

Putin Offers Depardieu a Russian Passport

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin offered French actor Gerard Depardieu a Russian passport Thursday, saying he would welcome the 63-year-old celebrity who is embroiled in a bitter tax feud with France's socialist government.

Weighing in on a dispute over a hike in taxes, Putin heaped praise on Depardieu, making the offer of citizenship in response to a question during his annual televised news conference. "If Gerard really wants to have either a residency permit in Russia or a Russian passport, we will assume that this matter is settled and settled positively," Putin said.

French daily Le Monde reported on Tuesday that Depardieu had told friends he was considering three options to escape a new tax on high earners: move to Belgium, where he owns a home; relocate to Montenegro, where he has a business; or flee to Russia. "Putin has already sent me a passport," he was quoted as saying.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said Wednesday that he would be happy to have the celebrated actor live in the North Caucasus. “Our republic would be glad to provide him with conditions worthy of a great cultural figure,” he said in comments carried by Interfax. He added that he was personally acquainted with Depardieu, admired his work and considered him “a man with a capital M.”

(Reuters, MT)

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