

Russia Mulls Opening Exclusive Foreign Goods Shop for Diplomats

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February 10, 2015



It is unclear if Russia's Western food import ban would apply to the shop.

In an apparent nod to the Soviet era, Russia's Foreign Ministry reportedly wants a "duty-free" store to open in central Moscow that would cater to foreign diplomats.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov requested in a letter dated Dec. 19 that Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev grant official permission for the store to open, news site Gazeta.ru reported Tuesday.

The store would reportedly sell goods usually carried by embassy commissaries, such as foreign food items and other products not readily available in Russia. It remains unclear whether the proposed store would be authorized to circumvent Russia's restrictions on food imports from the West, including the European Union.

The letter said the current means of distributing products to embassy commissaries are

fraught with "financial losses and delays connected with organizing deliveries," the report said.

Gazeta.ru cited the head of the Federal Customs Service, Andrei Belyaninov, as saying that private company Viktoria Trade, which has "a lot of experience working in the duty-free business," could be a suitable candidate to run the store.

Viktoria Trade is registered at 10 Ulitsa Seregina, on the central thoroughfare Leningradsky Prospekt near the Dynamo metro station, and that location was cited in an official request to open the store, Gazeta.ru reported.

The report cited a representative in Medvedev's Cabinet as saying the Finance Ministry, Economic Development Ministry and the Federal Customs Service were currently preparing their conclusions about the initiative.

"No time frames have been decided," the representative was quoted as saying.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union launched the Beryozka chain of stores, which sold goods to diplomats and the select few civilians who received income in foreign currency. The stores were rendered obsolete in the 1990s following the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

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Original url:

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