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Russian Lawmakers Pass Bills Allowing Future Suspects, Convicts to Sign Army Contracts

March 19, 2024



A Russian army recruitment center in Moscow. **Maxim Mishin, Moscow Government Press Service**

Russian lawmakers voted on Tuesday to allow future suspected or convicted criminals to join the military, thus expanding the wartime practice of recruiting prisoners to fight in Ukraine.

"The legislative initiative makes it possible for those who are under investigation, on trial or have been sentenced to sign a military contract," said senior State Duma member Pavel Krasheninnikov.

The recruits will have their criminal cases suspended or have the rest of their prison sentence converted to a suspended sentence for the duration of their service.

These soldiers can have their criminal records expunged if presented with state awards, according to two bills submitted to the Duma and voted in during all three readings this month.

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The list of pardonable crimes does not include serious felonies like treason, espionage, terrorism and sex crimes.

Krasheninnikov said the latest bills would replace existing laws that cover only those suspected or convicted of crimes committed before June 2023, and thus allow for the recruitment of future suspects or criminals.

The bill needs approval from Russia's upper-house Federation Council and President Vladimir Putin to become law.

The practice of recruiting prisoners for the war in Ukraine was spearheaded by the Wagner mercenary group in 2022, although Russia's Defense Ministry took over prison recruitment early last year.

Putin has said in the past that he has personally pardoned prisoners who agreed to fight in Ukraine.

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