The Moscow Times
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Latvia Mulls Possible Border Closure With Russia

November 24, 2026



The Latvian-Russian border. **Saeima / flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)**

Latvia's government plans to discuss the possibility of closing its land border with Russia as early as next month, the Baltic news outlet Delfi reported Monday, days after neighboring Estonia moved to shutter its checkpoints with Russia.

Prime Minister Andris Kūlbergs instructed the Latvian foreign and transportation ministries to prepare a clear position on potential restrictions based on national security risks and the expected impacts on transit and traffic across the Baltics.

"The new government was confirmed just recently. I hope we'll manage to do this in the coming days," Interior Minister Jānis Dombrava was quoted as saying.

Dombrava said Latvia's newly formed cabinet, which was approved by parliament last week after the October parliamentary elections, would need to reach a "common understanding" on the border issue before closing its checkpoints, according to Delfi.

Kūlbergs recently called for the EU to close its borders to all Russian citizens, arguing that European governments are unable to properly vet thousands of Russian nationals who continue to travel to the bloc.

Related article: Moscow Summons Estonian Diplomat Over Border Closure

Latvia, a member of NATO and the EU since 2004, views Russia as its principal security threat and has significantly increased defense spending in recent years.

Authorities in Latvia accused Russia and Belarus of trying to forcibly push nearly two dozen migrants through its border last month. They said the intruders damaged electrical equipment and stole surveillance cameras before returning to Belarusian territory. Belarus denied the accusations.

Discussions of a possible border closure between Russia and Latvia come as Estonia prepares to shutter its checkpoints along the Russian border next Tuesday in response to an alleged Russian sabotage plot against a local drone manufacturer.

Russia has rejected Estonia's sabotage allegations. On Monday, Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned Estonia's top diplomat in Moscow to protest the planned closure, which is expected to last at least six months.

According to Delfi, Latvia's state border guard chief warned last week that Estonia's border closure would trigger long lines at Latvian checkpoints and require border officers to work overtime to handle redirected traffic.

State Border Guard chief Guntis Pujāts said that closing Latvia's checkpoints with Russia would allow authorities to redeploy more personnel for patrols.

AFP contributed reporting.

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https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/11/24/latvia-mulls-possible-border-closure-with-russia-a94359