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# Latvia Restricts Border Crossings with Russia and Belarus

By AFP

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Latvia's border with Russia. **Alexander Welscher / dpa**

Latvia will impose new restrictions at its border checkpoints with Russia and Belarus, allowing only motor vehicles to cross, the government announced Tuesday, citing an alleged surge in refugees.

Latvia, along with Finland and Poland, has accused Russia and Belarus of intentionally orchestrating an influx of refugees to destabilize the region.

On Tuesday, the Latvian government approved a ban on pedestrian and non-motorized vehicle crossings at the three border points that remain open with Russia and Belarus.

"The decision to restrict the operations of these border checkpoints has been taken according to the risks of hybrid threats and migration crises," the government said in a statement.

It blamed "strategies implemented by Russia and Belarus aimed at organizing migration

flows detrimental to EU member states" for the rise in border traffic.

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Latvia's border guard service supports the move, with its chief, Guntis Pujats, reporting that officials had observed "organized groups" of migrants attempting to cross.

These groups "are trying to arrive at our border stations but they have neither EU residence permits nor Schengen area visas," Pujats told Latvian TV3 on Tuesday.

The new restrictions, which take effect Wednesday, will apply at the Terehova and Grebneva checkpoints on the Russian border, and the Paternieki crossing with Belarus. The government did not specify when the restrictions would be lifted.

Latvia has already built a fence along its border with Belarus and plans to complete a similar barrier along the Russian border this year.

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