

Russia, France Sign Ship Deal

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Russian and French shipbuilders signed an agreement Monday to set up a consortium to build military and civilian ships, officials said.

The agreement with French company DCNS was signed in St. Petersburg, said Igor Ryabov, a spokesman for state-controlled United Shipbuilding Corp. He did not say what specific ships will be built by the new venture.

The Defense Ministry promised to announce the results of a tender for an amphibious assault vessel for the Navy later this year, which France is widely expected to win. Russia has negotiated buying one Mistral-class assault ship from France and building several more such vessels at its own shipyards under license.

Ryabov said his company is awaiting results of the Russian military tender and would not give any details of the deal signed Monday.

"The agreement envisages a broad cooperation in building various types of ships," he said.

The agreement was signed by United Shipbuilding director Roman Trotsenko and DCNS

president Patrick Boissier.

Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, who also serves as United Shipbuilding's board chairman, attended the signing.

"By creating this venture we are laying a groundwork for future Russian-French cooperation in military and civilian shipbuilding," Sechin said after the signing, according to Russian news reports.

The Mistral, which could carry up to 16 helicopters and dozens of armored vehicles, would allow Russia to land hundreds of troops quickly on foreign soil.

The possible deal has alarmed Georgia, which fought a brief war against Russia in 2008, as well as the Baltic nations in NATO.

News reports said a key disputed issue in the talks with France on selling the ship had been Russia's demand that it be fitted with the proprietary state-of-the-art command and control system more advanced than the technology the Russian Navy has.

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