

Swiss Social Democrats propose split fighter acquisition

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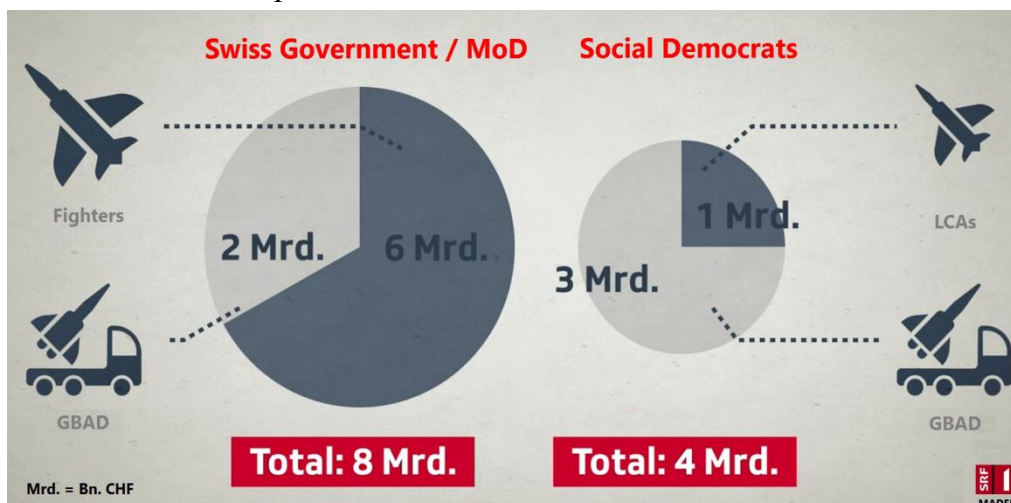
Swiss Social Democrat (SP) members of parliament (MPs) have proposed the country procure Leonardo's M-346FA light combat aircraft, followed by an F/A-18 replacement, instead of 40 multi-role fighters following a briefing at the company's Venegono plant on 25 October.

Led by MP and SP security policy spokesperson Priska Seiler-Graf, the delegation was received at Venegono plant by Cristiano Biancani, vice-president of sales and marketing, and Mauro Delle Donne, marketing director for Europe, Israel, and NATO. The briefings were focused on the armed LCA version of the M-346 Master, the Griffio radar-equipped M-346FA.

The SP does not support the CHF8 billion (USD8.1 billion) Air 2030 fighter and ground-based air-defence (GBAD) procurement programme launched in 2017, mainly for cost reasons.

The SP's foreign and security policy secretariat explained Seiler-Graf's arguments to *Jane's* on 29 October. "Switzerland should examine the procurement of the M-346FA. It is four times less expensive and costs six times less to operate. Not all airspace violations and suspicious encounters need to be countered by high-performance equipment and the M-346 can take over some of the roles the F/A-18 Hornet will have to take on after the retirement of the F-5E Tiger....This would save a lot of money and reduce carbon emissions and noise, and considerably extend the lifetime of the F/A-18 well beyond 2035. Instead, more funding than planned should be invested in ground-based air defence, especially against ballistic missiles."

In an interview with SRF 1 national TV on 30 October, Swiss defence minister Viola Amherd rejected delaying or splitting the Air 2030 buy, saying LCAs are not powerful or fast enough. The Swiss SP told *Jane's* that it expects "to remain the minority in the National Council with our CHF4 billion 'Air 2030plus' two-type concept, but are convinced that we have a good and very popular position for the referendum expected in autumn 2020".



Comparison of the two concepts presumably to be subjects to a Swiss public referendum in later 2020.

(SRF/Author translation)

Analysis

On 8 April, the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection, and Sport and the Armasuisse defence procurement agency began in-country evaluations at Payerne airbase of the Eurofighter Typhoon T3, Rafale F4, F-18E/F Super Hornet, and F-35A Lightning II to replace F-5E and F/A-18C/D fighters with a single type with a full operational capability in 2030. Armasuisse recommended that the Gripen E not participate. An assessment report and final vote in the National Council is planned for 20 December, triggering the countdown to the mandatory referendum the SP is counting on.



The first pre-series test airframe of weaponized M-346FA at the Venegono plant (Leonardo-Image)



Line-up of Swiss-AF F/A-18C- and D-models. Cracks recently found in it's flaps area made the Swiss AF to on short notice cancel the popular 2019 'Axalp'-demonstration public event. (Author Image)