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Austria Slams Russia Over Cancelled Vienna-Moscow Flight

By AFP

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Russia's transport ministry had "no comment for now." **Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency**

Austria on Thursday slammed Russia after it refused to allow an Austrian Airlines flight to be rerouted to avoid Belarusian airspace, resulting in the Vienna-Moscow service being cancelled.

Austria's Foreign Ministry said Russia's refusal to allow the route change was "absolutely incomprehensible," urging it "not to artificially impede free air traffic between Russia and Europe."

"It is in the interests of both Austria and Russia that all flights to and via Russia can continue to be carried out without any problems," it said in a statement to AFP.

Austrian Airlines cancelled the Vienna-Moscow flight on Thursday, saying Russian authorities had not approved a route change allowing the plane to avoid Belarusian airspace.

The airline said it had suspended flights over Belarusian airspace in line with a recommendation by the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), making a route change for the Vienna-Moscow flight necessary.

"A change in flight routes must be approved by the authorities. The Russian authorities did not give us this permission," the airline said in a statement to AFP.

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It added it was not yet clear if the next flight would be able to take place. A Moscow-Vienna flight is scheduled for Friday.

Passengers on the cancelled flight were rebooked, the airline said.

Russia's transport ministry told AFP that it had "no comment for now."

Belarus sparked global fury by diverting an Athens-to-Vilnius Ryanair plane on Sunday and arresting an exiled dissident in Minsk.

In response, EU leaders on Monday decided to ban Belarusian carriers from European airspace and airports as well as recommending that EU carriers should also avoid Belarusian airspace.

Austrian Airlines is part of Germany's Lufthansa group.

Lufthansa confirmed to AFP that all its airlines were "currently avoiding Belarusian airspace."

Scheduled flights to Moscow and St. Petersburg continued, it said.

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