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Belarus Bans Iraq, Syria, Yemen Passengers Flying From Turkey

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Belarus' flagship carrier Belavia announced Friday that it will no longer transport passengers from three Middle East countries from Turkey to Minsk as the migrant standoff on the Poland-Belarus border placed it at risk of EU sanctions.

Belavia said the ban on passengers from Syria, Iraq and Yemen goes into effect immediately and is the result of "the decision of Turkey's competent authorities."

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EU officials said Thursday that they had agreed with Turkey to suspend the sale of Istanbul-Minsk tickets to citizens of the three countries and restrict one-way ticket sales from Turkey to the Belarus capital.

“Belavia Airlines passengers who fall under this ban can get a full refund without deductions at the place of purchase,” Belavia said in a short statement on its website.

Accusing Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko of orchestrating the border crisis in retaliation to its sanctions after his disputed 2020 election victory, the European Union has turned its attention to the air carriers that have been transporting the migrants to Minsk.

Media reports this week suggested that the 27-member bloc is close to imposing more sanctions on Belarus, as well as Russia’s flagship carrier Aeroflot and Turkish Airlines.Aeroflot on Thursday denied the allegations while Turkish Airlines later announced it would no longer allow Iraqi, Syrian and Yemeni nationals on its flights to Minsk.

According to the European Commission spokesman, Iraqi airlines have also agreed to halt flights to Minsk, Reuters reported on Friday.

Meanwhile, Iraqi and Kurdish authorities have announced plans to send evacuation flights to return their stranded citizens from Belarus, though the migrants themselves have told The Moscow Times that they seek to gain access to the EU at all costs.

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