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New Law Requires Knowledge of Russian For Residency

By The Moscow Times

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The Russian language requirement is expected to apply primariy to manual laborers from Central Asia.

President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a bill that requires foreigners to prove their ability to speak Russian while also giving his seal of approval to a separate bill that will make it easier to grant citizenship to Russian-speakers in former Soviet states.

The new immigration rules for foreign citizens, published Monday on the Kremlin's website, make it compulsory for anyone applying for a Russian work or residency permit to submit a certificate from an accredited institution, demonstrating their knowledge of the country's language, history and its basic legal framework.

Those under 18 years old, over 60 and students at accredited institutions, as well as qualified foreign specialists and their families will also be exempt from the new rules, set to go into force on Jan. 1, 2015.

Foreign residents with education documents stemming from 1991 or earlier from former Soviet countries — where Russian language was a compulsory subject in schools — have also been exempted from the exam.

The exemptions to the bill suggest that it is mostly aimed at immigrants from Central Asia, who come to major cities like Moscow to perform manual labor work and are perceived as having a limited grasp of Russian.

Those immigrants who received their permits before Jan. 1, 2015 will have to submit the necessary documentation when renewing their existing permits.

The tightening of the requirements for potential immigrants was signed into law alongside a separate pack of legal amendments that makes it simpler for Russian speakers in former Soviet Union countries to acquire Russian citizenship, Reuters reported.

That bill has been interpreted as a way to facilitate granting citizenship to residents in eastern Ukraine, who Russian government officials have said are under threat from the new central government in Kiev.

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