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Russian Customs Duty Could Cause Massive Delays on International Deliveries

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Russia's Federal Customs Service has drawn outcry from express delivery services after informing market players last week that all low-value shipments sent abroad by companies would now be subject to a customs duty, newspaper Kommersant reported Monday.

Companies now have to pay a duty of between 750 rubles and 1,000 rubles ($13 to $17) on each package worth 200 euros ($217) or less, the report said.

What's more, companies will need to process a separate customs form for each package, which may seriously delay customs operations, Vladimir Sarkisov, president of the Association of Express Delivery Companies, told the paper.

This could prove troublesome for express delivery companies, which previously exported 400 to 500 packages a day under one registration, Sarkisov added.

Tatyana Golendeyeva, deputy head of the Federal Customs Service, told news agency Interfax on Monday that her agency intends to ask First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov to cancel the duty on packages.

While the Kommersant report indicated that customs rules had been changed, Golendeyeva said that in fact the duty was not new — the issue was that different customs offices had applied the rule differently, and the Federal Customs Service wanted to clear up the confusion.

The customs service decided to turn to Shuvalov because the current law "may not be entirely logical and does not conform to the general ideology of simplifying documentation for small express delivery services," Golendeyeva said.

But in the meantime, companies may face delays as a sudden surplus of paperwork pours into customs offices.

"Without increasing their staff, the customs service will not be in a position to process thousands of documents a day," Ivan Shatskikh, CEO of UPS in Russia and the CIS, told Kommersant.

The Federal Customs Service first informed market players of the duty in a letter sent out last Friday, Kommersant reported, citing a copy of the letter and representatives from major express delivery services.

Conditions for sending goods through national mail carrier Russian Post have not changed, a Russian Post spokesman told Kommersant.

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