



ILLEGAL CHARTER IS RESURGENT IN TOUGH RUSSIAN MARKET

News / Business aviation



Russia is seeing a rise in the number of so-called “gray charter” flights that do not meet all legal requirements, according to members of the country’s business aviation community. Speaking to **AIN** on condition of anonymity on the eve of this week’s JetExpo show in Moscow, Russian business aviation executives said that the rise in illegal charter flying marks a regression after the industry managed to greatly reduce a practice that had been rife a decade ago.

According to **Russian** charter operators, they feel under increasing pressure to cut corners in terms of operating requirements due to the country’s worsening economic situation. They blamed the growing number of so-called “black brokers” insisting on ever-lower charter rates and operating margins. Russian industry estimates suggest that the number of charter brokers active in the country has increased from just under 100 in 2013 to around 170 in 2015.

Speaking at the Business Aviation Forum in Moscow on September 9, European Business Aviation Association CEO Fabio Gamba said his group is working with the Russian United Business Aviation Association to tackle the gray charter problem. “Many of the [de facto Russian] operators are not in Russia,” he commented. “They are based in Austria, Switzerland, the UK, Malta and other countries.”

“Gray **charters** were an acute issue for us in Western Europe a few years ago,” Gamba added. “EBAA member companies are aware of the rise in illegal charters. Unfortunately, it is difficult for us to measure the rise in numbers on an annual basis because of the nature of gray charters.”

According to EBAA, charter operators have been more creative in seeking to exploit legal

loopholes. “If you are evading [the law] you are illegal,” said Gamba. “A lot of these people have been interpreting things in a way that is not illegal, but they are going against the principles of law.”

Gamba expressed the hope that the European Union’s new rules on operating so-called non-complex commercial aircraft, due to come into force in 2016, will help to eliminate the legal ambiguity. “It will reduce the gap that we have between commercial and non-commercial operations,” he said. “Because the gap is now so wide, this is creating a lot of cheating. A lot of people are commercial but pretending that they are not commercial.”

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