

Weak Ruble Boosts Prospects for Russia's Next-Generation Civilian Plane

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The sharp devaluation of Russia's ruble currency has brightened the prospects for the country's next-generation civilian aircraft design, the MC-21, on the global airliner market, Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov was quoted as saying by the RIA Novosti news agency on Friday.

The threat of Western sanctions against Russian airlines has seen Moscow pump funds into its aviation industry this year, though capacity remains far below Soviet levels.

But aircraft production depends on economies of scale to remain financially competitive, and Russia's internal market isn't large enough to prop up the domestic industry, forcing manufacturers to look for foreign customers. With the ruble down around 30 percent so far this year, planes like the nascent MC-21 suddenly have a price advantage.

“The market prospects of the MC-21 aircraft remain very optimistic. Interest in these aircraft

is high,” Manturov told reporters at the Irkutsk Aviation Plant where the MC-21 is being developed.

More than half of the components used in the aircraft are produced in Russia, Manturov said.

The MC-21 will hit the market sometime after its final certification tests in 2016, and will be sold in three different versions with various flight ranges and passenger loads. The airplane will compete against ubiquitous workhorses such as the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320.

The design already has 150 orders, 50 which come from Russia's flagship carrier Aeroflot, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin — who oversees the aerospace industry — said in September.

The weakening ruble could also help Russia's current contender in the civilian aircraft market, the Sukhoi Superjet 100. Developed in partnership with several Western aerospace firms and launched in 2011, the Superjet has struggled to gain market share.

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