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Russia Signs Deal to Hand Over North Korean Refugees

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North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia has signed an agreement with North Korea regarding the deportation of "illegal" immigrants, State Duma opposition deputy Dmitry Gudkov, said in an online post Wednesday.

Officially, the agreement calls for "transferring and accepting [readmitting] individuals who have illegally left and are illegally present on the territory of the Russian Federation and of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Russia's Federal Migration Service — whose deputy chief co-signed the deal with a North Korean deputy foreign minister — said in a statement earlier this week.

"Russian-Korean international agreements on readmission will help reduce the number of illegal migrants arriving in Russia or in the DPRK [North Korea]," the statement said.

But Russians are unlikely to flee illegally across the border to North Korea's impoverished totalitarian dictatorship. The agreement appears to amount to a pledge by Moscow to hand over North Korean dissidents seeking refuge in Russia.

The announcement of the deal comes shortly after the federal migration service refused temporary asylum to a North Korean citizen who said that deportation would mean death or imprisonment in his homeland's “death camps,” according to a report by Russia's RBC news agency on Jan. 27.

“Now there is yet another pretext for deporting him — an agreement has been signed,” Gudkov, the opposition-minded Russian lawmaker, wrote in his blog on the independent Ekho Moskvy radio station's website.

“Officially, [this was done] in order to strengthen ties between the countries,'” he wrote. “Strengthening the friendship with blood, how else.”

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