

Gerard Depardieu Gets Belarus to Spend \$2 Million on War Film

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Gerard Depardieu

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has allocated \$2 million to produce a World War II movie starring French actor — and lately Russian citizen — Gerard Depardieu, the Izvestia newspaper reported Monday.

Following a July visit by Depardieu to Belarus, Lukashenko immediately summoned his Finance Minister and ordered that the money be found for the project, Nikolai Borodachyov, head of Russia's National Film Foundation, Gosfilmofond, told Izvestia.

The movie will tell the story of the French Normandie-Niemen fighter regiment that was formed at the suggestion of Charles de Gaulle during the World War II and served on the conflict's eastern front alongside the Soviet Red Army. It is to be a co-production of Russia, Belarus and France, according to the paper.

According to Borodachyov, Depardieu will not play a leading role in the film. "Most likely he will play a mechanic or similar character," Borodachyov said.

Since storming out of France in 2012 over what he felt was an over-high income tax rate, Depardieu has befriended local and national leaders in the former Soviet Union including Lukashenko, Russia's Vladimir Putin and Chechnya's strongman ruler Ramzan Kadyrov. He received a Russian passport in 2013.

During his visit to Belarus, news reports showed Depardieu discussing measures to support agriculture and being given a lesson in hand-scything by Lukashenko, a former collective farm boss who has ruled his country for two decades.

The actor said earlier this year he was "ready to die for Russia because the people there are strong," the Voici news site reported, quoting an interview with Vanity Fair.

He also had praise for Belarus, telling France's Le Figaro in September it was a beautiful country and he wanted to move there to live "among peasants," according to a translation by news agency RIA Novosti.

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