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Antitrust Service Ramps Up Crackdown on Alleged Price Fixing at Gas Stations

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

Russia's Federal Anti-Monopoly Service (FAS) has launched price-fixing proceedings against six gas station chains in the Moscow region, Interfax reported Monday, as authorities scramble to contain a nationwide fuel crisis triggered by Ukrainian drone strikes on oil refineries.

The six private operators, which run a combined 25 stations across the region, are accused of illegally coordinating simultaneous price hikes at the pump.

The crackdown follows separate FAS investigations opened last month into suspected cartel activity among three major wholesale fuel traders and potential gouging at two Moscow gas station chains.

Nationwide, retail gasoline prices have climbed 11.6% since January, hitting an average of 72.38 rubles per liter ($3.52 per gallon) by late June.

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Also on Monday, Interfax reported that FAS had uncovered alleged anti-monopoly violations in the Saratov and Orenburg regions, both of which share borders with Kazakhstan.

In the Saratov region, the agency issued a formal warning to a gas station chain that holds a "dominant market position" in the region's Engelssky district. The company was ordered to roll back predatory price hikes by July 31.

In the Orenburg region, FAS accused three wholesale distributors of collusion to artificially inflate the cost of bulk diesel. It was not immediately clear whether the distributors faced any charges.

Since June, Russian regions have increasingly faced higher gasoline prices at the pump and, in some cases, outright shortages as a result of Ukrainian attacks on oil refineries and fuel supply networks.

The disruptions arrive at a critical time, with both the summer vacation travel season and the agricultural farming season in full swing. In response to the supply drop, authorities have introduced fuel rationing measures across the country and in annexed Crimea.

President Vladimir Putin recently acknowledged that Russia is facing a "certain shortage" of fuel. He estimated Russia's total gasoline reserves at 1.7 million metric tons, marking a 4% decline compared to the same period last year.

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