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Anti-Monopoly Service to Investigate iPad Imports

By Ken Martinez

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A woman holding up an iPad, the only tablet PC that has been exempt from import duties. **Alexandra Astakhova**

The Federal Anti-Monopoly Service has begun an investigation into customs duties on tablet PCs amid reports that Apple is the only manufacturer importing its products duty-free, while other tablet producers are paying import levies.

The antitrust agency sent letters to manufacturers inquiring how their tablets are classified, which determines customs duties, a source told Kommersant, which was later confirmed by the antitrust agency's information technology head Vladimir Kudryavtsev. Letters went out to 15 companies, including Acer, Samsung, Asus, HP, Lenovo and Sony.

Problems began for producers last fall when the Federal Customs Service changed classification codes for tablet computers with GPS hardware, counting them as navigators instead of computers. This resulted in a 5 percent import duty being levied — which increased

prices per unit by several thousand rubles. The customs service offered to cancel the duties if companies could show that the devices really were computers.

On Feb. 9 the Information & Computer Technologies Industry Association sent a letter to the customs service explaining why the iPad should be considered a computer, a source told Kommersant. Representatives of the association and customs chief Alexander Belyaninov met on Feb. 13 to discuss the topic, and the next day the service issued a recommendation that the iPad should be considered a computer.

Apple did not respond to a request for comment from The Moscow Times.

Acer Russia spokesman Denis Kutnikov said his company sent a letter to the customs service in early March not only requesting that their Iconia tablet be considered a computer, but also complaining that their products were routinely delayed at customs. The company has yet to receive a response.

The communication director for Lenovo in Russia and the CIS, Ilya Pozharsky, said the import classification of their devices depends on the customs inspector — half the time it's declared a navigator, the other half a computer.

More than half of the 800,000 tablet computers sold in Russia in 2011 were Apple iPads, Lenovo vice president Gleb Mishin said.

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