

Kazakhstan Reportedly Returns Former Presidential Guard to Russia

December 30, 2022



Mikhail Zhilin and his wife Yekaterina. **Photo from personal archive**

Kazakhstan has deported a Russian citizen who fled Russia's mobilization drive this fall in the first known case of Astana returning a draft dodger to Russia, media [reported](#) Friday.

Former presidential guard Mikhail Zhilin's [family said he faces torture](#) in Russia for fleeing the military draft announced by President Vladimir Putin. Russian authorities sought Zhilin, 36, on charges of desertion that carry a maximum prison sentence of 15 years.

“[Kazakhstan’s] migration police handed [Zhilin] to the border guards and the border guards said they handed him over to Russia,” Zhilin’s wife Yekaterina Zhilina told Novaya Gazeta Europe.

After an appeals court in Kazakhstan upheld Zhilin’s deportation on Wednesday, Yekaterina [said](#) that the decision was both rushed through and in violation of Kazakhstan’s law on refugees.

Zhilin on Sept. 26 requested political asylum in Kazakhstan after being detained by border guards for entering Kazakhstan illegally. As a federal employee with access to state secrets, Zhilin was also not permitted to leave Russia.

Related article: [Ex-Presidential Guard Who Fled Russian Draft Faces Extradition, Jail](#)

Kazakh authorities refused Zhilin's asylum claim in late November. Human rights activists say Kazakhstan's law on refugees grants him the right to remain in the country while his lawyers appeal that decision.

"He can't be deported until his refugee status is cleared up," prominent Kazakh activist Yevgeny Zhovtis [told](#) the regional affiliate of the U.S. news organization RFE/RL. "[The Kazakh authorities] are effectively violating the refugee convention," Zhovtis said.

"Of course there will be a scandal. It's clear what he faces in wartime [in Russia]," he added. "But apparently [the Kazakh authorities] think that the conflict with Russia is much more serious."

"Why the rush? I think it was at the insistence of Russia," Zhilina [told](#) Kazakh news outlet Exclusive.kz.

After the war broke out in February, Zhilin requested permission to resign from the Federal Guard Service (FSO), where he worked as a shift supervisor in a department in Siberia overseeing Putin's contacts with the Russian regions. The FSO rejected his request.

Kazakhstan has pledged not to extradite Russians who fled their country's mobilization unless they are under criminal investigation.

The Kazakh authorities say they have received more than 400,000 Russian nationals since Putin's announcement of a "partial" mobilization of reserves in September sent thousands of military-aged men scrambling to reach the country's borders.

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