

U.S. Revokes Aeroflot Crew Visas Over \$50M iPhone Smuggling Scheme

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Searches of various Aeroflot crew members' luggage had revealed "millions of dollars of electronic devices," investigators said. **Dmitry Feoktistov / TASS**

The United States has charged 10 Russian nationals with smuggling \$50 million worth of mainly stolen iPhones and other Apple products, the Justice Department [said](#) Monday.

The investigation has led the State Department to revoke 113 visas of current and former employees of Russia's flagship carrier Aeroflot suspected of participating in the smuggling scheme.

"If you believe it is acceptable to exploit positions with a foreign airline to smuggle millions of dollars in illegal goods back to Russia as we allege, the answer is *Nyet*," said FBI assistant director-in-charge William Sweeney.

The FBI conducted the inter-agency investigation with Customs and Border Protection, the New York City Police Department, the State Department's diplomatic security service and others.

The U.S. government alleges that Russian resident Sayuz Daibagya had instructed Aeroflot crew members and others to travel to the U.S. to pick up the iPhones, iPads and Apple Watches.

Suspects Akmal Asadov, Kirill Sokhonchuk, Anton Perevoznikov and Marat Shadkhin allegedly obtained the electronic devices, many of which the Justice Department says were stolen.

A total of eight suspects, including Shohruh Saidov, Zokir Iskanderov and Azamat Bobomurodov, have been arrested and two others are at large.

They were charged with transporting stolen property, failing to file export information and illegally exporting electronic devices.

The Justice Department said Daibagya and Saidov had smuggled more than 1,235 Apple products worth \$1.25 million over five separate trips between August-December 2019.

Searches at the time of the arrests revealed “large amounts of electronic devices” and more than \$600,000 in cash, some of which was hidden in the crawl space of Shadkhin’s residence.

Searches of various Aeroflot crew members’ luggage had revealed “millions of dollars of electronic devices.”

“As alleged, the defendants were members of an international smuggling ring that used a network of operators here and in Russia to circumvent U.S. export laws and regulations,” acting U.S. attorney Seth DuCharme said.

“With today’s arrests, the network has been disabled,” DuCharme added.

In a statement to the The Moscow Times, Aeroflot said that “none of the 10 published names of those being charged are current or former employees of Aeroflot,” adding that it was working with the Russian Embassy in Washington and Russian General Consulate in New York “to clarify the substance of any allegations against the company and to coordinate any further action.”

The company added: “Aeroflot consistently does everything in its power to prevent cross-border offences and economic crime. Previously, the company has worked with law enforcement agencies to identify and thwart attempts to engage its employees in illegal activity similar to what is being alleged in this instance. The company's response was robust, and included taking legal action.”

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