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State Duma Passes Bill Protecting Foreign Fighters From Criminal Prosecution Back Home

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A military recruitment center in Moscow. **Moskva News Agency**

Lawmakers in the lower-house State Duma on Thursday passed a bill that would shield foreign nationals who enlist in the Russian military from being extradited to their home countries if they face criminal charges there.

The bill, which by most accounts is aimed at attracting foreign nationals to join the army for deployment in Ukraine, would make it illegal for authorities in Russia to extradite foreigners at the request of other governments if they signed military contracts and served in combat.

According to the draft legislation, the new rule would also apply to foreign nationals who have already concluded their military service.

The bill, which must be passed in the upper-house Federation Council and signed by President Vladimir Putin before becoming law, comes after several foreign nationals have

faced criminal prosecution in their home countries for having fought in the war against Ukraine.

Russia does not say how many foreign nationals are currently serving on the front lines in Ukraine. Moscow has confirmed the deployment of North Korean soldiers alongside Russian forces, but thousands of foreigners from dozens of other countries are known to have fought in Ukraine on the side of Russia since the full-scale invasion.

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On Wednesday, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha claimed that 1,780 people from 36 African countries are currently fighting in the Russian army after authorities in several countries on the continent warned of illicit recruitment schemes.

In 2024, Putin signed an executive order that eased the requirements for obtaining Russian citizenship if a foreign applicant had served in the military. Migration experts have said the policy has not significantly increased army enlistment numbers.

Ukraine has also allowed foreign nationals to fight alongside its armed forces since the full-scale invasion, including citizens of former Soviet states like Georgia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, but also from Western countries like the United States and England.

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