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Russian Firms Design Replacements for French Mistral Warships – Reports

By The Moscow Times

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Two Mistral-class helicopter carriers Sevastopol (R) and Vladivostok are seen at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, western France.

A leading Russian naval design bureau is designing a helicopter carrier to replace the Mistral-class warships that Russia ordered from France but has yet to receive due to tensions over Ukraine, news agency RIA Novosti reported Friday, citing an unidentified source in the defense industry.

A Mistral analogue called Lavina is being developed by the Krylov State Research Center in St. Petersburg, the industry source told RIA.

"The Lavina helicopter carrier [would have] a displacement of 24,000 tons," the source said. This would make the ship — whose name means "avalanche" in Russian — larger than the French Mistral vessels, which have a displacement of 21,000 tons.

France was scheduled to deliver the first of two Mistral-class helicopter carriers to the Russian navy last year, but Paris froze the contract in response to Moscow's involvement in the Ukraine crisis. Russia has demanded that France either reimburse the 1.2 billion euro ($1.4 billion) contract in full or hand the ships over as promised.

Meanwhile, Russian design bureaus are rushing to present their own proposals for Russian-built analogues to the Mistrals.

On Tuesday, an unidentified source told RIA about another Mistral replacement being designed by the Nevsky Design Bureau in St. Petersburg. Known as the Priboy-class helicopter carrier, the ship would be smaller than Lavina, displacing only 14,000 tons of water, the source said. Later that day, a representative of the Russian navy's command staff confirmed the design's existence to news agency Interfax.

The Lavina would have a range of 5,000 nautical miles (more than 9,000 kilometers), a crew of 320 sailors and room for 500 troops or 50 armored vehicles, the source told RIA. Its hangars could hold 16 helicopters and its well deck could store six landing craft, the source said.

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