

Sweden Approves Giving NATO More Access Amid Russia Tensions



Brussels, May 26 (RHC)-- Sweden's parliament has approved a deal with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to give the Western military alliance more access to its territory amid brewing tensions between the neutral Nordic country and Russia.

Swedish lawmakers ratified the accord proposed by a broad margin of 291-21, allowing NATO to use the country's territory for training exercises and in case of a war in the region.

Sweden, an affluent state in Scandinavia, has traditionally distanced itself from NATO, but main center-right opposition parties favor membership to the military bloc. Polls also show that increasing numbers of Swedes agree with the membership although the government has said it will not join the alliance.

Russia, the main opponent of NATO's expansion policy, has already criticized Sweden's closeness to the body, with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov saying in April that Moscow would take unspecified action if Sweden joined NATO.

Sweden has taken steps suggesting that it seeks closer ties with NATO, including its increasing military cooperation with the organization's states like Denmark, Norway and Iceland, and contribution to NATO

mission in Afghanistan.

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