The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Russian Lawmakers Mull Requiring Drivers to Book Border Crossings

January 24, 2023

Vaalimaa-Torfyanovka border crossing on the Finnish-Russian border. **Jussi Nukari / IMAGO / Lehtikuva / TASS**

Russian lawmakers debated new amendments to existing legislation imposing restrictions on vehicles leaving Russia on Tuesday, with new rules expected to take effect from Sept. 1.

Under the proposed new legislation, which is ostensibly aimed at reducing long vehicle tailbacks and waiting times at Russia's land borders, anyone wanting to leave the country in their vehicle will be required to reserve a time- and location-specific slot for their border crossing.

The new law has sparked fears that further restrictions on travel inside and outside Russia could be on the cards.

The amendment, which was tacked onto the bill after its first reading in the State Duma in August, was proposed by Yevgeny Moskvichev, a deputy for the ruling United Russia party.

Later, Moskvichev specified that the new requirements would only apply to cargo vehicles and not to ordinary cars, the Russian news outlet RBC Daily reported.

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"It will be possible to reserve a date and time free of charge," the draft text of the law cited by the Interfax news agency reads. "The reservation can be refused only if the applicant fails to provide the [required] documents and information, a list of which will be determined by the government."

An editorial in the pro-government newspaper Noviye Izvesti on Tuesday recalled the Soviet-era requirement for citizens to obtain permission to leave the country.

The Kremlin denied it had any intention of restricting travel abroad for Russians on Tuesday, however.

"No, that is not being discussed in the Kremlin. And there are in fact explanations provided in the text, which I think we can proceed from," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said.

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