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Aeroflot Plans Lawsuit Sue Over Boeing 777-ER Delay

By Roland Oliphant

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Aeroflot could sue the Federal Civil Aviation Agency for hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages after the national carrier's newest airliner was grounded because of lack of documentation.

The airline plans to seek compensation of $50,000 for each day its 777-300ER airliner doesn't fly. The airplane was grounded Friday because of the aviation authority's refusal to certify that the plane can be commercially flown in Russia.

On Wednesday, Aeroflot took delivery of the first of 16 Boeing 777-300ERs it ordered in 2011.

But the airline had to cancel the aircraft's inaugural flight from Moscow to Bangkok because of the bureaucratic hurdle.

The Boeing 777-300ER remains on the tarmac at Sheremetyevo Airport, Aeroflot board

member Alexei Navalny said in a blog post.

Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger and opposition leader, was elected to Aeroflot's board in June with the support of minority shareholder Alexander Lebedev.

He accused bureaucrats at Russia's civil aviation regulator and the International Aviation Committee, the body that regulates flying in the CIS, of "throwing documents back and forth, the result being that there is no permit."

"One small detail that no one's writing about: Foreign airlines have successfully landed this aircraft at Sheremetyevo," Navalny wrote in an indignant LiveJournal post Friday.

"[But aviation authorities say] First get a bit of paper from us. We don't want to give it to you, and we won't explain why, but nonetheless we demand that you get it from us."

Aeroflot, which is 51 percent state owned, promised to sue "all sides" responsible for the delay.

That could mean a claim of hundreds of thousands of dollars against the Federal Civil Aviation Agency and the IAC.

Izvestia quoted a source at the company as saying that a suit would be filed against the Federal Air Transportation Agency next week.

Analysts have speculated that the delay could be the result of dirty tricks by Aeroflot competitors. The IAC is headed by Tatyana Andonina, a shareholder in Aeroflot's main rival, Transaero, and the mother of that airline's chief executive, Alexandra Pleshakova.

A spokesman for Transaero told The Moscow Times, "We do not have any comment on these blogs and speculations. From our point of view, the IAC is the only body that can comment on the delay with regard to certification."

Boeing says it submitted all certification documents for the 777-300-ER, an extended-range variant of the 777, on April 12.

Aeroflot will create an airline serving the Far East on the condition that the federal government promises financial support for the project until at least 2016.

The airline, a government-backed initiative to boost air transportation links in the region, would be built on the basis of Aeroflot's Sakhalin Airways subsidiary, the airline said in a statement following a board meeting Thursday.

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