

Lithuania Closes Border With Belarus Over Repeated Balloon Incursions

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The closed Lithuania-Belarus border checkpoint in Sumskas, Lithuania. **EPA / TASS**

Lithuania will close its border with Belarus in response to repeated incursions of smuggler balloons into the NATO and EU member's airspace, Lithuanian Prime Minister Inga Ruginienė [said](#) Monday.

The announcement follows the [shutdown](#) of Vilnius Airport and two Belarus border [crossings](#) on Sunday evening.

This follows shutdowns on Saturday, Friday, and Tuesday of last week, in addition to a similar incident on Oct. 5, all related to balloons entering the capital's airspace.

Last week, more than 170 flights were [disrupted](#), affecting almost 30,000 passengers.

"A government meeting will take place on Wednesday. We are already prepared to approve a decision to close the border with Belarus indefinitely," Ruginienė told reporters, according to the Lithuanian broadcaster LRT.

She said diplomats and EU citizens would be exempt from the border closure.

Lithuanian authorities [say](#) smugglers use the weather balloons to transport contraband cigarettes from Belarus. But Vilnius also [blames](#) the regime of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, a close Russian ally, for putting “pressure on Lithuania by testing our resilience.”

Ruginienė warned that the border closure “sends a clear signal to Belarus that no hybrid attack will be tolerated here, and we will take the strictest possible measures to stop such actions.”

Ruginienė added that Lithuanian forces would [shoot down](#) any balloons crossing from Belarus and that Wednesday's meeting may call for NATO Article 4 consultations.

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