

**Russian Visa Regulations and Western
Music Business**
Challenges and Future

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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>I detta examensarbete introducerar jag problematiken som uppstod med visum regleringar sedan 2013 för utländska artister som kommer på turné till Ryssland. Jag presenterar den nuvarande visumprocessen som en del av produktionen för en turné genom användning av relevant litteratur för att skapa en teoretisk grund för detta arbete och för att kunna definiera visum alternativ. Dessutom använder jag av min egen arbetserfarenhet på Live Nation Finland som visum koordinatör för utländska artister. Syftet är att identifiera den uppstådda problematiken samt förklara bakgrunden till den och hitta relevanta lösningar till visum regleringar så att utländska artister kan i framtiden smidigt komma på turné till den Ryska Federationen. Jag har valt den kvalitativa metoden i denna uppsats och konserter av Madonna och Bloodhound Gang som fallstudier. Jag implementerar olika aspekter av kulturella-, politiska- och businessrelationer mellan Ryssland och Västvärlden när jag utvärderar resultaten av problematiken som uppstått. Jag har genomfört intervjuer med nyckel personer inom produktions- och promotionsfältet för konserter i Ryssland. Mitt syfte är därmed att utveckla en förståelse för problemet och att hitta alternativa lösningar åt den relativt känsliga situationen med visum regleringar idag. Den politiska spänningen som Ryssland och Västvärlden står inför år 2014 sätter ett mörkt moln på framtiden och det är för tidigt att säga om förändringar inom visum regleringar kommer att ske snart.</p>	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This thesis introduces the problematic of the Visa Regulations for foreign artist coming on tours to Russia since 2013. I present the existing visa processes as a part of the production process of a tour using relevant literature and implementing my own working experiences at Live Nation Finland as a Russian Visa coordinator for foreign artists. The aim is to identify the arisen problematic and its background and finding the right solution so that the foreign artists could entry Russian Federation smoothly. I have used a qualitative method in this thesis and Madonna and Bloodhound Gang as case studies. When analyzing the outcome of problematic, I implement different perspectives of cultural, political and business relations between Russia and the Western World. I have used interviews with lead people in production and promotion field of the entertainment business in Russia. I aim to develop an understanding of the problem and to find the alternative options that could solve the itchy situation with the visas that the foreign artists face in entering the Russian Federation. The political tension that Russia and the Western World are facing in 2014 puts a dark cloud on the future to come and it is rather early to say whether the changes in the Visa Regulations are to be made soon.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä:</p> <p>Tämä lopputyöni esittelee ulkomaalaisten artistien viisumihakemusten ongelmia Venäjän alueelle kiertueelle pääsemiseen vuodesta 2013 lähtien. Esittelen käytännössä olevan viisumiprosessin osana kiertueiden tuotantoprosessia yhdistäen käytäntöön olennaista kirjallisuutta sekä omia kokemuksiani Live Nation Finlandin Venäjän alueen viisumikoordinaattorina ulkomaalaisille artisteille. Lopputyön tähtäimenä on yksilöidä viisumikäytäntöön muodostuneet uudet ongelmat sekä löytää parhaat keinot ulkomaiselle artisteille päästäkseen kiertueillaan myös Venäjälle esiintymään. Lopputyössäni käytän kvalitatiivista menetelmää sekä Madonnaa ja Bloodhound Gang yhtyettä tutkimustapauksina. Ongelmien analysoinnissa olen havainnoinut eri näkökulmia kulttuurin, politiikan ja kauppasuhteiden Venäjän ja Läntisen Maailman välillä. Olen haastattelut viihdealan tuotanto- sekä promoottoriyritysten avainhenkilöitä jotka työskentelevät Venäjällä. Yritän luoda ymmärryksen ongelman ytimeen sekä etsiä siihen vaihtoehtoisia ratkaisuja jotka voisivat ratkaista ulkomaisten artistien kiertueongelmat viisumien suhteen Venäjällä. Tämän hetkiset poliittiset jännitteet Venäjän ja Länsimaiden välillä heijastavat uhkakuvia tulevaisuudelle ja sen vuoksi onkin aikaista sanoa tapahtuuko viisumien myöntämisessä muutoksia positiivisempaan suuntaan lähitulevaisuudessa.</p>	
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Preface

I want to start this preface with words by Paula Leone, a woman that I have been fortunate to have worked with during my two years at Live Nation Finland:

” Music should unify us, not divide us”

During my work at Live Nation, I have met many struggles and difficulties in processing Russian visas for international artists going on tours to so fascinating but so isolated and conservative at the same time.

In this thesis work, I want to primarily implement my own working experiences and reflections alongside my studies in Cultural Management at Arcada- University of Applied Sciences; with additional perspective of my studies in Political Science at the University of Helsinki.

As both Russian and Finnish citizen, I want to combine my understanding of Russian culture and language with an angel of Western culture.

I would like to dedicate this thesis work to the wonderful people that I have been fortunate to have worked with and to the people that supported me in fulfilling this accomplishment.

Sincerely,

Russian Visa Regulations and Music Business

Challenges and Future

1. Introduction

In July 2013, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation ceased to issue visas with the words “cultural relations” to foreign artists coming on tour in Russia. The reason that the government gave was pronounced as simple – these visas are intended for travelers engaged in non-commercial activities on the territory of the Russian Federation. ([Russian and India Report; August 12, 2013](#))

1.1 Background

Since summer of 2013, foreign artists can no longer receive visas by invitation from the Ministry of Culture under the aegis of cultural links if they come to Russia to conduct commercial activity, according to state-run news agency RIA. ”The support of show business is not included among the tasks of the Ministry of Culture”- that is how First Deputy Minister of Culture Vladimir Aristarkhov stated it. ([Russian and India Report; August 12, 2013](#))

But where do we draw the strict line between pop culture and show business? Today they are grown together. Or is there something else to this? The speculation follows.

