was required to come to the Greek Consulate for a personal interview.

As she recounted her story, when she appeared and tried to explain her case, the consulate's Ukrainian employee told her she was not to talk unless she was asked to. Suddenly, she said, the consul started yelling at her in Greek, and then started making faces at her. As she said at the time, the consul, Dimitrios Mikhalopulos, started hitting the bulletproof glass between them, as if trying to hit her on the face and slap her. Shocked, she left. This case prompted

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the Ukrainian foreign ministry to intervene, and, as a result, the Ambassador of Greece apologized to Maley. The consul, Mikhalopulos, soon left his post, supposedly due to a scheduled rotation.

Outburst Came at Ordeal's End

The encounter with such hostility was the end of a long ordeal that Ukrainians who apply for visas must face. In addition to the regular package of documents, which includes passport, application form, and employment letter that confirms what the income is and that there is an income, embassies can require a statement from the police that a person has no other passports, bank statements, a review of money flow from and to the applicant, and even the income statement of the company that has written a letter confirming that the applicant works for it.

Among the other requirements that are applied individually, these items can be required: police-verified biographies of close relatives; notary-verified photos of the apartments or other property the applicant owns. If the visas are asked for an entire family, all members can be required to deposit some money at the bank for the duration of their visas. Ukrainians applying for visas over 90 days to the Czech Republic, for instance, must submit a medical certificate that the applicant does not have AIDs, TB or syphilis, and the medical certificate must be notarized and certified.

--Vlad Lavrov, Korrespondent magazine