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### UPDATE 1-EU told Yemenia not to repair its planes

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By Tim Hepher

PARIS, June 30 (Reuters) - The Yemeni carrier whose plane crashed off the Indian Ocean archipelago of Comoros on Tuesday had been banned for now from servicing European Union-based jets after failing audit inspections, a European Union agency said.

The move would not have affected the Airbus A310 involved in the Yemenia crash since that plane was registered in Yemen, over which European safety authorities have no jurisdiction.

But it adds to a growing picture of European concerns in advance of the disaster after France said it had barred the same aircraft from its airports and the EU Commission said the plane which crashed had also sparked an EU inquiry two years ago.

The European Aviation Safety Agency, which is responsible for certifying operations outside the EU bloc, granted Yemenia approval to carry out maintenance on EU-registered aircraft in 2006 but suspended this in February, a spokeswoman said.

'These approvals are for maintenance organisations located outside the EU, allowing them to maintain aircraft registered in the EU,' the spokeswoman for the Cologne-based agency said.

'(Yemenia) was suspended at the end of February due to the result of recent audits. Suspended does not mean revoked; it can be reinstated if corrective action is in place,' she added.

She was responding to a Reuters query about details contained in a June 5 regulatory filing.

The suspended authority -- known officially as a Part 145 approval -- allows non-European companies to carry out maintenance on EU-registered aircraft, often to carry out ad hoc repairs when the aircraft are away from base.

Without the approval, any repairs to European aircraft must be carried out elsewhere.

Major maintenance deals in Yemen's neighbour United Arab Emirates were signed at the Paris Air Show earlier this month.

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Yemen on Tuesday denied any safety problems with its flag carrier and said its aircraft were always thoroughly maintained.

'Every aircraft before take off must undergo safety measures and full engineering inspections to guarantee the safety of passengers,' undersecretary for the civil aviation authority Ab dul-Rahman Abdul-Qader told Reuters by telephone from Sanaa.

Yemen's transport minister said the crashed A310 underwent a thorough inspection in May under Airbus supervision.

Industry watchers noted Yemenia had a valid safety audit certificate from trade body IATA, of which it is a member.

'These cover the whole range of operations including training and maintenance,' said Paul Hayes, a director and air safety adviser at UK aviation consultancy Ascend.

The aircraft which crashed is registered in Yemen but is indirectly owned by the U.S. government after a federal bailout of insurer AIG, parent of the world's largest aircraft leasing firm by fleet value, International Lease Finance Corp.

ILFC leased the plane to Yemenia in 1999, industry sources said. The Los Angeles-based company declined to comment.

ILFC is in the process of being sold to raise funds by AIG, which is 80 percent owned by the U.S. government.

(Additional reporting by Kyle Peterson, Inal Ersan, Mark John) Keywords: COMOROS CRASH/MAINTENANCE EU

([paris.equities@reuters.com](mailto:paris.equities@reuters.com); +33 1 4949 5452; Reuters Messaging: [tim.hepner.reuters.com@reuters.net](mailto:tim.hepner.reuters.com@reuters.net))

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