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Russia Threatens Lawsuit After France Suspends Mistral Warship Delivery

By The Moscow Times

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The Russian navy frigate Smolny is seen at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, western France on Nov. 25, 2014.

Russia is ready to file a lawsuit against France for indefinitely suspending the delivery of two Mistral helicopter carrier warships to Russia, an official has said.

"We have already prepared all the documents" to file in court, Vladimir Kozhin, a Kremlin aide in charge of military technical cooperation, told the TASS news agency on Thursday.

He declined to specify when the suit might be filed, saying only: "It will be done when it's done," according to the report.

But Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin said the same day that nothing had been set in stone, suggesting Moscow expects Paris to make good on the delivery, as Russian officials have previously demanded.

"There is a certain time period, connected with the date when the contract must be fulfilled, and it hasn't run out yet," Rogozin was quoted as saying by TASS.

The first of the two Mistral warships — built for Russia by France under a $1.7 billion contract signed in 2011 — was scheduled to be delivered in the last quarter of this year. The contract also envisaged a second Mistral ship to be delivered in 2015.

But in late November, France suspended delivery of the first Mistral carrier to Russia, citing Moscow's interference in Ukraine.

Russia's Deputy Defense Minister Yury Borisov told Zvezda military news television channel at the time that his country would not yet pursue claims against France, but expected the contract to be fulfilled.

Rogozin told TASS on Thursday that arms export agency Rosoboronexport, which signed the contract for the Mistrals, was "prepared for any eventuality, so we are awaiting their reaction [should France fail to supply the ships]."

Rogozin has also denied French media reports that Russian sailors training on a Mistral in the French port of St. Nazaire have been barred from accessing the ship.

"There are two crews of Russian sailors of 160 men each, plus another 60 instructors," Rogozin told TASS, adding that the sailors were still stationed at the warship.

"They are there, nobody has recalled them," he was quoted as saying.

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