

# Middle Class Fleeing Putin's Russia

July 31, 2012

**The  Moscow Times**

Blogger Alexei Navalny has accused Investigative Committee head Alexander Bastrykin of concealing real estate and business interests in the Czech Republic.

But this is par for the course these days. Many Russians have purchased homes and apartments in Eastern Europe over the past few years. And besides, Bastrykin's Czech apartment is inexpensive by Moscow standards.

The larger and broader problem is that more than 100,000 people are leaving Russia every year, and the revelation that the head of the Investigative Committee bought property abroad — "just in case" — is a bad sign any way you look at it.

Practically all of my acquaintances are leaving. If they can manage their businesses from abroad, it is easier for them to leave. In addition, they relocate their parents abroad if they can afford it.

And it's not only the young people who are leaving. One middle-aged man I know works 24/7 to earn \$3,000 per month. His eyes lit up when he told me how his wife and children would be living in a small house in Brittany where the schools are better, and the food and clothes are

better quality and less expensive than in Russia.

I am talking here about middle-class emigration. They're spending most of the money they earn here on real estate overseas. The reason is simple: The prospect of six or 12 more years under President Vladimir Putin has made Russia unfit for habitation.

People are leaving because no matter what they do in Russia, they cannot escape the unhealthy and dangerous conditions here.

Yes, many can buy apartments and furnish them, but every day they must step out of their apartments and confront grungy entry ways that reek of urine. And even if you can build a 5-meter-high fence around your luxury home on Rublyovka and send your kids to school with a private driver, you can't escape Russian lawlessness. A reckless government official or mafia boss speeding through traffic could easily plow head-on into your car and walk away scot-free.

People are leaving because they cannot live in Putin's Russia. The country is no longer suitable for habitation. It has become a Third World country in terms of infrastructure and personal safety.

Russia lacks normal schools, hospitals and universities. Every interaction with government bureaucracy inevitably entails bribes and unbearable paperwork and frustration.

And the people in power who brought the country to this pathetic condition tell us that we have problems because "Russia is surrounded by enemies" and "the West doesn't like us."

Apparently, it's those evil Westerners who flooded Krymsk, cause Moscow's endless traffic jams and force government officials to take bribes.

But ordinary Russians have begun to ask the same question that Navalny asked: If the West is so bad, why did Bastrykin buy an apartment there? And why does Putin's friend and oil billionaire Gennady Timchenko hold Finnish citizenship and live in Switzerland?

I have no problem with the man who struggles to earn enough money to send his family to France, or the businesspeople who earn their fortunes here and live abroad. But I do have a problem with the countless number of government officials who are destroying this country and blaming the West while buying luxury homes in Europe and the United States.

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