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Short-Haul Plane Policy Gaining Ground

By Anatoly Medetsky

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A row of Yak-40s lined up at Kiev International Airport.

The government is hammering out a policy to help local production of short-haul foreign passenger aircraft, as plans are afoot for the assembly of Czech and Canadian models.

Transportation Minister Maxim Sokolov said that the ministry was pushing for the state leasing subsidy on this type of plane to apply first of all to domestically-manufactured planes.

He made the statement Monday at a meeting with President Vladimir Putin, also promising to compile an overview in the course of a month of what Russian companies plan to do to meet demand for this type of aircraft.

Putin said any projects to assemble small foreign planes in the country must stipulate using local content in the longer run, rather than rely just on putting together imported knock-down kits.

Industry expert Oleg Panteleyev said Thursday that the Industry and Trade Ministry favors

a project to produce the Czech 9- to 14-seater Evektor 55 near Ulyanovsk. Production could start in 2014, with Evektor, the Ulyanovsk regional government and a third partner reportedly to team up for the effort.

Another plan supported by the ministry is for the manufacture of Canada's 19-passenger DHC-6 Twin Otter 400 near Ulyanovsk by Moscow-based Vityaz Avia Corporation, he said. Canada's producer of the planes is Viking Air.

The ministry also proposes a plan to fit newer engines on one of the current short-distance flight workhorses, the Antonov-2, said Panteleyev, chief editor of the Aviaport.ru industry portal. Coupled with profound maintenance work and some other upgrades, the effort could extend the service life of these planes, he said.

A ministry spokeswoman said Thursday evening she was unaware of the ministry's proposals in this area.

Panteleyev said the government would have to drop any preferences for local aircraft producers in subsidizing leasing payments come 2015 in order to comply with WTO requirements. Officials might reintroduce import duties for this type of aircraft, but they won't be as high as the previous 20-percent rate — again because of the country's WTO membership, he said.

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