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Russian Sailors Training on Mistral Warships to Return From France, Reports Says

By The Moscow Times

December 18, 2014

A Russian sailor stands on the deck of the Russian navy frigate Smolny at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, western France, on Dec. 17, 2014.

Russian sailors training aboard Mistral-class warships in France will return home in the coming days, possibly beginning their departure as early as Thursday, French media reports said.

See the Photo Gallery: Russian Sailors Leave Mistral Behind

The exact status of the Mistral deal, which envisages France providing Russia with two helicopter carriers under the terms of a $1.7 billion contract, remains uncertain, and French officials declined to elaborate on the scheduling details.

But a spokesman for French shipbuilder DCNS told AFP that the Russian sailors training

onboard the ships would be back in their homeland "before the end of the year," France-24 reported.

Ouest-France cited unidentified "multiple sources" as saying the departure would begin Thursday, adding that the date was "still kept secret" by the Defense Ministry.

On the eve of the expected departure, scores of Russian sailors swarmed to shops in the French port of Saint-Nazaire, stocking up on various goods, Ouest-France reported.

France has indefinitely suspended the delivery of the first of the two warships, citing the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow will seek a refund of its money if the contract is canceled, Russian officials have said.

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