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U.S. Jails Dual U.S.-Russian Citizen for Attempted Aircraft Exports to Russia

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Cessna aircraft. **Peter Bakema**

A U.S. federal judge has sentenced a dual U.S.-Russian citizen to 41 months in prison for attempting to illegally export aircraft to Russia in violation of U.S. sanctions, prosecutors said.

Sergei Nechayev, 49, pleaded guilty to multiple charges including attempted illegal export without a license, smuggling and making false statements in export documentation, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Georgia said.

Nechayev was also sentenced to three years of supervised release.

Authorities arrested Nechayev in December 2024 and he entered a plea deal with prosecutors in September 2025.

The investigation was conducted by the U.S. Commerce Department, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Aviation Administration.

Prosecutors said that between September 2022 and March 2023, Nechayev attempted to

export two vintage Cessna light aircraft with a combined value of about $170,000 from the U.S. to Russia.

The attempted exports took place after the U.S. imposed expanded sanctions on Russia in February 2022, which require a special license from the Commerce Department for aircraft exports to the country.

Nechayev did not obtain such authorization, prosecutors said.

According to court filings, Nechayev sought to evade export controls by routing the aircraft through third countries on paper and claiming they were destined for an unnamed flight school.

He also submitted falsified export documents that listed fictitious end users in Turkey and Armenia.

A U.S. freight forwarder flagged the shipment after discovering that the company named as the recipient was registered in Moscow, prosecutors said.

Anti-corruption researcher Ilya Shumanov said Nechayev worked as a pilot for Russian charter airline East Union, which specializes in VIP charters and aircraft and yacht leasing, from 2008 to 2021.

Russian border-crossing data shows that Nechayev flew at least 40 times on flights carrying billionaire Leonid Mikhelson and members of his family, Shumanov said.

The flights were operated using a Gulfstream business jet with the registration number N650GL, which has been linked to the Novatek group that Mikhelson co-owns.

Other frequent passengers on Nechayev's flights included former Novatek deputy chairman Alexander Novak, now Russia's deputy prime minister, and former Deputy Natural Resources Minister Denis Khramov, according to Shumanov.

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