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Belarus Closes Transit Route for Russian Military Conscripts

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Minsk National Airport. **Oleg Yelkov / TASS**

Russians who have received a military conscription notice will no longer be allowed to travel through neighboring Belarus to avoid service, border authorities told Belarusian state media on Wednesday.

The announcement follows reports from rights lawyers that a Russian man listed in a military conscription database was barred from flying out of Minsk National Airport this week while attempting to travel to Georgia and Armenia. Lawyers said it was the first such instance since Russia launched its digital military summons system last year.

"If there are no travel restrictions, then you can leave Belarus. If travel is prohibited, then all questions should be directed to the Russian Federation," a spokesperson for Belarus' State Border Committee told the Belsat news agency.

The spokesperson said Russia and Belarus share a "common database" that allows Belarusian border personnel to see whether Russian citizens are restricted from leaving Russia.

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Artyom Klyga, a lawyer at the Movement for Conscientious Objectors, an NGO helping Russians legally avoid military service, said he expects cases of Russians in Belarus being denied travel to rise as the country increases cooperation with Russia.

Under a digital summons system signed into law by President Vladimir Putin in April 2023, the rights of Russian draftees — including the right to travel abroad — are automatically restricted if they fail to report for service.

An electronic notice is considered legally served seven days after it is posted to a centralized digital registry, regardless of whether the recipient has viewed it.

Men who ignore the summons for more than 20 days face additional penalties, including driving bans and restrictions on loans and real estate transactions.

The digital overhaul was designed to close loopholes in the previous draft system, which relied on the in-person delivery of summons and allowed many to avoid service by being away from their registered addresses.

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