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Russia Says Mistral Warship Transfer Should Be Signed With France By November

By The Moscow Times

September 30, 2014



The deed transferring control of the first of two French-built Mistral warships to the Russian navy should be signed within weeks, a Russian state arms export agency official was quoted by Interfax as saying Tuesday.

"If the French meet their obligations, the deed will be signed in late October or early November," said Rosoboronexport's deputy general director, Igor Sevastyanov.

Washington and several of its NATO allies have lobbied hard for Paris to ax the deal, worth 1.2 billion euros ($1.5 billion), due to Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for rebels in eastern Ukraine. France appeared to have caved to the pressure in early September, when it was announced the deal was put on hold. French President Francois Hollande later said the delivery would only go through if tensions in Ukraine subsided by the end of October.

According to an unidentified source quoted by Interfax earlier Tuesday, the first ship — named the Vladivostok — should be transferred to the Russian navy at a ceremony scheduled for Nov. 4.

Sevastyanov said the transfer "must be signed in Saint-Nazaire," where the ship was built. Russian sailors are currently training alongside French sailors to operate the vessel, which has advanced war-fighting capabilities that the Russian navy does not already have and cannot domestically acquire.

The second Mistral is slated for delivery next year.

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