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Russia Expands Fast-Tracked Citizenship Scheme to All Ukrainians

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Sergey Vedyashkin / Moskva News Agency

Russia will extend its fast-tracked citizenship scheme to all Ukrainian citizens, not just those living in separatist or Russian-occupied areas, according to a decree signed by President Vladimir Putin on Monday.

Putin's decree orders that "all citizens of Ukraine" be given "the right to apply for admission to the citizenship of the Russian Federation in a simplified manner."

Russia first introduced the simplified passportization scheme to residents of the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" of eastern Ukraine in 2019.

The program was expanded in May 2022, three months into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to include Ukrainians living in the Russia-occupied Kherson region and the partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region.

Kyiv's foreign ministry condemned Monday's decree as an "encroachment" on its

sovereignty and territorial integrity, adding that the naturalization of Ukrainians is "incompatible" with international law.

"Ukrainians do not need Putin's citizenship and attempts to impose it by force are doomed to failure," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said.

Kuleba called Monday's decree "worthless" and proof of "Putin's aggressive appetites."

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The passportization expansions have added to speculation that Moscow will seek to establish permanent control over Ukrainian lands it has captured in its four-month invasion, despite Putin claiming in March that Russia had "no intention" of occupying Ukrainian territory.

A recent series of appointments of pro-Moscow officials to senior roles in occupied Ukrainian territories have added to these concerns, with analysts warning of a string of potential annexations in Ukraine's south.

Kirill Stremousov, a Moscow-installed official in Ukraine's occupied Kherson region, previously said that the fast-tracked passport system will cement Russia's presence in these regions.

"The simplified system will allow all of us to clearly see that Russia is here not just for a long time, but forever," he told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Putin has hinted at rolling out the program to all Ukrainian citizens since 2019.

"We are not only providing people who live in the [separatist republics of] LNR or DNR with this method of obtaining our citizenship. In general, we are thinking about granting Ukrainian citizens our citizenship in a simplified manner," Putin said at a press conference that year.

AFP contributed reporting.

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