

Portugal Opens Talks to Buy 5 Embraer KC-390 Transports

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Portugal was an early partner in the KC-390 tanker-transport, seen here landing on a Portuguese airport during a demonstration tour in June, and now plans to buy five, with an option for a sixth, to replace its C-130H Hercules. (Twitter photo)

The Portuguese Council of Ministers on July 27 authorized the defense ministry to open negotiations with Embraer for the acquisition of five KC-390 military transport and tanker aircraft. It also directed the ministry to evaluate the suspension of the upgrade of the C-130H aircraft now in service.

The Cabinet resolution, now published in the Portuguese government gazette, *Diário da República*, mentions up to five KC-390s with a sixth one on option, as well as logistics support and a Category-D full-flight simulator to be installed and operated in Portugal.

"This reinforces the current capabilities of air transport, search and rescue, humanitarian evacuations and support for the Portuguese citizens, between the Continent and the Archipelagos," reads the resolution, which adds that this acquisition will bring additional in-

flight refueling and fire-fighting capabilities, enabling Portugal to operate dual-use (civilian and military) aircraft that meet the country's permanent requirements.

Portugal was involved in the KC-390 development and production through its state-owned aerospace company, OGMA, and in 2011 Portugal's defense minister signed an agreement with Embraer on the potential acquisition of the KC-390, which allowed the Portuguese air force to monitor the configuration of the aircraft throughout its development phase.

Portugal also invested 30 million euros in the KC-390 program between 2012 and 2015, and is one of the program's cooperative partners, along with the Czech Republic and Argentina.

"Having contributed to the very significant progress of the project's development phase, [Portugal] expects to play a key role in the commercial success of the production phase, which is of particular importance for the potential benefits of industrial development and exports," the cabinet resolution added.

The Cabinet directed the ministry of defense to complete, by the end of October, a detailed report that "identifies all the relevant and necessary aspects of the introduction of the new KC-390 weapon system into the air force...with the objective of achieving Initial Operational Capability (IOC) by the end of 2021."

The Minister of Defense will direct the negotiations with Embraer and its subcontractors, assisted by a team comprising representatives of the Ministers of Finance, Science, Technology and Higher Education, and Economy.

The Council of Ministers also directed the Minister of Defense to evaluate the suspension of the modernization of the six C-130H aircraft now in service. These aircraft were due to be retired in 2016, but will now have to be operated until the KC-390 is delivered in 2021. If this is technically possible, the budget allotted for the upgrade will go towards their operation until their replacement.