

Finnish Leader Discusses Child Dispute With Putin

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said he spoke with President Vladimir Putin by phone a few days ago and noticed no deterioration in ties with Russia amid a dispute over the rights of Russian children living in Finland.

“There are no reasons to worry about the harsh statements voiced recently on the Russian side,” Niinisto told reporters in remarks carried by Interfax on Thursday.

He said he and Putin believe that the dispute should not affect relations, adding that the two leaders might discuss the issue the next time they meet “if it is raised and is still relevant.”

He rejected a Russian proposal to set up a joint commission to monitor family affairs, saying no country has the right to veto decisions made by Finnish authorities.

The dispute is linked to Finnish authorities’ removal of 51 children from the homes of 36

Russian-Finnish families this year, Interfax said. The Russian parents in the families have turned to the Russian Embassy in Helsinki for assistance.

Most recently, Finnish social services, apparently worried about possible child abuse, removed four children from the family of Russian citizen Anastasia Zavgorodnyaya late last month after her 6-year-old daughter told schoolteachers that her father had smacked her on the rear for behaving badly. Zavgorodnyaya's youngest child was less than a week old.

The Foreign Ministry has expressed "serious concern" over the case and promised to monitor it closely.

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78