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Proposed Quota on Foreign Pilots Splits Government

By The Moscow Times

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The question of how many foreign pilots to allow into the Russian airline industry has divided the Transportation Ministry and the Economic Development Ministry, Kommersant reported Tuesday.

The Transportation Ministry proposed in early June to institute a quota of 200 foreign captains that Russian airlines could hire each year. If demand exceeded the quota, the ministry would distribute the hires according to companies' yearly volume of flights.

This number is insufficient and "unfounded," the Economic Development Ministry said.

Aeroflot alone needs to hire 160 pilots in 2013, while Transaero needs 125 pilots and UTair will need 100 new pilots every year for the next two to three years, according to information provided by the airlines.

This need is not being met by flight schools. According to estimates, no more than 160 graduates complete flight school each year, while 700 pilots leave the field in the same period.

The industry is especially desperate for captains, who require a full six to eight years of training even after graduation.

Despite the shortages, Sheremetyevo's flight personnel labor union has publicly opposed introducing foreign pilots to the industry.

"The arrival of foreign pilots will lower the safety level of flights," said a public relations assistant at the union, explaining that the conditions offered by Russian airlines are unlikely to attract the most qualified foreign captains.

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