On the other hand there has been another discussion on whether it is the reaction of the Russian government on growing political tensions between the US and Russia (and nowadays also EU and Russia) combined with increasing friction between the anti-gay

law passed by Russian parliament and the pro-gay attitudes of Western pop stars. International Entertainment stars have used the stage as platforms to speak out for the human rights others state that these actions are nothing but artists' PR stunts. ([The Guardian; August 16, 2013](#))

Putin defended the “anti-gay”-law, saying: “Any minority's right to be different must be respected, but the right of the majority must not be questioned.” And the government represents the majority of the population. Furthermore the Ministry of Cultural affairs states: “We are ready to support the performances of talented artists, but do not have the right to, and will not, engage in violations of the law”. ([Russia beyond Headlines; August 12, 2013](#))

One way or another, this prevents artists to come to Russia on a tour. With visa regulations not catering for their needs, Western artists wanting to perform in Russia face big obstacles. Meanwhile, main representative of the entertainment sector in Russia call for changes in the current system. With this said it means that the future looks dark for promoters to get International artists into the country.

1.2 Research Question

Furthermore this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: What has to be changed in the visa regulations so that International stars can have a smooth entry into the Russian Federation?

In order to provide an answer, sub-questions are formulated: 1. Why is this problem emerging so strongly today? 2. To what extend does pop culture influence political, cultural and business relations?

1.3 Research Goals and Methods

For this research several goals have been set: my aim is to analyze and reflect on the problematic in this field from the perspective of promotion and production using interviews and taking different cases like concert of Lady Gaga, Bloodhound Gang and Madonna as examples. I will apply my own experience from working within Live Nation Finland (January 2011- November 2012) in coordinating the Russian Visas for International artists from preparing documents to finalizing the process.

Moreover, I will be interviewing (per e-mail) Paula Leone from the leading visa agency in the entertainment business - [Traffic Control Group](#) in New York which has been dealing with Russian Visa authorities for the past 10 years; and that I have been fortunate to have worked closely with. Last but not least I will be interviewing the front men in the production- and promotion field of the entertainment business in Russia: Chad Taylor (production manager at Live Nation Finland), Natalya Popova (production manager at Glavclub, St.Petersburg and Pop Farm concert agency, Moscow), Oksana Gurtovaya (production manager at Concert Agency "[Melnitsa International](#)", Kiev) and Nina Taylor (freelance tour manager at Live Nation Finland). These people are the cornerstones in the visa process and have a great knowledge of and moreover experience in how the visa process evolve in reality.

2. About the Visa process

2.1 Defining the Visa Type

All types of Russian entry visas are received through Russian embassies and consulates. Russia is a vast and diverse nation that continues to evolve politically, economically and socially. Russian visa requirements are complex, and alien citizens must take care they do not unintentionally violate entry and exit regulations (travel.state.gov; 2014).

There are several types of visas defined by Consulate General of Russia:

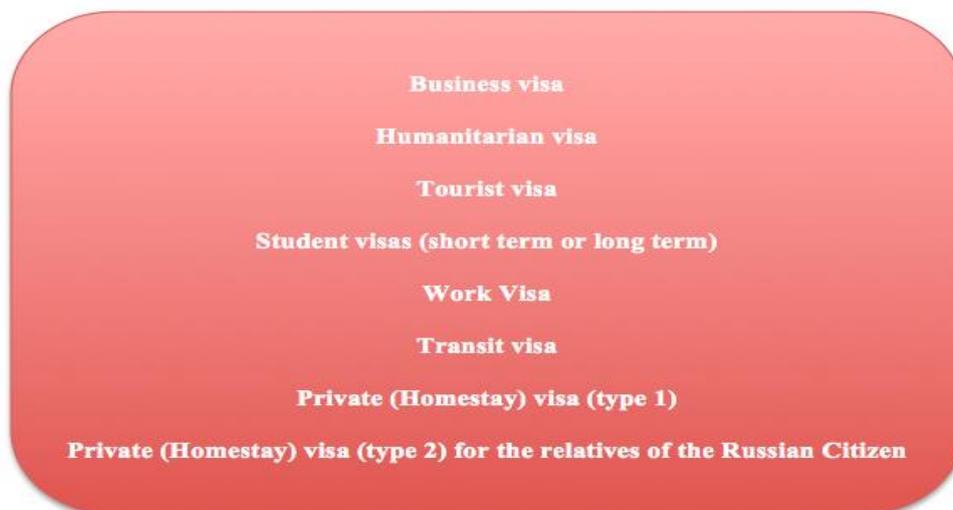


Figure 1; (consulrussia.org)

In this thesis I will draw your attention mainly to the Business/Humanitarian-, Tourist- and Work Visa types, as they are the visa types generally used and most suitable for international performing artists.

The type of visa you need to apply for depends on the purpose of your trip and the length of your stay. Most visitors to Russia require only the easily obtainable single entry Tourist Visa, valid for **one month**. If you are planning **to stay for longer**, or need to enter Russia more than once during your trip, then you will need a **Business/Humanitarian Visa** (previously also known as Cultural Visa) even if you're traveling for pleasure. Once you've decided on the type of visa you need, you will then need to find a person or company who will supply you with the documents required by Russian consular departments to process your visa application. These documents are usually referred to as **visa support documents**. ([Step by Step visa Guide; saint-petersburg.com; 2013](#))

If you are pre-booking accommodation in Russia and going on a short visit, then nearly all hotels and most travel agencies will be able to issue you with the necessary support documents, also known as Tourist Vouchers, to apply for a maximum one-month Tourist Visa. Dates of validity of the Tourist Visa will correspond with the dates mentioned on your tourist voucher/confirmation from the hotel or travel agency. Important to be aware of is that if you are planning to travel to other cities than Moscow or St. Petersburg, where the hotels have rights to issue these necessary tourist vouchers, you will need to turn to only specific travel agencies to obtain this a tourist voucher. ([Step by Step visa Guide; saint-petersburg.com; 2013](#))

Shortly, if you applying for a Tourist Visa, you require the following relevant documents:

- Tourist Voucher
- Tourist Confirmation
- An original, valid, and signed passport with at least one blank page, valid for at least 6 months after the end of your stay
- Two signed copies of the Russian visa application form (Attachment 1), with all fields completed.
- A passport-size photo (some embassies/consulates ask for two copies), signed on the reverse

([Russian-visas.net](#))

As mentioned earlier, for business or a **longer stay than one month**, you will require a **Business Visa/Humanitarian Visa**, issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the request of the company or individual who is sponsoring your visa application- in this case these are the promoters or concert agencies.

