France Training Russian Sailors On Mistral Warship Despite Threats to Nix Sale

By The Moscow Times

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The second of the two French-built Mistral amphibious warships on order for Russia on Monday completed its first round of sea trials with its Russian crew, despite French threats to abort the deal over Moscow's actions in Ukraine, news agency RIA Novosti reported.

The ship, a helicopter carrier named the Vladivostok, will rotate its crew and return to sea on Tuesday to continue familiarizing Russian sailors with its operation systems and "shake down" any lingering problems, an unidentified source at the French shipyard in Saint-Nazaire that is building the Mistrals told the agency on Monday.

The Vladivostok will go through several rounds of trials and certifications leading up to its scheduled delivery late next year.

The Mistral carriers have become a symbol of division in the West on how to respond

to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Kremlin's ongoing support of separatists fighting in eastern Ukraine. Washington and several of its NATO allies have pleaded with France to axe the deal, which would hand Moscow the keys to two of the most advanced warships in the world at a time when many Western leaders fear Russia is rediscovering its imperialist ambitions.

In early September, France said it would withhold delivery of the Sevastopol, the first of the two Mistrals. French President Francois Hollande later clarified that the decision to deliver the Sevastopol would be made on the eve of its Nov. 1 contractual delivery date and was contingent on a permanent ceasefire and a political settlement in Ukraine.

On September 9, Reuters reported that sea trials for one of the Mistrals — which of the two was not specified — had been delayed due to technical reasons.

The Vladivostok left St. Nazaire with its Russian crew on September 13.

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