The Moscow Times
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Russia Scuttles Old Ship to Block Ukrainian Vessels Accessing The Black Sea, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

March 06, 2014



A picture believed to be showing the Ochakov.

Russian Black Sea fleet has scuttled one of its old ships at the mouth of a Crimean bay used by a Ukrainian navy base, effectively blocking vessels from accessing the Black Sea, a news report said.

The ship, a decommissioned Kara-class cruiser named the Ochakov, had been gathering rust since it was docked at a Russian naval junkyard in 2011. On Wednesday, the Russians towed it to the channel leading out of the bay, known as Donuzlav Lake, before sinking it, The LA Times reported.

To the annoyance of Ukraine, 10 Russian vessels have been blockading the bay, including the flagship of the Black Sea fleet, a large Atlant-class guided missile cruiser called

the Moskva, which was first of the fleet to be deployed to the Black Sea in response to the 2008 Georgia crisis.

"The Black Sea fleet can sail in the Black Sea, but it has no right to block our navy harbor like this!," said Lieutenant Colonel Alexei Mazepa, a Ukrainian Defense Ministry spokesman.

The Russian navy has attempted to rattle its Ukrainian counterparts in Crimea on a number of occasions in an effort to pressure them into defecting.

Earlier this week, Admiral Alexander Vitko, head of the Black Sea fleet, visited Ukraine's South Base and invited the Ukrainian officers to "collectively take up the Russian military oath and become part of the Black Sea Fleet," said Captain Viktor Shmiganovsky, deputy commander of the base.
However, Vitko was rebuffed by the base commander and "left in a rage," Shmiganovsky said.

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