

France to Decide Whether to Deliver Mistral to Russia Next Month

By [The Moscow Times](#)

October 28, 2014



The Mistral-class helicopter carrier Vladivostok is seen at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, France.

PARIS — France will wait until next month to decide whether to deliver the first of two Mistral helicopter carriers to Russia, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said Tuesday.

French President Francois Hollande had for months resisted pressure from Washington and other allies to scrap the 1.2 billion euro (\$1.58 billion) contract before choosing last month to push back the original end-October delivery date.

He said then that he would only hand over the first carrier — the Vladivostok — if there was a lasting cease-fire and a political settlement in Ukraine.

"The president ... said that if the political conditions did not change he did not envisage giving the authorization for delivery," Le Drian told reporters.

He declined to say whether the conditions had now been met, but said the president would make a decision "during November."

Western officials on Monday hailed Sunday's Ukraine election. Pro-Western parties are set to dominate parliament, handing President Petro Poroshenko a mandate to end a separatist conflict and to steer the country further away from Russia's orbit towards mainstream Europe.

But after months of conflict he still faces huge problems. Russia opposes his plans to join the European Union, a cease-fire is barely holding between government forces and pro-Russian separatists in the east, and the economy is in dire straits.

French officials are remaining tight-lipped over the fate of the Mistral contract, with Moscow warning that it will seek damages if it is canceled or suspended.

Russia's Mistral purchase would give it access to advanced technology, alarming some of France's NATO allies who consider Paris is blindly strengthening Moscow militarily.

With as many as 1,000 jobs at stake in France, there is immediate concern at home. But more worrying for Paris is what impact the cancellation of the contract would have on future defense export deals and on a defense industry that employs 40,000 people.

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