Many travel companies are able to obtain such invitations for a fee, and can arrange to have them couriered to you if your consulate requires an original copy ([Step by Step visa Guide, saint-petersburg.com; 2013](#)). Business visa can be valid for up to 90 days and can be issued for single or double entry.

Also business visa can be issued for multiple entries and can be valid for up to 1 year. Dates of validity of the visa will correspond with mentioned on your **Letter of Invitation** issued by a Russian Federal Migration Service agency *or* a **Telex** from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ([vfsglobal.com; 2014](#))

Telex is a communications system consisting of teletypewriters connected to a telephonic network to send and receive messages. ([ask.com; 2013](#)) All the passport data is telexed directly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to any Russian consulate that a person is obtaining Russian visa in. That might be for example Russian Consulate in Helsinki, New York or London.

When the needed paperwork process is done by the Russian Authorities, you will get the *telex number* and name of your inviting company from by email and with this information you submit your documents to the consulate. *Telex highly increases your chances of obtaining a long term Russian visa.* The procedure of telex is more convenient as you do not need to pay for the postage services in receiving the original copy of the invitation. (Anton A. Huurdeman; 2003)

A *business visa* may be issued for various reasons including *cultural relations* and therefore mainly refer to *Humanitarian visa*. Humanitarian visa can be issued for the foreign citizen traveling to Russia with sport, cultural, scientific-technical, public, religion, charity or humanitarian purposes ([consulrussia.org; 2014](#)).

2.2 How does it work in practice - my personal experiences

As I have mentioned earlier- my previous working experience in Live Nation Finland, January 2011- November 2012 has covered the preparation of the visa documents for the Authorities. I will further on present my working process for the visa preparations.

To start with, after a show of an artist is confirmed, the main task is to start with the production process. In my case, I was responsible for the visa processes. My first step was to get in contact with the management of the artist and the tour management.

The first approach was usually a general letter/email to the Tour Manager of the Artist with the short presentation of Visa Requirements (Attachment 2). My letter of presentation also specified the visa agencies that Live Nation was using as a delegate, instead of putting the tour management in direct contact with the consulate. The visa agencies were two, as I mentioned earlier, [Traffic Control Group](#) in New York and [Scott's Tours](#) in London. Mainly this was due to that the visa agencies are professionals in their field with good developed relations to the Russian consulates in their representative cities.

It was very important to specify which city the Artist managements chose to process visas in as it was further delegated by me to Russian colleagues and Authorities so that they therefore knew which city Consulate to send telexes to.

Traffic Control Group has been providing immigration and visa services to the Music, and related industries, since 1983. The agency coordinates the passports, work visas and immigration documents for rock/pop/classical/alternative musicians and their entourages for international tours. The agency also supports industry bodies in lobbying for changes in immigration practices for the benefit of the touring musicians (tcgworld.com; 2013)

Scott's Tours on the other hand was founded in 1991 and offer a fast, reliable visa service for most of the major destinations of the world like India, Japan, China and Russia, to name a few. ([Scott's tours; 2013](#))

Afterwards, when my first contact to the Tour Management was established, I gathered the passport scans and separate passport information on the entire touring party of the Artist, which could for example vary from 3 to 100 people, in one file and sent it further to the Russian promoters that delegated it with needed paperwork to the Russian Authorities. In most cases if the concert was co-promoted with Russian [Melnitsa International Concert agency](#) the letter of invitation and in this case a *telex*, came from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Usually, the process from the preparation of the documents for Russian authorities until receiving the telex number took approximately 2-4 weeks; depending on the bank holidays in Russia.

I was the delegate for providing the telex number, which I received from Russian colleagues, to the chosen visa agency (in New York or London) as well as the inviting company and afterwards all the communication mainly concentrated from the Tour Management and me to the Visa Agency and Tour Management. The Visa agency received directly the original passports from the Tour management, prepared all the papers and delegated them to the Russian Consulate with the awaiting telex number. That process might have taken a week but the special arrangements could be done in case of an emergency and lack of time. After the visas were officially issued, the passports were returned to the Tour management of the Artist.

In most of the cases if the artist is travelling on tour and there are no possibilities for him/her to provide his/her only passport due travelling, special arrangements are usually made; the artist may obtain two passports at the same time.

My main task was therefore to keep an eye on that visas were processed on time for the concert.

