

France and Germany are establishing a closer military co-operation with Russia

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Russia and France on 17 June signed a contract for the construction of two Mistral class helicopter carriers for the Russian Navy. On the same day, in the shade of the Russian-French agreement, a Russian-German deal on building a modern combat training centre was struck. The centre will be based on the Russian army's training ground in Mulino near Moscow, which is the largest in Europe. While the contract of sale of the French ships to Russia – which has been commented on by the press worldwide from the very beginning – is mainly of political significance and bears no significant impact on the condition of the Russian fleet, the implementation of the Russian-German deal – which has not been given any publicity – will fundamentally improve the combat capacity of the Russian armed forces.

France is selling helicopter carriers to Russia

Negotiations concerning Russia's purchase of Mistral class ships from France, which are capable of transporting an equipped battalion (units of this class are capable of transporting 40 tanks, 450 soldiers and 16 heavy helicopters) started in November 2009. The purchase of the amphibious assault carriers – the first ones in its fleet – was not most important for Russia since they are not sufficiently grounded from the point of view of the navy use doctrine (this has been confirmed by contradictory Russian reports on the future allocation of the units and their tasks). What was most important were the modern command and communication systems which the ships are equipped with. One proof for the fact that Russian demands regarding the electronic equipment of the ships have been satisfied at least partly (contrary to the reservations which have been voiced also in France) was the concern expressed by the French Defence Ministry, which has announced it will examine the details of this contract. This may mean that the ship equipment issues will still be a subject of complicated negotiations.

Finally, the parties reached an agreement on building two ships in France in co-operation with Russian companies (they will supply for example elements of the hull and the ship-borne attack helicopters); the estimated value of the contract is 1.2 billion euros. The ships will be built by the French-Russian DCNS-OSK shipbuilding consortium, which has been established specially for this purpose. The shares of Russian shipbuilders in the construction of the first two ships at the French Saint-Nazaire shipyard will reach 20% and 40% respectively. The first Mistral class ship for Russia is to be ready in late 2013/early

2014, and the second one is expected one year later. The option of building a further two such units, which has been announced in Russia on numerous occasions, appears purely hypothetical at the moment. The Russian armament programme by 2020 allocates no funds for the purchase of more Mistral ships. However, it is worth noting that on 17 June Russia signed one more contract with the French-Korean shipbuilding corporation, STX (the owner of DCNS), which provides for the construction of a shipway to be used for the construction of large combat ships at the Admiralteyskaya Verf shipyard in Saint Petersburg. It is likely to be used by Russia to build completely different units for the Russian navy, for example a new aircraft carrier, which is currently being designed.

Germany is building a modern combat training centre for the Russian army

The creation of a Russian new-generation combat training centre in co-operation with Germany is one of the key elements of the Russian army's modernisation process. The centre is to enable comprehensive training – both with the use of 3D simulators and in training ground conditions – for an expanded tactical formation (brigade), including an exercise engagement between two brigades. This will be the first facility of this kind in the Russian army (very few Western armies have similar training centres) and will change fundamentally the way and the nature of the training of the Russian ground forces as well as the air forces and airborne forces which co-operate with them. The centre will enable the Russian army to shorten and improve the security of the training process, to evaluate more precisely the level achieved by the trained units and to substantially cut expenses.

Progress in the work on the creation of this centre is unusually rapid; the decision to create it in co-operation with Germany was made in December 2010, the Russian Defence Ministry and Germany's Rheinmetall company signed a contract to design the centre in February 2011 and an agreement on 17 June envisaging the centre's construction by 2013, when it is expected to commence its training activity (the centre is to reach complete readiness in 2014). The estimated value of the contract is 280 million euros, which includes simulators ordered by the Russian army in Germany, the same as those used at the Bundeswehr training centres. However, the nature of this co-operation is not strictly commercial; as progress in the implementation of the project to construct the centre is made, co-operation is being intensified between the Russian armed forces and the German army (they signed a memorandum of co-operation in the training of officers and non-commissioned officers in February this year), and the contracts are preceded by talks between senior officials representing the defence ministries of the two countries. According to some Russian sources, the Mulino combat training centre is also to be used in future by the Bundeswehr, which does not have such a large facility.

Conclusion

The deals with France and Germany constitute a small part of the Russian army's modernisation programme currently underway. They confirm, however, that the Russian defence sector is still backward in selected areas, mainly those involving electronics, in comparison to the arms industries of the leading Western countries. On the other hand, the

deals are a sign of regularly increasing Russian expenditure on military purposes, which are currently close to 3% of the country's GDP. The Russian Federation intends to spend some 500 billion euros on the development and purchase of weapons and military equipment by 2020.

It is worth noting the level of publicity the two deals have been given; the press has devoted a large amount of attention to the talks on the purchase of the French ships by Russia since their commencement, and some countries which believe that the Russian army poses a potential threat to them (mainly Estonia and Georgia) have also protested against the possibility this contract being signed. In turn, the German-Russian co-operation on the building of the combat training centre has never been an issue discussed in the press. In Germany this is a taboo subject like the previous signs of the Bundeswehr's military co-operation with the Russian armed forces (for example, during the putting into orbit of a group of German military satellites).

The two contracts clearly show the differences in the approaches of France and Germany to military co-operation with Russia. In the case of Paris this co-operation is mainly of a business and political nature, while Berlin is focusing on the business and military aspects which in future may offer benefits to both parties – regardless of the training co-operation between the Russian Armed Forces and the Bundeswehr, German firms are counting on more contracts linked to the technical modernisation of the Russian army. This is the reason why the process of reaching agreement and consequently the levels of publicity given to those two deals in the press worldwide have been different.

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