

Ecuador Seeks Russian Aid Against U.S. Military Buildup In Colombia

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Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa will come to Moscow to discuss weapons supplies, but the Kremlin also expects him to speak about the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

"We need to restore the might of our army," Correa said about the goal of his visit to Moscow, which he will make together with Defense Minister Javier Ponce.

Ecuador has been alarmed by the decision of Colombia, with which it severed diplomatic relations in March 2008, to allow U.S. troops to use its bases.

The Ecuadorian officials plan to sign the contract, which was initialed last week, for the delivery of two Mi-17 Hip multirole helicopters for its Defense Ministry's civilian purposes, said a representative of the Russian state arms exporter, Rosoboronexport.

However, Moscow also expects Ecuador to sign other contracts. A source at Russian Technology said Russia could supply six Su-30MK2 Flanker multirole fighters, several helicopters, and air defense systems to Ecuador, which would increase the value of their military cooperation to over \$200 million.

In response, Russia expects Ecuador to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A source at the Russian Foreign Ministry said Ecuador had unofficially promised to announce its intention during the president's visit.

There are no indications that the decision has been taken, but we have strong hopes for recognition by Ecuador and Bolivia, said South Ossetian Foreign Minister Murat Dzhioyev.

Positive signals are coming from all Latin American countries, said Maxim Gvindzhia, deputy foreign minister of Abkhazia. "Following recognition by Nicaragua and Venezuela, the other ALBA countries will eventually recognize us too," he said.

The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) is an international cooperation organization comprising Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Antigua and Barbuda.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega announced the recognition of the two breakaway Georgian republics in September 2008, and in December Russia granted Nicaragua a \$1 billion loan.

Venezuela was issued a \$2.2 billion loan for the purchase of Russian weapons during the visit by President Hugo Chavez in September this year, when he announced the recognition

of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, Gvindzhia recalled that a \$1 billion loan had been granted to Venezuela in September 2008, when Chavez was in Moscow, but Venezuela did not recognize the two republics then.

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