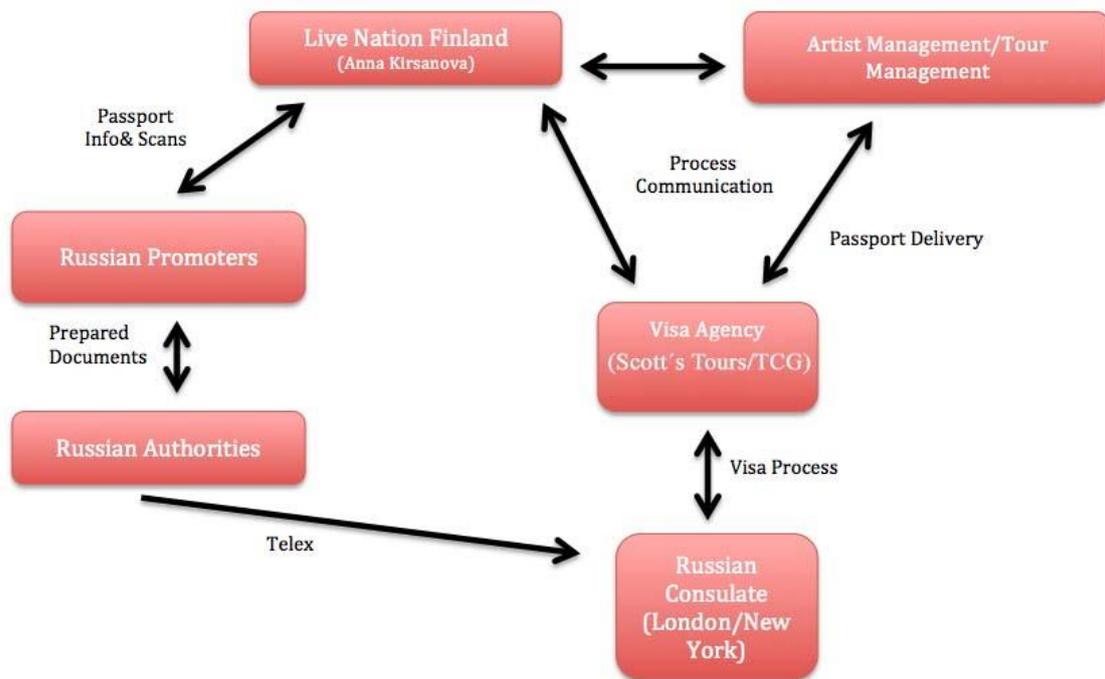


Figure 4; My working process (Anna Kirsanova; 2014)

The process that I have presented above is the ideal one. Unfortunately, it does not always evolve as preferred. The first problematic that the promotion company could face was the contact establishing to the tour management or manager him/herself. For example, if a band is on a world tour and extremely busy moving from one city/country to another; the communication is therefore slow and sometimes the management is not fully aware of that the Russian visa process is complicated, bureaucratic and takes time.

One could face cases where the time ran out for processing the humanitarian/business visas and the only possibility left was to process a tourist visa supported by a voucher from the hotel or a travel agency. The voucher could be issued in a few hours and therefore the visa was stated naturally as an *express tourist visa*; but in this case

followed by extra visa costs. This has been extremely exceptional and rather unwanted case, as tourist visa is not the type of visa that should be applied for an Artist performing in Russian Federation. The Artist coming to perform is simply not a tourist. Moreover, once you applied for a tourist visa, you cannot change the period of staying as the visa is given for the exact stay.

Also, this means that any international star performing in Russia may be accused of illegal entrepreneurial activity, since tourist visas do not authorize them to take paid employment ([Russia Beyond headlines; May 1, 2013](#)).

In other cases when the touring party was big and changing the entourage rapidly, this could cause re-issuing continuously the documents and new telexes alongside with invitations. Let us say that 2 weeks before the show, the cameraman “x” was removed from the touring party and a replaced by a new member. This simply meant extra paperwork and quick actions.

Above presented is the way that the visa issuing process has somehow succeeded until the year of 2013. In an interview with a production manager, Natalya Popova from Glavclub in St Petersburg, she clearly stated: “The visa procedure in recent past (until 2013) was not so horrible”. Popova continues: “Sometimes we just have not had time. Especially when the artist was on tour and they couldn't stay more than 2-3 days at one place”.

Tour Manager Nina Taylor, who has been responsible for coordinating many tours of international artist into Russia, adds: “I think the visa process in general has always been hard. It is so complicated that it makes the artist very scared of even starting the process. It is rather unnecessary paperwork with a lot of obligatory documents to be provided and extremely bureaucratic. It is one of the hardest points of starting a tour”.

There are bigger problems that Entertainment industry has come across with over the past year of 2013. Since summer of 2013 Russian Federation has ceased to issue visas with the words “cultural relations” to foreign artists coming on tour to Russia. Mainly explaining that the reason is the specification of Humanitarian visa says that you cannot get paid in Russia and that the artists therefore are not on the *cultural exchange*.

[\(Russian and India Report, August 12, 2013\)](#)

In fact, Russia’s immigration law does not define a “touring performer,” so even the most famous international stars coming to play in Moscow are considered “foreign citizens performing work.” In this sense, Madonna has no more right to be paid in Russia than guest workers from former Soviet republics. ([Russia beyond Headlines; May1, 2013](#))

However, no other type of visa, including business and tourist or work, entitles artists to come to Russia on a tour without facing problems.

[\(Russia beyond Headlines; August 12, 2013\)](#)

3. Visa Options in 2013

In this chapter I will present the existing but rather “poor” options of how the visa regulation works in reality due this day after the announcement of the government in summer of 2013.

3.1 What are the options left?

In my interview with Paula Leone, paralegal at Traffic Control Group, she explains the situation due to this day: “It has become very difficult for the Russian promoters to obtain *telexes* as invites from Ministry of Culture and they were *forced to issue*

“business invites” instead of telexes; this scenario generates additional costs on the Russian side, as they must FedEx to us the hard copies and once here, often we find mistakes and this in turn creates additional delays in the processing of visa”. Production Manager at Live Nation Finland, Chad Taylor gives an example “It is expensive to send nowadays an invitation by FedEx over night from Moscow to NY, per piece it could cost 500 €. Well, telex was quicker, but it is still so ancient. The rest of the world has Internet for sending out information.”

Also Natalya Popova mentions the other problem - bureaucracy. “In the 21st century we still need to send paper invitations to the other end of the world in some cases. Also, you cannot make any spelling mistakes (which sometimes happens), or your application will be rejected and you can't fix them on place, all the procedure should be started from the beginning. It's ridiculous!” - Popova outrages.

Furthermore, Chad Taylor comments on the bureaucracy matter: “In Russia, everything connected to government is highly bureaucratic. Every year it just gets more difficult and more expensive. The Russian customer ultimately pays this cost, since it is rolled into the ticket price. The visa application forms are ancient, the questions are non-relevant, and the cost is exorbitant”, Mr. Taylor says.

As I have mentioned earlier- there is one more option that could theoretically be applied to the migration of the International Artists to Russia. That only option would leave us with the Work Visa, which is the most complex and expensive visa type.

