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Russian Trial Of Mistral Warship Scrapped for 'Technical Reasons'

By The Moscow Times

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The Mistral-class helicopter carrier Vladivostok is seen at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, Sept. 4.

NANTES, France — A forthcoming sea trial of a French-built Mistral helicopter carrier due to be delivered to Russia has been suspended for technical reasons, a source close to the matter said Tuesday.

Under pressure from allies, France said last week that it wanted to see whether a cease-fire between pro-Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces held before deciding whether it could deliver the ship as planned on Nov. 1.

A nine-day sea trial with Russian sailors on board was due to start Wednesday.

"It has been suspended for several days," the source said. "It's no doubt a technical reason — it has nothing to do with the current situation in Ukraine."

Four hundred Russian sailors have been based in the Atlantic port of Saint-Nazaire since June to receive training on the warship, the first of two that France agreed in 2011 to deliver as part of a 1.2 billion euro ($1.55 billion) contract with Moscow.

French officials until last week vowed to go ahead with the sale of the first of two Mistral ships, saying that scrapping the deal would hurt France and its defense sector more than it would Moscow.

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