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Aurora's Crew to Be Replaced by Civilians

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A crew of navy sailors at Russia's most famous ship, currently serving as a museum in St. Petersburg, will be replaced by civilian personnel, though the vessel will remain the Navy's property, news agencies reported Wednesday.

The new crew on the Aurora cruiser, an icon of the Bolshevik Revolution, is to list 38 members, possibly ex-Navy sailors, all of whom will be employees of the Russian Naval Museum, a spokesman for the Navy said, RIA-Novosti reported. The crew has not been hired yet, and the switch will take several months, he added.

"The move will make it possible to use the historical and cultural potential of the Aurora ship ... more effectively," the Navy said in a statement on the current crew's departure, Interfax reported.

Earlier reports sparked speculation that the Defense Ministry intended to get rid of the Aurora altogether. Activists from different groups, ranging from the pro-Kremlin Young Guard to the Communist Party, were unified in protesting the move, and a Navy spokesman dismissed the

rumor Wednesday.

“It was and will be on the Baltic Fleet's balance, which involves maintenance support and supplies,” he said about the Aurora.

The ship was alleged to have been neglected and deteriorating in recent years, a claim also dismissed by the Navy spokesman.

Billionaire tycoon Mikhail Prokhorov threw a birthday party for his Russky Pioner magazine on the ship during the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2009, sparking a public outcry. No repercussions followed.

The Aurora, launched in 1900, fired the opening blast of the revolution. It was later used as a training ship and moored in the Neva River in 1944.

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