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Russian Crews of Mistral Warships Disbanded – Report

By The Moscow Times

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Russian sailors stand in formation in front of the Mistral-class helicopter carrier Vladivostok at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, western France.

The Russian crews of two French-made Mistral-class helicopter carriers, whose delivery has been suspended due to political tensions over the Ukraine crisis, have been disbanded, news agency Interfax reported Friday, citing a source in the Russian navy.

"The Mistral crews have been disbanded. The sailors will continue to serve on the ships of the Pacific Fleet," Interfax quoted the source as saying.

About 500 people in total were training to serve on the Mistral-class warships, according to the agency.

At the same time, the TASS news agency on Friday cited an unidentified source in the military as saying that the crews had in fact not been disbanded.

The crews can be disbanded only after a final decision on the ships has been made, the source said, adding that Mistral crew members are now undergoing a navy training course.

Russia ordered the two Mistrals from France in 2011 in a deal worth 1.2 billion euros ($1.3 billion).

The Russian sailors arrived in France last year to participate in exercises on the first Mistral helicopter carrier and then waited at the shipyard for the ship's delivery. When France announced that the delivery had been suspended after the EU slapped sanctions on Russia over its role in the Ukraine crisis, the sailors returned to Russia.

Citing unidentified sources, news agency RIA Novosti reported earlier this month that France and Russia had finally reached an agreement on compensation for the non-delivery of the warships. The agreement must now be approved by the governments of both countries, the report said.

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