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French Actor Depardieu Gets Russian Home Address

By The Moscow Times

February 24, 2013



Depardieu showing off his residency stamp in his passport Saturday beside Mordovia leader Vladimir Volkov. **Yulia Chestnova**

French actor Gerard Depardieu got a new permanent address in Russia, 1 Democracy Street, on Saturday, adding a final touch to his quest to get Russian citizenship.

After receiving his Russian passport from President Vladimir Putin last month, Depardieu had it stamped with the new address in Saransk, a city of 300,000 about 640 kilometers east of Moscow.

The actor has been at the center of a heated debate over tax exiles as France's Socialist government proposes a hefty tax on the rich, but he has denied that he accepted the passport to escape the tax man.

Saransk is the provincial capital of the Mordovia republic, home to a sprawling web of Soviet-

era prison camps, where one of the members of the Pussy Riot band is serving her two-year sentence for an irreverent "punk prayer" against Putin.

Depardieu said at the ceremony that he appreciated the symbolism of his new address.

"I want to be an ambassador of democracy to the world," he said, according to Russia Today, which quoted him as saying: "Russia is a country with a great democracy."

Saransk has otherwise mostly retained Soviet-era street names. Democracy Street is surrounded by Proletariat, Communist, Soviet and Bolshevik streets.

Depardieu, who has starred in films such as "Green Card" and "Cyrano de Bergerac," enjoys broad popularity in Russia and received an enthusiastic welcome in the city. Showing off his knowledge of local history, Depardieu likened himself to Yemelyan Pugachyov, who led a peasant rebellion in the 18th century.

"Yemelyan Pugachyov was a peasant tsar who came to Kazan and to Saransk," Depardieu said in comments carried by Russia Today. "I am like Pugachyov: I am a peasant, and I want to be tsar of Saransk."

Depardieu was registered at an apartment belonging to the relatives of a Russian friend, the head of the Gosfilmofond state film archive, Nikolai Borodachyov. It is not clear whether Depardieu will actually live in the apartment, and he has no requirement to spend any particular amount of time there — though he promised to visit the city often.

Depardieu's decision to accept citizenship has earned sarcastic comments from Putin's critics, who say the actor is a tool of Kremlin spin.

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