

Cameron: Selling Mistral to Russia Is Now Unthinkable; Hollande Disagrees

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Activists in Kiev shouting slogans at a protest against the Mistral deal.

LONDON — British Prime Minister David Cameron on Monday questioned France's plan to sell Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia, saying fulfilling such an order would be unthinkable in Britain after the downing of the Malaysia Airlines plane in Ukraine.

When asked about France's plan to press ahead with a 1.2 billion euro (\$1.66 billion) contract to sell the ships to Russia, Cameron said: "Frankly in this country it would be unthinkable to fulfill an order like the one outstanding that the French have."

"But we need to put the pressure on with all our partners to say that we cannot go on doing business as usual with a country when it is behaving in this way."

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said, however, that he doubted France would cancel the deal, despite coming under pressure from other Western leaders.

"This is billions of euros. The French are very pragmatic. I doubt it [that the deal will be canceled]," Rogozin said. "Suspension of the deal would be [much] less damaging for Russia than for France."

Cameron made his statement as fighting flared in the eastern Ukrainian city of Donetsk as investigators began to inspect the bodies of victims of the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 last week.

Cameron said that the EU should consider hard-hitting economic sanctions against Russia, including freezing the assets of President Vladimir Putin's closest allies whom he referred to as "cronies and oligarchs."

"I made some progress with that on Wednesday night, I hope to make some more progress [at an EU meeting on Tuesday], but I think it is time to start go into the tier three sanctions," he said, adding that Russia could not expect access to European markets, capital and technical expertise while Putin was fueling conflict in Ukraine.

A Question of Attitude

French President Francois Hollande said Monday a decision on whether to deliver a second Mistral helicopter carrier to Russia will depend on Moscow's attitude over the Ukraine crisis,

Speaking during a dinner with the presidential press corps, Hollande said that a first warship was nearly finished and would be delivered as planned in October, despite strong opposition from France's allies.

"For the time being, a level of sanctions has not been decided on that would prevent this delivery," Hollande said.

"Does that mean that the rest of the contract - the second Mistral - can be carried through? That depends on Russia's attitude," Hollande added.

For the second delivery to be canceled, EU sanctions would have to be decided at the level of heads of state and government, a French government official said.

EU foreign ministers might agree to ratchet up sanctions on Russia when they meet on Tuesday, though targeting deliveries of defense equipment was not planned, the official added, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"For now, France wants the sanctions to be financial, targeted and quick," a presidential aide said separately.

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