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Russia's First MC-21 Airliners to Be Powered by Foreign Engines

By The Moscow Times

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An artist's rendering of the MC-21.

Russia's next-generation civilian airliner will initially have to rely on foreign engines, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin lamented on Friday, but said that the country is on the verge of making a breakthrough in engine technology.

"Unfortunately, the first [three] new MC-21 aircraft will take off ... using engines that were not produced in Russia. Only the fourth will have domestic engines," Rogozin was quoted as saying by Moskovsky Komsomolets.

The grounding of Boeing planes flown by Russian budget airline Dobrolyot by EU sanctions in July has highlighted the need for Russia to switch to homemade designs. Russian airlines are extremely vulnerable to the threat of further sanctions as 90 percent of the planes they use are Boeings and Airbuses leased from the West.

"It would be preferable, of course, to not depend on Canadians or on Americans in the field of engine construction, but this is the current situation. We are slightly behind, but we are catching up," Rogozin said after touring the Irkutsk Aviation Plant, where the MC-21 is being developed.

The government has already stepped in to bankroll investment in domestic civil aviation. Two weeks ago it backstopped a 3.3 billion ruble ($92 million) bond issue to finance the continued development of a new engine, the PD-14, which will power the MC-21. This week, it guaranteed a $400 million loan to finish development of the MC-21 by 2017.

But the MC-21 is just the beginning, Rogozin said Friday, with long-haul airliners and new military transport planes powered by Russian engines on the horizon.

"Russia is on the threshold of a major technological breakthrough in the field of aircraft engine design," Rogozin said. "It is important to monitor and maintain this process because powerful and reliable engines are needed for new aircraft."

Among Russia's plans is a joint project with China to develop a long-haul wide-bodied aircraft that can stand in for the Boeing 777 and Airbus A330 aircraft that dominate transcontinental and transoceanic routes.

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