

*Ambassade de France
aux Etats-Unis*

Washington, December 21, 2009

L' Ambassadeur

Mr. Senator,

Thank you for your letter dated December 18, in which you express concerns about a Russian official request to purchase a Mistral-class ship built in France. These are legitimate questions and I am happy to engage this important discussion, in the spirit of trust and confidence that is the mark of the strong relationship between our two countries and that I personally value so much.

As you mention, France's contribution to global peace and security is well known and has been recently illustrated by the key role President Sarkozy played in the Georgian crisis in summer 2008. We still have French men and women on the ground, as part of a European effort to maintain the peace agreement brokered last year, and we have every interest in avoiding a new conflict at Europe's doorstep. We cannot be suspected therefore of complacency in the issue you mentioned in your letter. May I simply add that we have been keen to consult our partners, notably Georgia, before any move and that we have acted in full transparency? I also underline that Russian authorities, at the highest level, have clearly rejected the irresponsible statement that you mention, with respect to the sale of the Mistral-class ship.

At the same time, both France and the United States recognize that we have to engage Russia constructively, so as to anchor it in a mutually beneficial partnership and intensify its cooperation with Europe and NATO. We understand that this mindset is shared by the administration and by many in Congress. It is through concrete cooperation that we will contribute to rebuilding an atmosphere of trust which is absolutely necessary to the improvement of European security.

[REDACTED]

.../...

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

In this context, France has no reason to refuse considering a Russian request, which is being examined, and will be concluded, with all the necessary precautions as part of the French military equipment export control regulatory procedures.

I would also like to recall also that a Mistral-class ship is a support ship that France has used in particular for humanitarian or nationals' evacuation missions due to its transport and medical capabilities. It does not have any particularly advanced technological elements and French authorities are taking all the necessary steps so that any sensitive equipment (communications) is not exported. The present Russian request would therefore not represent a credible threat to the North Atlantic Alliance.

I stand ready, as always, to continue this important discussion directly and will be happy to meet you at your earliest convenience, if you wish so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Vimont', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Pierre Vimont

Cc : The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State.
