

Beat: Business

THE FATE OF THE TWO MISTRAL HELICOPTER CARRIERS... THE SERIES

FRENCH SOURCE VERSUS RUSSIAN SOURCE

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USPA NEWS - RUSSIA demands that the 1,2 billion euros payment should be given back. FRANCE in May proposed 785 million as refund via Louis GARTIER. Now, RUSSIA declares that an agreement was made for FRANCE to pay back 1,2 billion. Are we sure that this is the end of the series ?

If we go back to May, Louis GARTIER, the Head of France's Secretariat-General for National Defense and Security (SGDSN), arrived discreetly in Moscow in an attempt to find a solution out of the failed mistral deal. He offered to refund RUSSIA 785 million out of the 1,2 billion euros. The Russians must have been thinking that the messenger had no idea about the details of the arms deal contract (as it was said in Paris-Match in May 20, 2015). The «misunderstanding» was clear because François FILLION, ex-prime-minister of Nicolas SARKOZY, in a letter, was reassuring Moscow that the French Government was taking the engagement of paying back in the best conditions in case of problems happening.

And the Government of François HOLLANDE does the opposite. The political situation changed but for the terms, do they have to change too ? Business engagements or politics, which one should be respected first when changing Government. FRANCE stopped the planned sale after the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The arms export contract was signed between DCNS, a French company that specializes in naval defense and energy, and Rosoboronexport, Russia's Agency for Defense-related exports and imports, in 2011. The Russian side already paid 1.2 billion two mistral-class helicopter carriers. The first ship should have been delivered in november 2014 and RUSSIA expected the second ship in 2015.

However, FRANCE cancelled the delivery, citing Russia's alleged involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. So, the reaction of Moscow was fast and it was declared that RUSSIA has technology to build equivalent of Mistral Helicopter carriers. Declaration from Russian Presidential aide Vladimir Kozhin. He added that even if they were not delivered, their defense potential would not be decreased.

Now, FRANCE will have two warships on its hand if not coming on an agreement with RUSSIA. All that remains now is for the two sides to agree on a compensation package for Moscow. After that, the problem for FRANCE is of who to sell the ships to. Both the Wladivostok and the Sevastopol, which are currently stuck in the port of Saint-Nazaire, have been built to Russia's specifications and could cost millions to convert.

What might be compelling FRANCE to push for a deal now, is the simple cost of doing nothing. According to Jean-Dominique MERCHET, French Defense Columnist, the delay in the Mistral deal could cost French taxpayers as much as 5 million euros a month for upkeep and maintenance if they remain in the port of Saint-Nazaire.

Still in May, Oleg Bochkaryov told journalists that RUSSIA was planning to built its own Mistral-class helicopter carriers to replace the not delivered by FRANCE. In July, François HOLLANDE said during a news conference «Discussions are under way, I will make a decision in the coming weeks». A French source told AFP that an agreement has been reached but that some details still were needed to be finalized.

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