

# Slovakia to Replace Russian-Made Helicopters With 9 U.S. Black Hawks

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A U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.

BRATISLAVA — Slovakia has agreed to buy nine U.S.-made Black Hawk helicopters for \$261 million, to replace its outdated Russian Mi-17 fleet, reducing the NATO country's dependence on Russian parts and servicing, a spokesman said.

"The decision to reduce our dependence on Russia was taken even before the conflict in Ukraine began and considering recent developments it proved to be a good one," Defense Ministry spokesman Martin Cambalik said Thursday.

The conflict in neighboring Ukraine, in which the West accuses Russia of supporting rebels, has hastened decisions around the region to raise military spending and turn to Western suppliers.

"We could have some equipment repaired but EU sanctions forbid import of Russian spare

parts," Cambalik said.

Last year, Slovakia signed a deal with Italy's Alenia Aermacchi for two Spartan C-27J transport aircraft to replace Russian Antonovs.

It has also been in talks with the Swedish government on leasing Gripen fighter jets to replace Russian Mig-29s. A tender for new air defense radars is also under way.

Slovakia spends 1 percent of gross domestic product on defense, half of its NATO commitment. But it has pledged to raise that to 1.6 percent of GDP by 2020.

Black Hawk helicopters are made by Sikorsky Aircraft Corp, a unit of United Technologies.

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