The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Shipbuilder Opposes Foreign Purchases

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July 01, 2013



A French Mistral-class amphibious assault ship, or helicopter carrier.

A senior United Ship Building Corporation official said Russia should not buy ships abroad, while the company recently completed assembly of a Mistral helicopter ship under a French license.

Anatoly Shlemov, the head of the department which oversees government orders at the state-owned corporation said that any purchases of military ships abroad should be "an exception."

"A country which positions itself as a sea power should build ships by itself," Shlemov said, Interfax reported Monday.

He also said purchases of foreign equipment downgraded Russia's potential as an arms exporter. "After we start buying something [abroad], we will loose our authority," he said.

One of the leading world arms exporters, Russia has exported weapons worth $6.5 billion

since the beginning of the year, according to government figures. President Vladimir Putin said earlier that military equipment and weapons exports increased 15 percent last year.

Shlemov spoke on the eve of the International Maritime Defense Show, which opens in St. Petersburg on Wednesday. The show, which has been held since 2001, will host 350 defense companies, including 38 foreign ones.

United Ship Building Corporation completed its part of the construction of the hull of a Mistral helicopter carrier late last month. The project was carried out under license from France based on a $1.7 billion contract signed in 2011.

The French side will now equip the ship with systems and equipment. Military officials said the ship would be ready in October. The second Mistral-type ship will be fully manufactured in Russia.

The Russian Defense Ministry said in December that it had postponed the construction of another two Mistral ships, which had been specified as an option under the contract.

The deal, signed during the tenure of former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, became the first major purchase by Russia of military equipment from a NATO country.

But, while ruling out buying foreign-made military vessels, Shlemov also said that foreign-made military equipment is known to often be cheaper and of better quality.

He said the Russian Navy would seek some cooperation with Poland, a NATO member, to repair some of the existing Polish-made ships bought by the Soviet Union when Poland was a member of the Warsaw Pact.

He was referring to the support ships used for the marines. "Those ships are still being used because they have proved their quality."

A senior engineer of one of the Russian defense companies that repairs ships for the Russian fleet in Sevastopol, Ukraine, said that, due to security concerns, foreign military equipment should not be purchased.

"We are becoming dependent on spare parts, which harms our national security," he said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

"We have many good projects ourselves; the problem is only the proper use of money," he added.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/07/01/shipbuilder-opposes-foreign-purchases-a25423