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Russian Migrant Goes On Hunger Strike Against Latvian Residency Exam

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A Russian migrant in Latvia has launched a hunger strike to protest the country's refusal to allow his elderly mother-in-law to obtain a residence permit there without taking the required language exam.

Around one-third of Latvia's population of 2 million are ethnic Russians, many of whom do not have Latvian citizenship and are thus unable to vote. Moscow has long complained about the rights of ethnic Russians in the Baltics.

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Kirill Ivanov went on hunger strike last week after what he described as a seven-month unsuccessful attempt to obtain a medical exemption from the Latvian language exam for his mother-in-law. Valentina Zakharova, he says, has developed dementia since his family migrated to Latvia in 2014.

“The 71-year-old was living in a vacuum all this time. Without documents, it’s certainly not life, but a strange existence that degrades human dignity,” Ivanov wrote on social media.

Faced with a Nov. 14 deadline to either leave Latvia or apply for a temporary permit, Ivanov announced Monday he would stop taking water in addition to refusing food to protest the decision.

Latvia’s health inspectorate refused to say why it found Zakharova’s medical report unfounded, citing the protection of patients’ privacy, the Delfi news outlet reported Wednesday.

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