

JAPAN FEELS “STRONG CONCERN” ABOUT FRANCE – RUSSIA NAVY DEAL

President Francois Hollande has defied allies Britain and the United States by confirming plans to deliver a helicopter carrier to Russia.

A 1.2-billion-euro (\$1.62 billion) (960 million pounds) contract for two warships, signed by France's then-president Nicolas Sarkozy's conservative government in 2011, was the first by a NATO member country to supply Russia with military equipment. British Prime Minister David Cameron said last week fulfilling such an order would be unthinkable in Britain after the downing of the Malaysian Airlines plane in Ukraine.

Japanese Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera told his French counterpart, Jean-Yves Le Drian, in a meeting in Tokyo that Japan was strongly concerned about the plan given its potential impact on east Asia's security situation.

One of the two French helicopter carriers Russia plans to procure is named **Vladivostok**, after Russia's Far Eastern seaport.

"'Strong concern', in a sense, means we want them to stop the deal," Onodera told reporters following his meeting with Le Drian. "The world is highly concerned about Ukraine and we are worried about the recent military buildup in Russia's Far East.

If the ship is deployed to its namesake, that would be something that makes the whole world concerned."



The **VLADIVOSTOK** fitting out in St.Nazaire
Photo : Leon de Hoop ©

Le Drian responded by saying France understood Japan's concern but Russia has already made a payment, adding that if such sales are included in EU sanctions on Russia, France would follow the policy, a Japanese Defence Ministry official said. U.S. and European leaders agreed on Monday to impose

wider sanctions on Russia, and EU member states were expected to try to reach a final deal on Tuesday on stronger measures that would include closing the bloc's capital markets to Russian state banks and an embargo on future arms sales.

In a letter to EU leaders last week, European Council President Herman Van Rompuy said there was an emerging consensus on some key principles, including only targeting future contracts, which would leave France free to go ahead with the delivery of the helicopter carriers being built for Russia.

Western leaders say pro-Russian rebels almost certainly shot the Malaysian Airlines passenger plane down by mistake with a Russian-supplied surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 people on board.

Moscow has blamed Kiev for the tragedy.

Source : Reuters (Reporting by Kiyoshi Takenaka; Editing by Robert Birsel)