

France Ready to Build Mistral by 2013

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French shipyards are ready to build the first Mistral helicopter carrier for Russia by 2013 if they win a government tender, RIA-Novosti reported Friday, citing one of the ship's producers.

Russia, which has held negotiations with France since last year over the procurement, is holding a tender for a helicopter carrier as it tries to modernize its aging armed forces.

"The first Mistral ship can be built in the French shipyards of Saint Nazaire in 2013 if the contract is signed," Jacques Hardelay, president of STX Europe's operations in France, was quoted as saying.

The Mistral is being built by French shipyard companies DCNS, a quarter-owned by defense electronics group Thales, along with shipbuilder STX.

Talks between Russia and France have been complicated by Moscow's desire to acquire technology along with the ships, as well as questions over where they would be built.

Hardelay was also quoted as saying two ships could be built in Russian shipyards in 2016

using French technology.

Russia wants to buy four Mistral-class amphibious assault ships on the condition that two are built in Russian shipyards, RIA-Novosti reported.

Russia is trying to modernize its armed forces, burdened by Soviet-era equipment that military leaders said was exposed as outdated in the 2008 war with Georgia.

Moscow's potential purchase of one or more of the 400 million to 500 million euro (\$480 million to \$600 million) carriers has alarmed Georgia, as well as Baltic Sea nations within NATO.

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