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Russia's New Border Rules Could Cut Off Key Trade Routes, Kazakh Lawmaker Warns

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Alexander Manzyuk / TASS

Russia's new border restrictions risk costing Kazakhstan vital trade access through Russia and Belarus by forcing truck drivers from the country into technical violations of Russian law, a Kazakh lawmaker said Monday.

"Tens of thousands of drivers and international transportation companies are now under threat," Bolatbek Nazhmetdinuly, a member of the ruling Amanat party, wrote on Facebook. "This is no longer theoretical — good Kazakh carriers are effectively falling under restrictions, risking loss of access to routes through Russia and Belarus."

The warning comes after Russia imposed new rules on Jan. 1 limiting visa-free stays for foreign nationals, including Kazakhs, to 90 days per year. Nazhmetdinuly said that long delays at Russian border crossings, including those on the route to the European Union via Belarus, count toward that limit, pushing drivers into noncompliance.

“Our drivers aren’t tourists. They’re performing their professional duties. Yet these new requirements effectively make them violators of Russian law,” Nazhmetdinuly wrote, claiming that some Kazakh drivers have already been detained in Russia.

Russian media earlier this month reported that thousands of trucks carrying Chinese goods were stuck at the Kazakh-Russian border due to stepped-up customs checks.

Industry sources said the inspections targeted dual-use goods such as drones and electronics that could violate Western sanctions. Kazakh officials have blamed the backlog on tighter Russian customs procedures.

Adding to the challenges, Russia on June 30 introduced a digital pre-entry system requiring citizens of visa-free countries, including Kazakhstan, to register through a state-run app and obtain a QR code at least 72 hours before arrival.

Nazhmetdinuly said he had contacted Kazakhstan’s foreign and interior ministries, as well as the country’s Eurasian Economic Union representative, to intervene in the matter. He warned that, if the situation persists, Kazakhstan could face rising transport costs, shrinking freight capacity and the risk of being displaced by Russian and Belarusian competitors.

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