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Law Makes Finns Return Land on Border Territory

By Irina Titova

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Finnish citizens and companies that own real estate on Russian territory near the border will have to give up their land under a new law.

According to Russia's land law, which has been in effect since 2001 and has recently returned to the spotlight, foreigners cannot own real estate on border territories. A list of specific areas that fall under this category was only signed by President Dmitry Medvedev on Jan. 9, 2011.

Included on the list are municipal districts in the Leningrad region such as the Vyborgsky, Kingisepsky, Lomonosovsky, Slantsevsky and Sosnovoborsky municipal districts.

The Finnish Foreign Ministry sent an inquiry to its Russian counterpart to clarify what would happen to real estate on the lands in question bought by Finnish citizens before 2011.

Mikko Kivikoski, a counselor at the ministry, told Fontanka.ru that those citizens would have

to give back the land within a year.

"In any case, we are probably only speaking about dozens of Finnish citizens who have real estate on those territories, not about hundreds," said Niko Nurminen, spokesman for the Finnish Consulate General in St. Petersburg, adding that the consulate has not received any complaints from Finnish citizens regarding the matter.

According to research done by Finland's Eastern University last year, most Finns would like to limit the right of Russian citizens to buy real estate in Finland, the Vyborgskiye Vedomosti newspaper reported.

In 2011 alone, Russian citizens made 459 real estate deals in Finland, while 800 deals were closed in 2008.

According to the 47News portal, foreign citizens own 317 plots of land on the border territories listed by Russia, totaling 80 hectares. The majority of them are from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Estonia. Legal bodies own 22 hectares of land, including the Finnish company Neste, whose director and founder are Finns. The owner of the land is, however, Russian.

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