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Russia May Create Sanction-Proof Airline to Service Crimea

By The Moscow Times

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Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin

Russia may launch a new airline operating domestically made civilian aircraft to service flights to Crimea, after Western sanctions last month grounded a Russian low-coster that was flying the route.

Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said Wednesday on Twitter that a government meeting had "addressed the issue of creating an airline to ensure regular air travel to Crimea with a domestic fleet."

Aeroflot subsidiary Dobrolyot was blacklisted by the European Union in July for, the EU said, facilitating the integration of the illegally annexed territory of Crimea into Russia. The move nixed Dobrolyot's plane leasing agreement with Ireland's AWAS, forcing the airline out of the sky. Russian airlines lease 90 percent of their planes from the West, and many of them fly routes to Crimea, making them vulnerable to potential sanctions.

Last week, Oleg Panteleyev, head of the AviaPort information agency told the Moscow Times the government had anticipated the possibility of Russian airlines losing their Western leases as early as April.

"A way out would be to create a special airline servicing only flight to and from Crimea that would only employe Russian-made planes," Pantelyev said, adding that this could be accomplished by the end of this tourist season.

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