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Edward Snowden cleared to leave Moscow airport -- but not today

By Sergei L. Loiko and Carol J. Williams

This post has been updated. See the note below for details.

7:09 AM PDT, July 24, 2013

MOSCOW -- Fugitive NSA leaker Edward Snowden will be allowed to leave the Moscow airport, where he has been holed up for more than a month following a Russian government decision to consider his request for temporary asylum, Russian media reported Wednesday.

“Snowden is passing the passport control now, a procedure that for him, a man without a valid passport, may take longer than just stamping a passport,” a Federal Migration Service officer who requested anonymity told the Los Angeles Times.

[Updated 7:50 p.m. PDT, July 24: The officer later said that Snowden did not have all the documents he needed and will have to stay in the airport transit zone for at least another day.]

The Russian Federal Migration Service issued a certificate Wednesday, in effect stating that the agency was reviewing his application Snowden submitted last week seeking temporary shelter, RIA Novosti reported.

The document reportedly allows him to leave the transit zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo-2 airport, where he arrived with a revoked U.S. passport on June 23 and has been unable to legally enter Russia or leave for elsewhere.

The Federal Migration Service would not confirm or deny the reports. “We don’t have this information yet,” agency spokeswoman Svetlana Gordeyeva told The Times.

Snowden’s Russian lawyer, Anatoly Kucherena, who was supposed to pick up the certificate, was seen Wednesday afternoon entering the airport and proceeding to Transit Zone E, Interfax reported.

“This certificate will allow Snowden to cross the Russian border and finally leave the airport transit zone,” Kucherena said in an interview earlier this week, hoping he would get the document on Snowden’s behalf by

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Wednesday.

In the last two weeks, Russian President Vladimir Putin said more than once that Russia would not extradite Snowden to the United States but also expressed hope that the former National Security Agency contractor would leave Russia for some other country soon.

It was unclear where Snowden, 30, would stay once he left his airport limbo. Several Russian human rights groups have offered to assist him in his efforts to evade a U.S. extradition warrant seeking his return to face espionage and theft charges.

Snowden revealed in early June that the NSA gathers vast amounts of data on U.S. and foreign citizens' telephone and Internet communications. His actions have been denounced by some as dangerous disclosures of sensitive intelligence information and practices but hailed by privacy advocates as heroic acts of whistleblowing.

RIA Novosti cited unnamed sources in Russian law enforcement as saying the document allowing him to formally enter Russian territory while his asylum bid is being considered was pending on approval by the border guard service, suggesting he has not yet left the airport.

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Loiko reported from Moscow and Williams from Los Angeles

sergei.loiko@latimes.com carol.williams@latimes.com

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