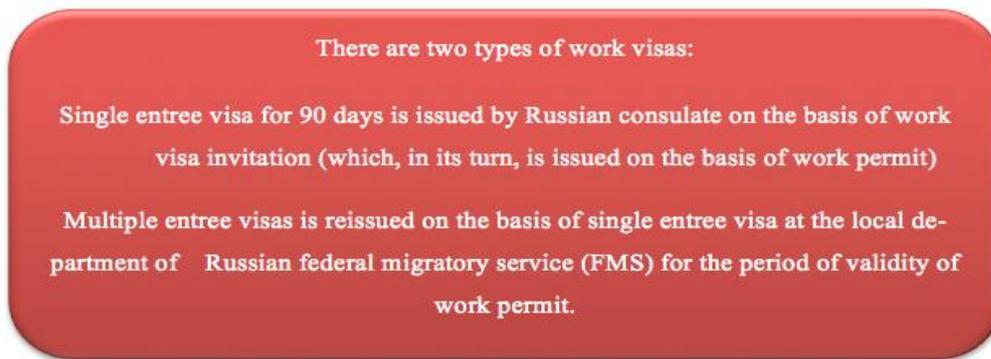


Figure 5; “The two types of working visas” (consulrussia.org)

The only option to apply for a work visa through the Federal Migration Service (FMS), which is a very difficult process that takes about half a year and you will need a lot of paperwork to get it ([Russian and India Report, August 12, 2013](#)). In my interview with Natalya Popova, she mentions:” In entertainment business you can confirm the show 2 months before it, which means there are no chances to get a working visa for the artist on time as it takes at least 6 months to get it”.

In an article in Russia Beyond the Headlines, ([Russian and India Report, August 12, 2013](#)) I found an interview with Dmitry Kofanov, CEO of NS Consulting and a lawyer specializing in Russian labor law. He explains the following: “Employment of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation is governed by Federal Law No. 115. No matter what kind of contract is entered into with a foreign performer – employment, civil, or any other – if income is involved, the performer must get a work permit, while the inviting party must get authorization to employ foreign workers”.

3.2 Criticism of the Working Visa

I will further present the problematic of the Work visa as well as an overall view on the situation as today.

Followed by problems with bureaucracy there is another rather difficult issue with the option of the working visa - the Artist would also be *required to terminate all existing contracts* in his/her home country. It is hard to imagine that, for example Madonna would terminate contracts with her agents for a tour to Russia. Since all artists work with several agencies, major problems arise. ([Russian and India Report, August 12, 2013](#))

Furthermore, it seems absurd if we for example take a *music festival*. It represents the cultures of many different countries. Music festivals bring artists into any country within the framework of cultural exchanges. Let me define *cultural exchange*- the word phrase cultural exchange is defined as the exchange of individuals between different countries. This particular exchange is known to take place between students, *artist*, and athletes, in addition to many other types of individuals and professionals who express interested in it. ([dictionary.com; 2014](#))

“A businessman who comes for six months, and an artist coming for two days – are two fully different things. If a work visa becomes the only option, artists will simply stop coming here. To obtain a work visa, you need half a year, and it costs a fortune. We must understand that the majority of artists who come to club concerts get about € 200–300 for one performance. To get a work visa would cost more than this, and they simply will not come here. In the end, the audience will suffer, as well as the country's reputation.” Ilya Bortnyuk, general director of Light Music ([Russian and India Report, August 12, 2013](#)).

4. Why are we facing these problems?

In this chapter I will present the answers from the interviews reflecting the outcomes of the challenges the Artist are facing today. I will look at different aspects and relations between music, politics, culture and business.

4.1. Money, politics and music business?

I will begin this chapter with the following statement:

"The visa problem is primarily a political problem.

Technical issues are secondary here"-

European Economic and Social Committee President Henri Malosse

[\(Visa Free Europe; August 8, 2013\)](#)

In my interview with Chad Taylor he lifts up an important aspect: “It comes down to money. The Russian Federation does not consider a paid performance as a cultural event. Since the artist is paid, then the government feels that this is a “business transaction”. This is the same process in the United States, when certain individual states started demanding local taxes to be paid on income derived while visiting their territory. This was mainly aimed at athletes (basketball, baseball), but ended up applying to musicians and their technical staff. I think it should be handled with visa free travel since the artist’s fee is already subject to 18% VAT from the Russian Federation.”

Let me explain further. It is important to note the distinction between *withholding* and *taxation*. Generally, *withholding* is required of anyone making a payment to a foreign

artist for services performed in a foreign country. Withholding is the mechanism by which the Taxation Authorities ensure that it collects taxes owed by foreign artists. (artistsfromabroad.org; 2014).

For example in Finland if you are a foreign artist or sportsman, and you give a performance or participate in a sports event, the fee that you receive will normally be subject to Finnish tax. Tax at source will be withheld on payment at the rate of 15 per cent regardless of whether the compensation is characterized as wages or any other type of income. (vero.fi; 2014)

Chad Taylor explains: “In Russia, this 18% VAT on the fee is actually to be paid by the promoter. All artists going to Russia usually make the contracts of a net fee (meaning the tax is not their problem), but the Russian law states that you should pay VAT on this fee. Live Nation specifically takes the VAT on the fee as a "show cost" and it comes out of the artist’s money if they break percentage (on a profit split show). So this means that when a show gets cancelled, the biggest problems arise for the promoter, not the Artist”.

Most promoters of concerts for international performers in Russia stay in the business until the first conflict with law enforcement. As soon as promoters smell trouble, they go bankrupt – only to start a new company under a different name some time later and do it all over again ([Russia beyond Headlines; May1, 2013](#))

“This is, of course, a business and politics aspect of the problem- money. A VAT is only a VAT, but the question is that the Russian Federation seems to put on this matter is: should the artist pay normal “salary related” tax once he/she is performing and getting paid in the Russian Federation?

It all comes down to the money in this case and unfortunately it is only the deputies in Russian Duma that could carry the answers”, Mr. Taylor adds.

"If a foreign national's activity in Russia is aimed at making a profit, including through commercial performances, the said national must receive a work permit from the Federal Migration Service, and therefore must be issued a normal work visa, with the purpose of the visit stated as work for hire," the Foreign Ministry statement.

[\(Russia and India Report; April 18, 2013\)](#)

4.2. Wrong attitudes versus political propaganda?

To my further question on whether this has to do with the “anti-gay” law and pro-gay attitudes of the western pop-stars, Chad Taylor remarks: “Yes, I think it is connected to the visa process. For example there have been surveys done where Russians were asked about gay rights, and their freedom to assemble. Over half of the respondents said that they did not agree with the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community and it should not be present in their country. Maybe the government **is** representing the people and their wishes? I do not say that I personally agree with that. You can’t just tell Madonna not to come over to perform because she supports the gay rights, but you can restrict her visa”.

