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Putin Signs Law Easing Citizenship Procedure

By Yekaterina Kravtsova

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The new law makes it easier for Russian speakers to gain Russian citizenship.

President Vladimir Putin signed a law on Monday simplifying procedures for obtaining citizenship for Russian speakers living outside the country and those who already live in Russia but have either no Russian citizenship or no citizenship at all.

The law is aimed mainly at native Russians who are willing to relocate to Russia from former Soviet republics. The move marks a significant change from the previous procedure — less than a decade ago, ethnic Russians were required to live for at least five years in Russia to qualify for citizenship.

Observers say the adoption of the law is not related to the recent developments in eastern Ukraine, but that it will allow some Ukrainian citizens whose first language is Russian to more easily move to Russia.

"For the most part, the law falls within the framework of the Kremlin's policy of attracting Russians who live abroad back to the country," said Sergei Boldyrev, head of the International Alliance on Labor Migration, a group of migration experts.

According to the new law, citizenship applications of native Russian speakers living abroad and wishing to move to Russia will now be considered within three months instead of six. Those whose applications are approved will immediately get a residence permit, which then allows them to receive Russian citizenship.

Interviews with candidates will be conducted in order to determine whether they can be considered native Russian speakers. Those whose relatives currently live or used to live in territories that belonged to the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, however, will be exempt from this assessment.

Russia has also established easier terms for foreigners to enter the country, extending the duration of stay and introduced simplified procedures for getting a residence permit.

Putin also signed into law on Monday an amendment that will require foreigners living and working in Russia to prove their ability to speak Russian.

Contact the author at e.kravtsova@imedia.ru

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