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Russia-Bound Imports Stalled in Kazakhstan as Border Checks Tighten

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TASS

Shipments to Russia through Kazakhstan have slowed sharply amid intensified border inspections, leaving importers waiting for goods dispatched from China in September and prompting some transport companies to suspend the route.

Small importers and marketplace sellers appear hardest hit, particularly those sharing trucks with other customers. Businesses say delays affect both fully documented imports and goods shipped through unofficial channels.

“Deliveries have been like a lottery over the past two months,” said an auto parts dealer still awaiting three September shipments. “At the end of October, our carrier notified us that it was suspending the Kazakhstan route altogether because of the delays.”

A journey that once took about 20 days now involves waits averaging 20 days at each Kazakh border, cargo owners said.

Kazakh customs officials have intensified inspections at crossings with China and Kyrgyzstan since the summer, a freight forwarding company employee said. Targeted goods include electronics, machinery, automotive products, drones and shipments declared at unusually low prices.

Russia- and Belarus-bound cargo frequently faces requests for additional documents and inspections involving samples, another logistics specialist said. Delays can reach three months, while microchips and machine tools are "almost always turned back."

The specialist linked the crackdown to dual-use electronics shipped through Kyrgyzstan under false transit declarations because Chinese manufacturers were unwilling to send them directly to Russia.

Several carriers stopped dispatching trucks through Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan between Oct. 28 and 30.

Congestion worsened after restrictions at the Nur Zholy crossing, which handled about 500 trucks daily, one carrier told customers. Trucks were diverted to Khorgos, with capacity for no more than 100 daily, leaving some waiting 20 days.

Kazakhstan's Transport Ministry also announced tighter checks on oversized and heavy vehicles on Oct. 30, following instructions from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who said the country was missing out on substantial transport revenue.

Almost all trucks bound for Russia and Belarus now face additional weight checks, a trucking company employee said.

Logistics companies recommend road routes directly into Russia or through Mongolia, or shipping through Russian Far East ports.

Direct road shipments cost 10% to 15% more than the Kazakhstan route, which cost $12,000 to $13,000 per truck in October. They also make transporting dual-use goods and unofficial imports harder, a logistics specialist said.

Further delays could follow from Dec. 1, when Russian customs officials are expected to inspect every truck rather than conduct selective checks, the specialist added.

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