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Russia Demands Final Decision on Mistral Warships or Money Back

By The Moscow Times

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Russia's Foreign Ministry has demanded that France make a clear statement regarding the delivery status of the first of two Mistral-class warships at the end of October. If Paris decides to cancel the deal then the Foreign Ministry says the money should be returned.

"It's time for the French to determine their position because this summer we heard that, despite the current situation, the contract will be honored. ... It is time now to decide, and if not, the money should be returned," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Alexander Lukashevich said, the RIA Novosti news agency reported Thursday.

In early September, French President Francois Hollande, under pressure from several NATO allies to refrain from giving the ships to Russia in response to Moscow's annexation of Crimea and support for rebels in eastern Ukraine, said the delivery would only go through if the situation in Ukraine improved.

Russia has continuously protested any potential cancellation of the delivery, demanding that France honor the 1.2 billion euro ($1.5 billion) deal.

"The situation is quite simple: There is a contract that should be completed. Under this contract, significant [sums of money] were transferred," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Alexander Lukashevich, RIA Novosti reported Thursday.

If things have changed on the French side, Lukashevich added, "this needs to be discussed [face to face], not through the methods of megaphone diplomacy, especially through the media."

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