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World Airline Body Calls for Post-War Return to Russian Airspace

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An airplane at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport. **Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency**

Western airlines should prepare to return to Russian airspace when the war in Ukraine has ended, the head of the global airline trade group said Tuesday.

Flights between Russia and the West came to a virtual standstill following mutual airspace bans in the wake of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February. The closures limited Russian-owned and chartered flights around the world while also forcing Western airlines to take longer and more expensive routes to reach Asia.

International Air Transport Association (IATA) head Willie Walsh said war-related airspace closures have created unsustainable congestion over Europe.

He also warned that Chinese carriers would gain a competitive advantage over their European rivals once Beijing relaxes its Covid-19 restrictions.

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Given these disadvantages, "we should be looking to reopen Russian airspace" in the event of the war in Ukraine ending, the aviation news website FlightGlobal quoted Walsh as saying.

That would free up Europe's airlines' traditional Siberian overflights and make access to Asia more efficient, he added.

"Longer term, we are going to have to see a return to more normal operations," Walsh was quoted as saying.

"I think we have to hope that the hostilities end when the war ends," he added, according to Britain's The Telegraph.

The newspaper reported that European airlines have begun lobbying the European Union to review the Russian airspace ban in recent weeks.

Now in its tenth month, Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues to drag on with neither Moscow nor Kyiv expressing willingness to resume peace negotiations.

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