The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Rogozin Orders Investigation of Plane Builders

By Roland Oliphant

May 28, 2012



A police officer standing in front of a Tupolev Tu-144 at a MAKS show. **Maxim Stulov**

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin has ordered prosecutors to investigate the "illegal" privatization of property assets belonging to the Yakovlev and Tupolev aviation firms.

Rogozin, who oversees the defense industry, issued the order Monday after Gleb Nikitin, chief of the Federal Property Management Agency, asked him to look into sales of the two airplane manufacturers' assets.

"We will check your information and punish [those responsible] if it is confirmed," Rogozin said after a meeting in the Cabinet building, Interfax reported.

The agency apparently uncovered evidence that property transferred to both Yakovlev and Tupolev during the 1990s was later sold at artificially low prices.

According to Nikitin's agency, between 2001 and 2006 Yakovlev sold at artificially low prices

about 80,000 square meters of property it had received in 1992.

Meanwhile, Tupolev's management was allegedly involved in the sale of about 100,000 square meters of property in Moscow between 1999 and 2003.

Two facilities that belonged to Tupolev, Russia's oldest aviation company, have been turned into a business center and residential buildings, he added.

Rogozin's intervention follows an appeal by residents of Zhukovsky, a town southwest of Moscow. They asked him to take personal control of the development of a new center for the aviation industry there.

The airfield at Zhukovsky, which hosts the biannual MAKS air show, has been earmarked as the site of the new National Aircraft Manufacturing Center.

But local residents and environmental activists clashed with police and developers last month after a protected forest was cleared to build a road to a special economic zone at the site of the present-day Gromov Flight Institute, an aviation research center.

In their letter to Rogozin, residents argued that the "momentary financial advantage" of the commercial development would be outweighed by the loss of the research center and urged a reconsideration of the approach to the new manufacturing hub.

Rogozin did not mention the letter from Zhukovsky residents on Monday.

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