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Diplomat Responds To Criticisms By Ecuadoran Banana Producers Regarding French Protectionism

by Barbara Khol

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According to an ad placed by the Ecuadoran National Banana Producers Federation (Federacion Nacional de Bananeros del Ecuador-FNBE) in the July 19 issue of a Guayaquil daily newspaper, the French government is promoting a policy calling for the reduction of Ecuadoran banana imports by the European Economic Community (EEC). The FNBE called on the Ecuadoran government to "just reciprocity" in bilateral trade by linking imports from France to banana exports entering the French market. At present, Quito is negotiating the purchase of nine French locomotives and two Airbus planes. On July 29 in Quito, Pierre Coquillat, press attache for the French Embassy, responded to the FNBE's statements. According to Coquillat, EEC policy is defined by the 12 member-nations. The 12 nations, he said, have decided to prioritize EEC banana production. Next, providing market access privilege to African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations is considered "normal," he added, given historical relationships, and the terms of treaties with nations in these world regions. Coquillat said the EEC's objective is not to "obstruct" Ecuadoran banana imports, but rather to avoid balance of payments and employment disruptions in the aforementioned African, Caribbean and Pacific nations once the EEC is transformed into a single marketplace in 1993. Next, the diplomat described the FNBE's allusion to the purchase of nine French locomotives as "quite surprising," given that the sale will be financed by concessionary loans offered by the French Treasury. Regarding the two Airbus planes, Coquillat said the Federation failed to specify that Airbus construction is not exclusively French, but involves German, Spanish and British participation as well. In addition, he said, the Ecuatoriana de Aviacion firm chose the lease-purchase option as the most profitable and appropriate one to quickly upgrade its fleet. Finally, the press attache said the Federation's allusion to a bilateral trade disequilibrium departs from reality. In 1990, Ecuadoran exports to France increased 60%, while French imports to Ecuador declined by 10%, reducing the French trade surplus to only 4%. Regarding criticisms about French protectionism, Coquillat pointed out that Ecuadoran shrimp exports to France last year increased by 112%. In addition, he said, Ecuador is a beneficiary of the French government's Guaranteed System of Preferences (GSP). Ecuadoran exports under the GSP program increased 23.3% between 1988 and 1989. (Basic data from AFP, 08/29/91)

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