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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Authorizes Deportations of Ukrainians From Occupied Areas

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Men outside their home in Donetsk. **Nikolai Trishin / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree allowing the deportation of Ukrainian citizens in Moscow-occupied areas who refuse Russian passports.

The move marks the latest chapter of the Kremlin's Russification campaign in occupied Ukraine that rights experts have slammed as a war crime.

Starting July 1, 2024, Ukrainian nationals who opt out of Russian citizenship will be deported as foreign citizens, according to the text.

The deportation decree also applies to the holders of passports issued by pro-Russian separatist governments in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which declared independence from Kyiv after Moscow annexed Crimea in 2014.

Putin in September claimed to have annexed Donetsk, Luhansk and two other partially-occupied territories, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, despite his forces failing to establish

complete control over any of them.

Ukrainian citizens in the annexed regions were given one month to opt out of Russian citizenship after Sept. 30, 2022, when the territories were formally incorporated into Russia.

Occupational authorities there will also be able to deport residents who pose a "national security threat," including for participating in unauthorized protests and supporting "terrorist" activities.

Human rights experts have criticized Putin's measures as a violation of international law and a potential war crime.

In comments to the Agentstvo investigative outlet, the experts said Putin violated some of the same norms that the International Criminal Court (ICC) cited when it issued an arrest warrant for Putin and his children's rights commissioner last month.

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