

SuperJet Loses Alitalia

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Italian airline had planned a possible \$500 million order but will lease Sukhoi Superjet's Brazilian rival instead. **Victor Sokolowicz**

ROME — Italian airline Alitalia has decided to drop Russian plane maker Sukhoi for a possible \$500 million regional jet order, saying Friday that it could wait no longer for Sukhoi's delayed new Superjet 100 and would opt for planes from Brazil's Embraer instead.

The Superjet 100 is Russia's first newly designed passenger aircraft since the fall of the Soviet Union and is being developed and marketed with strong involvement from Italy, amid increasingly warm ties between the countries.

But flag carrier Alitalia, recently rescued by Italian investors at Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's insistence, said Friday that it could not afford to wait for the plane despite naming it as its first choice for a purchase of 20 planes.

"We would have preferred that option precisely because of the involvement of an Italian company and so we delayed our choice by six to 12 months," chief executive Rocco Sabelli told

reporters. "But the fundamental problem is that as of today, Sukhoi has not taken to the skies."

The Superjet is designed to challenge Embraer and Canada's Bombardier in the market for regional jets and has the backing of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The Russian plane made its maiden flight in 2008 but has not yet received full European safety certification, which is a necessary condition for selling it to Western airlines.

Alenia Aeronautica, a unit of Italian group Finmeccanica, holds a 25 percent stake in the Sukhoi project to build a 75- to 95-seat airliner with Western avionics and also owns 51 percent of a Venice-based marketing arm called Superjet International set up to export the plane.

French aerospace firms Thales and Safran are key suppliers on the project.

Sabelli said Alitalia was worried about making sure "it did not fall to us to launch a new airliner."

He added: "We couldn't procrastinate any longer on the choice, and it seemed to us that the airliner that has yet to fly was not compatible with our timeline."

But the decision looked set to trigger an internal dispute within Italy as the decision left Alenia fuming about the move.

A source close to Alenia said the company was "particularly surprised" by Alitalia's choice, saying the Superjet's schedule was compatible with requirements and the offer was more competitive.

Alenia "does not understand why Superjet International has not been involved in the final negotiation phase," the source said, adding that Aeroflot would be the launch customer rather than Alitalia.

Instead, Alitalia will take delivery of leased Embraer 170 and Embraer 190 jets between 2011 and 2012, Sabelli said.

Sukhoi and Superjet International declined to comment.

Earlier this month, Sukhoi confirmed that it was hoping to sell 20 to 24 aircraft to Alitalia, and analysts estimate the value of such an order at about \$500 million. Russia is among a number of players building small jets as a possible dry run for taking on Airbus and Boeing in the market for bigger jets with more than 100 seats.

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