On the other perspective, in my interview with Natalya Popova, she tells her Russian Promoter side of the story: “Unfortunately there are a lot of factors which affect to the migration situation in common and for the show business particularly. We can’t say that we are out of the politic as we work with people from other countries and relationships between those countries directly effect on the visa situation. Madonna on her last show in Moscow decided to support Pussy Riot and gay people in our country, which of

course attracted the attention of the government and entailed problems with getting visas for other artists. Or recent situation with vocalist of Bloodhound gang insulting symbols of Russia, which has led to the situation when we couldn't get any invitations from the Ministry of Culture as they rejected all applications.”

The incident with Bloodhound Gang took place when the band, famous for its sexually explicit songs and on-stage antics, played a concert in Ukraine. On a [video](#), posted on YouTube, Hasselhoff is seen pushing the Russian white-blue-red tricolor into the front of his pants and then pulling it out of the back. That act got him barred from a music festival in Russia.” (csmonitor.com; [September 11, 2013](#))

As a remark, let me also assure you that this had nothing to do with the tension between Russia and Ukraine that we are facing in the early 2014 as this artist has also insulted the flag of Ukraine in summer 2013 (<http://youtu.be/cljAiKG-OVQ>). The Artist is now also banned from entering Ukraine.

Chad Taylor adds: “If this was done to an American flag- they would be banned from US for sure. Or if this would happen in Pakistan- he would be probably dead by now”.

Natalya Popova continues in her interview: “Artist should remember that many people paid a lot for tickets and promoters risk with their money and reputation and they must respect them too. It's not just the fight between anti-gay and pro-gay people, artists should understand that they are coming to another country with its own law and they should “respect” it. They may not agree with that, but this is the law. Some people can support this, some not, but for me it's kind of ridiculous if you get thousands or millions of dollars for the show and saying that you fight for the people rights.

To me it looks more like PR campaign, than the real fight for the rights of gay people. After this kind of “performances” artists come back home and live happily ever after, but the promoters the ones who have problems after.”



Figure6; “The chain reaction of events”(Anna Kirsanova;2014)

4.3 Music versus Politics

I further will try to seek to the answer to one of my research sub questions: *To what extend does pop culture influence political, cultural and business relations?* As a short example I will look at the Soviet times and The Beatles and the case with the tour of Madonna in 2012.

Music and politics have long been connected. Nowadays you can find interesting literature, which draws attention to the role of music and musicians in forms of public action. Many of these derive from studies of the former Soviet bloc, and argue that music and musicians were giving expression to resistance to the regime and even organizing opposition to it. (Sheeran, 2001; p.53)

Popular entertainment is a statement about the society, which it is portraying. These cultural displays can carry important subliminal messages regarding individualism, consumer choices and other values. For example, Soviet audiences watching American films learned that Americans owned their own cars, did not have to stand in long lines to purchase food, and did not live in communal apartments. (Lord, 2006; p.52)

For example, the effect The Beatles had in Soviet during the Cold War is an example of how music artists and their songs can become political. During this time, rock music channeled liberal “Western” ideas as a progressive and modernized art form. The Beatles symbolized the Western culture in a way that introduced new ideas that many believe assisted in the collapse of communism. As a result, the Beatles served as cultural diplomats through their popularity in the Soviet Union. Their music fostered youth communication and united people with a common spirit of popular culture. (Richmond, 2006; p.205)

In this way the music of The Beatles struck a political cord in the Soviet Union, even when the songs were not meant to be political. This is an example of how products of culture can have an influence on the people they reach outside of their own country. It also shows how a private citizen can unintentionally become a cultural ambassador of sorts.

The urge to censor music for fear of its effects is as old as music itself. (Street 2011; p.125) Over the years, folk music commented on politics directly. The reason this works is because music gets people thinking, talking, and doing. ([Huffington Post; Baret Martin; October 10, 2013.](#)) Let me present closer the case of Madonna and if it could be applied to the above mentioned.

Since Madonna played Moscow and St. Petersburg in August 2012, Russian officials have been squabbling over whether she had the right to be paid for her performances. The controversy involves Madonna’s visa category and terms of employment in Russia, as well as accusations of liability against the Ministry of Culture and the concert organizers ([Russia beyond Headlines; May1, 2013](#)). St. Petersburg legislator Vitaly Milonov, known for his anti-LGBT statements, his sponsorship of the “gay propaganda” bill and his protests against Madonna’s Russia tour, has asked the Foreign Ministry to examine the legality of the singer’s concerts in Russia. He maintained that the singer

and the promoters of her concerts in Moscow and St. Petersburg breached Russian labor laws. Madonna's visa only entitled her to take part in not-for-profit events.

In media it has mostly been stated that Milonov has been fighting against Madonna because, as he believes, she “publicly promotes a non-traditional sexual orientation” at her concerts. It is unlikely that his goal is to change the way Russia's concert and touring market works ([Russia beyond Headlines; May1, 2013](#))

In addition, Paula Leone also states in my interview: “The situation with the visa problems have started immediately after the above concert by Madonna and ultimately gave a negative effect on both sides - US and Russia”.

But let me present the data that show that the laws seem to align with Russia's rejection of homosexuality. About three-quarters (74%) of Russians said homosexuality should not be accepted by society, while just 16% said it should be accepted, according to a recent *Pew Research Center survey*. The global survey assessed attitudes on homosexuality in 39 countries and found widespread rejection of homosexuality in Russia as well as in parts of Asia, Africa and predominantly Muslim nations. Russian acceptance of homosexuality varied slightly by age. A greater percentage of people ages 18 to 29 (21%) were accepting of homosexuality than people ages 50 and older (12%). ([pewresearch.org; August 5, 2013](#))

Let me also point out that Russia is a very old and traditional country and therefore rather isolated- this could be applied to the above-mentioned data. In Ria Novosti on September 19th 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin touted traditionalism as the heart of Russia's national identity, lamenting threats like globalization and multiculturalism, the drive for a “unipolar world” and the erosion of Christian values – including an exaggerated focus on the rights of sexual minorities.

