

# Bulgarian Premier's Jet Flies Home Vacationers

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*\*Editor's Note Appended*

Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov provided his own government jet to bring home stranded Russian tourists, but some 200 vacationers remained stuck in Bulgaria on Sunday amid a debt dispute between an airline and their tour operator.

Up to 900 Russians were stranded in the airports of Burgas and Varna on Friday because of the spat between Bulgaria Air and the St. Petersburg-based Alma Tour company. The airline accused the tour operator of running up a debt of \$5 million, Vesti state television [said](#).

Alma Tour said the money had been transferred but possibly failed to reach the airline's account due to an unspecified "technical" failure, Fontanka.ru [reported](#). An agency spokeswoman also said Bulgaria Air had never alerted the agency about the upcoming cancellations, RIA-Novosti [reported](#).

Alma Tour also released a [statement](#) Friday that stressed the delay "has nothing to do with the financial side of the matter," but did not elaborate. It added that the Renaissance Strakhovaniye insurer had extended the duration of its coverage for the stranded tourists, but said nothing about compensation for passengers.

Russia's deputy consul in Varna, Galina Petrovskaya, said Saturday that talks between Bulgaria Air and Alma Tour had failed and the next session was postponed until Monday, even though hundreds of passengers were waiting for flights, Itar-Tass [reported](#).

The prime minister's jet flew some 80 people, mostly elderly and women with small children, to Moscow on Saturday, Channel One television [reported](#). Several dozen other vacationers bought new tickets home.

The last 200 stranded vacationers were expected to return to Moscow on Monday, Federal Tourism Agency spokesman Oleg Moseyev said Sunday afternoon, Rusnovosti.ru [reported](#). He did not say how the others had managed to leave Bulgaria, but added that the stranded passengers were put up in local hotels.

Separately, Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky District Court opened hearings Friday into four lawsuits against the Luzhniki Travel agency on accusations that it took money from dozens of tourists but never sent them on their trips, the plaintiffs' lawyer, Eduard Oganyan, told The Moscow Times.

Luzhniki Travel is one of three tour operators that have declared bankruptcy in recent months. The other two are Skytour and Alfa Voyazh.

Fifty-nine Luzhniki Travel clients have filed complaints with Ingosstrakh, which had insured the agency for about 30 million rubles (\$1 million) and has begun making payments, Ingosstrakh's press office said by e-mail.

City police have opened a criminal case into Luzhniki Travel on fraud charges, punishable with up to 10 years in prison. No one at the company could be reached for comment Friday.

"Small tour operators are leaving the market because they are unable to compete with the big companies," a tourism expert with the Public Chamber, Roman Bobylev, said by telephone.

He said this was actually a "positive trend for tourists" because big players "can provide better safety and service at a lower cost."

Luzhniki Travel and Alma Tour are included on a [list](#) of 19 tour operators that have faced financial problems since August 2010 and was compiled by the tourist industry portal TourDom.ru last month.

*\*Due to an editing error, this article initially identified insurer Renaissance Strakhovaniye as Renaissance Capital.*

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