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Transportation Ministry Against Limiting Aircraft Service Life

By Vladimir Goryachev

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The Boeing 737 plane operated by Tatarstan Airlines that crashed in Kazan, shown above landing at Moscow's Vkunovo airport, had been in service for 23 years. **Aktug Ates**

The Transportation Ministry is against limiting the service life of planes, going against an idea proposed by State Duma deputies in the wake of last weekend's fatal plane crash in Kazan.

A group of United Russia party deputies last Wednesday put forward a bill that would limit the use of planes older than 20 years from 2017 onward, Kommersant reported.

Aviation authorities appear to be divided on the subject. The Federal Aviation Agency supported the proposal in principle and said companies' fleets need to be renewed gradually. However, the agency did say that age was not the only factor affecting the airworthiness of a plane.

The Interstate Aviation Committee rejected the idea outright, arguing that the safety of a plane is not directly related to its age, a position shared by Transportation Minister Maxim Sokolov.

Sokolov said in an interview on NTV on Sunday that there is no credible information suggesting that a technical failure had caused the deadly crash of a Boeing-737 in Kazan on Nov. 17.

“Every vessel, regardless of its service age, has an airworthiness certificate,” Sokolov said, Itar-Tass reported. “The expert community believes implementing any restrictions related to aircrafts’ maximum service life would be premature.”

Sokolov also said aviation safety requirements in Russia fully complied with international safety standards. The new amendments to the Air Code introduced this year have enabled state bodies to monitor the country’s flight safety system and withdraw or suspend airlines’ operator certificates if they violate safety regulations, he said.

The crash of a Boeing-737 en route from Moscow to Kazan on Nov. 17 claimed the lives of all 50 passengers and crew on board. The Interstate Aviation Committee said in a preliminary report published Wednesday that the crash was caused by a crew error during the second approach for landing at Kazan International Airport.

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