Further on this might be applied to the statement made by Putin that “Any minority's right to be different must be respected, but the right of the majority must not be questioned.” ([Ria Novosti, September 19, 2013](#))

In this case- a law is a law; despite how undesirable it may be for minority of the population. As I have mentioned earlier, in the press conference held by Ministry of Cultural affairs in Russia states: ”We are ready to support the performances of talented artists, but do not have the right to, and will not, engage in violations of the law” ([Russia and India Report; April 18, 2013](#)).

4.4. About Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy a type of includes the "exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding. ([Wikipedia; 2014](#))

Ultimately, the goal of cultural diplomacy is to influence a foreign audience and use that influence, which is built up over the long term, as a sort of good will reserve to win support for policies. (Weller, 2009; p.74)

It therefore seeks to harness the elements of culture to induce foreigners to:

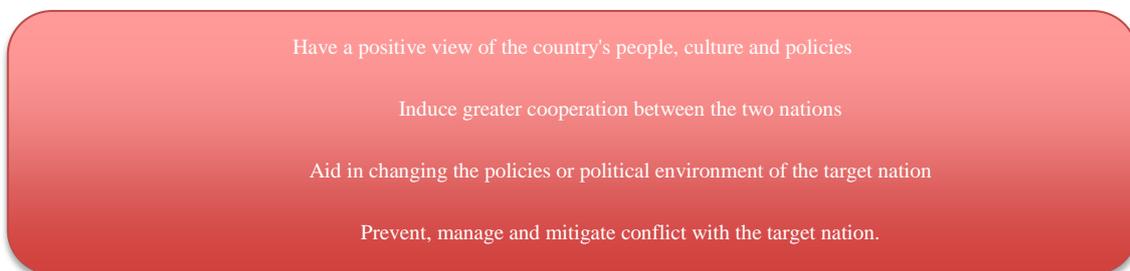


Figure7; “Cultural Diplomacy goals” (Wikipedia; 2014)

If the above mentioned is applied to the case of Bloodhound Gang or Madonna- neither “Cultural diplomacy” nor the “Cultural Exchange” were the acts of “culture exchange” so to say. Therefore the government of Russian Federation used it as an explanation of why the cultural relations visas and the law are violated.

5. What has to be changed?

I have above presented the different the problems and challenges that the visa regulations are facing today both with a political-, legal-, business-, and cultural aspect. The challenges are of course major and there should be put a lot of effort and resources to solve problems like these. I have below summarized the interview answers and analyzed articles with proposals that might put a brighter light on the future of the visa regulations. The following reflections bring me to my main research question: What has to be changed in the visa regulations so that International stars can have a smooth entry into the Russian Federation?

All over the world, there is such a concept as an *artist visa*. In the West, touring musicians receive a special category of performer’s visa. There are no such visas under Russian law. The Federal Migration Service still has not drawn up regulations for artists. They have fully airtight regulations for migrant workers, but these cannot be applied to for example to Madonna or Lady Gaga.

In the interview with Natalya Popova she states: “My opinion, that the government should introduce a separate category of visas for the Artists, sportsman etc. (people who come for kind of working purposes for few days). That could solve a lot of problems as for promoters so and artists too. The thing is that migration police sometimes don’t even know how to prove the “offence” by the artist, but they can cancel the show just for the reason that it’s may be illegal from the artist’s and promoter’s side. This is aftermath of the fact that we actually don’t have the type of visas for these cases.”

In an article by “The Guardian” is written that Yevgeny Finkelshtein, president of PMI concert agency, which organized Madonna and Lady Gaga's concerts in St Petersburg, sent an open letter to President Vladimir Putin last week seeking the creation of a separate visa for artists, athletes and their entourages. The letter was signed by 27 industry figures, including prominent artists, event promoters and venue owners. He wrote the letter to avoid any further scandals or interruptions in the arrival of foreign stars. His open letter also warns that any additional requirements or stiffening of the visa regime for artists and athletes will "inevitably lead to the country's isolation from world culture." ([The Guardian; August 16, 2013](#))

Chad Taylor also reflects the economical aspect of solving the problem. He believes that: “It is good for the economic growth and prosperity of the Russian Federation to offer visa free travel. This would be extended to musical artists as well.”

He continues: “As a world superpower, economic powerhouse, and member of the G8, they need to lift the visa restrictions for both tourist, and business purposes. It’s just simply good for the image and economy of the country. If people are coming over there to do business and sell it to the Russian people, they are still paying the VAT. It’s enterprising! The entertainment industry is nothing different than entertainment combined with enterprise. They are bringing something special to the Russian people and I think that the government should support that. Support visa free travel for all.”

Mr. Taylor gives further an example on how it could be handled: “Your passport details could be sent to the port of entry at the airport and then the visa would be issued on the spot when the name is verified against the passenger list. For instance- that’s how they do it in Egypt- they do it right at the airport”.

Further on some progress is to being made: the Russian Culture Ministry is drafting a law on ten-day visa-free travels of viewers and participants in business, cultural and sport events ([Russia Beyond headlines, November 23,2012](#)).

Whether the above will also be applied realistically to the artist performing and being paid- that remains a question.

To this day everything is unclear and uncertain, mostly because of the political tension between world countries and simply because of the lack of communication. Paula Leone comments: “In my opinion, it is not the requirements and prerequisites that create the problem(s), as it is certainly understood with violence and bombings, etc. One must be extremely thorough in issuing visas to individuals; however, it is lack of communication with the consulate that now creates the issues; we now have no means of access or understanding between us (Traffic Control Group) and the individuals at the consulate. I feel there is a great deal of pressure on the consulate when issuing visas, and I am certain it is on the U.S. side as well, due to recent political differences”.

Leone then adds: “Realistically, communication, respect and understanding would improve issuing visas, as well as, many of the other world problems. Music should unify us not divide us!”

