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Foreign Airlines Offer to Operate Grounded Airbus Jets for Russia – Kommersant

August 06, 2025



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At least two foreign airlines have offered to operate Airbus aircraft grounded in Russia due to Western sanctions, the business newspaper Kommersant reported on Tuesday.

Last year, Russia's S7 Airlines grounded dozens of its Airbus A320neo and A321neo jets after the engine maker issued a recall over a defect that could cause micro-cracks. Sanctions prevent the aircraft from receiving maintenance or repairs, and the planes are expected to be decommissioned starting in 2026.

According to Kommersant, Egypt's AlMasria Universal Airlines and the Philippines' South East Asian Airlines (SEAIR) sent a request to the Russian government to use the grounded jets. A Montenegro-based company, MelonAero, reportedly initiated the proposal.

SEAIR was said to have offered to operate two A321neo jets on routes between the Philippines

and Russia's Far East and Siberian cities, including Vladivostok, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk and Novosibirsk. AlMasria is ready to take on three to five grounded jets.

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MelonAero CEO Oleg Yevdokimov said negotiations are ongoing with other carriers from "friendly" countries and that all of S7's grounded planes could theoretically be placed in the hands of foreign operators.

Corporate records show MelonAero was founded last year, suggesting it may have been created specifically to facilitate a workaround for the grounded aircraft.

An anonymous Russian government source told Kommersant that the proposals "will be considered in due course." The Transportation Ministry and S7 declined to comment, the newspaper wrote.

However, some aviation experts expressed skepticism that foreign lessors and insurers would approve the proposed deals. Others told Kommersant that Moscow might prefer to swap aircraft rather than allow foreign carriers to operate grounded jets.

Russia's FSB security service reportedly blocked the return of Airbus aircraft to foreign lessors, citing national security concerns.

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian authorities have allowed only four foreign aircraft to be returned: two Boeing 737 Max 8s and two Boeing 747s.

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