GERMAN MILITARY TO USE 13 A400M AIRCRAFT AFTER FAILING TO FIND BUYERS

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The German military plans to use 13 Airbus A400M military transport planes for its own needs after failing to find buyers for the aircraft, it told lawmakers on Friday.

The move will mean extra costs in coming years.

Germany initially planned to buy 60 A400M aircraft, but later lowered the number to 53. Parliament then approved a plan in 2011 under which 13 of those aircraft would be sold to other countries to save money, but the ministry has been unable to find willing buyers.

The longer-term costs of operating those 13 aircraft were still being assessed, but initial estimates pointed to one-time startup costs of 505 million euros, including 150 million euros needed to prepare a second A400M base, state secretary Markus Gruebel said in a letter to parliament's budget committee.

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Gruebel said the ministry continued to explore multinational use for the 13 planes, but it made sense for the German air force to use them in the meantime to offset delivery delays on the other 40 A400M aircraft Germany is buying.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper last month reported that Berlin was in talks with the Czech Republic, Switzerland and others, about jointly operating the 13 transport planes.

The European multinational A400M program is years behind schedule, with Germany's share of the costs having risen to 9.6 billion euros ($10.2 billion) from an initial estimate of 8.1 billion, the ministry reported in December.

Tobias Lindner, a member of the Greens party and the budget committee, said the decision showed that the renegotiation of the A400M contract in 2010 had been based on false expectations about the airplane's export prospects.

"The A400M is and remains a problem child," Lindner said in a statement.

A ministry spokesman had no immediate comment.

Airbus spokesman Florian Taitsch said the company remained convinced about its ability to find additional buyers for the A400M transport planes, but declined comment on the ministry's letter to lawmakers.

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