6. Conclusions

In conclusion I want to put an emphasis on how grey the area of visa regulations still is in Russian Federation. It evolves an enormous amount of different aspects and people in the process. To point out and state that the reason is just political or cultural would be extremely narrow.

This thesis works is a scratch on the surface to begin with that represents the main problems that have arisen to this day. It reflects my own experiences before the actual actions on visa regulations started to occur and how they enrolled until this day. This issue is to this day rather “itchy” and versatile. My results from the interviews and analysis set a good base for the further research as they cover three different aspects in the visa process- political, cultural and business related.

The future to come is still uncertain and I personally believe that it will not be easy due to the political tension the world is facing in in 2014. One thing is to be done - a change, but this change is going to be long, bureaucratic and hard. It has to be done with mutual understanding and interactions between different authorities as well as countries and cultures.

I believe this area needs a deeper analysis and research involving politicians and layers in searching for the right answers and conclusions.

Attachments

Attachment 1 (http://www.visatorussia.com/russianvisa.nsf/consulate_form.html)



VISA APPLICATION

I declare that data supplied by me is correct and complete. I am aware that any false statements will lead to my application being rejected or to the annulment of a visa already granted and may also render me liable to prosecution under Russian law. I undertake to leave the territory of the Russian Federation upon the expiry of the visa, if granted. I understand that possession of a visa does not entitle its bearer to enter Russia. I will not seek compensation if I am refused to enter Russia.

**** - not to be filled by holders of diplomatic and official passports**

1. Nationality (if you formerly had USSR or Russian citizenship, please indicate when and why you lost it)		6. Purpose of visit	
2. Last name (as in passport)		7. Category and type of visa	
3. First and middle names (as in passport)		8. Number of entries Single entry <input type="checkbox"/> Double entry <input type="checkbox"/> Multiple entry <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Date of birth (dd/mm/yy)	5. Sex M <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/>	9. Date of entry in Russia (dd/mm/yy)	10. Date of departure from Russia (dd/mm/yy)
11. Passport No		Date of issue (dd/mm/yy)	
Issued by		Valid until (dd/mm/yy)	
12. Type of passport other <input type="checkbox"/> diplomatic <input type="checkbox"/> official <input type="checkbox"/> tourist <input type="checkbox"/> please specify			
13. Russian institution or organization to be visited? (for tourists - name and reference number of the host tourist company, for businessmen - name of the host organization and town, for private persons - last name, first name, middle names and home address of the host)			
14. Itinerary (places of visit)			
**15. Do you have a medical insurance valid in Russia? yes <input type="checkbox"/> Please specify? no <input type="checkbox"/>			
16. Who will pay for your trip to and stay in Russia?			
17. Marital status married <input type="checkbox"/> single (never married) <input type="checkbox"/> divorced <input type="checkbox"/> separated <input type="checkbox"/> widowed <input type="checkbox"/>			
18. Spouse's full name (if divorced or separated, please indicate maiden name if applicable)		19. Spouse's date of birth (dd/mm/yy)	
20. Spouse's place of birth			
**21. Your father's full name		**22. Your mother's full name	
23. Have you ever been issued a Russian visa? (When and where?)			
**24. Has your passport ever been lost or stolen? yes <input type="checkbox"/> no <input type="checkbox"/>			
**25. List all countries you have visited in the last ten years and indicate the year of visit		**26. List all countries which have ever issued you a passport	
**27. List your last two places of work, excluding the current one			
1. Name		Phone number	
Address		Your chief's surname	
Your position		Dates of joining - dismissal (mm/yy) (mm/yy)	
2. Name		Phone number	
Address		Your chief's surname	
Your position		Dates of joining - dismissal (mm/yy) (mm/yy)	

Attachment 2 (personal written letter)



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Live Nation Finland Russian Visa Requirements

Please note that Live Nation Finland will only accept 3 day processing fees for reimbursement. Any expedited service needs to be cleared in advance. Live Nation Finland will only cover the visa and processing fees for essential touring personal only. We are happy to arrange invitations for extra persons traveling with the artist, but the processing will be at the sole expense of the artist. We will only cover the cost of visas processed via the 2 agencies listed below.

I hope this will explain a few of the necessities for getting your visas processed for entry into the Russian Federation.

1. Please send via email a color scan of each person's photo page of their passport. Email one large PDF file to either of the agencies listed below. This keeps all scans together. If need be 2 or more files may be necessary to reduce the size. In your email please indicate that you are being processed for a Live Nation Finland show.

2. Please send a list of all persons that need visas in a rooming list format. A template is attached if you wish to use. This will help us to check off that we have everyone. On this list please indicate which agency you would like to be processed in. We have 2 agencies that we use for this. Once all invitations have been issued they will be sent to either NYC or London. All passports will then need to be sent to either of these agencies. The processing time is approx 7 days.

I will need the name of the employer, full address, phone, fax, and email. This can be the management company's address or the financial management company for the group. The employer needs to be based in the country in which the applicant resides. So if you have applicants from UK and USA, I will need an address in each country.

Scott's Tours
[Redacted]

Traffic Control Group
c/o Paula Leone

3. Very important to note that each person's passport MUST be valid for a minimum of six months AFTER their intended date of departure from the Russian Federation. So for example: show date is January 15th, 2009, then your passport must be valid till August 1st, 2009. If you have members of your party that must obtain a new passport, then please go ahead and send the ones that are ready, and we can process the others later.

4. The agencies listed above are there to assist you with any processing questions, contact them regarding timelines for submitting the passports for the actual visas. Please note that they will need approximately three weeks just to have the invitation letters.

5. If there are any of your party that need to be processed in a different country than their passport, then they need to send a scan of their residence permit as well. Example: A UK passport holder wants to be processed in New York, then you will need to show a valid USA residence permit or Alien Resident card. Otherwise, you can only be processed in your "home" country.

6. If you travel to Russia with a bus or truck, we will need you to fill in the vehicle information sheet attached.

7. All questions regarding form, scheduling, etc should be directed to the processing agencies. Live Nation Finland Oy accepts no responsibility for mis communications or processing errors.

Hope this helps, Please contact me with any questions.
Anna Kirsanova
Live Nation Finland

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