

Resolution on the EU code of conduct on arms exports

2008/2514(RSP) - 13/03/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate held in plenary on 12 March, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. The text adopted in plenary was tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, Greens/ALE and GUE/NGL groups.

Parliament deplores the current political impasse on the adoption of this Common Position, in the light of the tenth anniversary of the Code. The adoption of this Common Position will make the Code a legally binding arms export control instrument for all Member States.

Parliament recalls that, on 30 June 2005, COREPER agreed at the technical level the text of a Common Position as the result of a thorough process of revision of the Code, with the aim of transforming the Code into an efficient instrument to control arms exports from EU territory and by EU companies. The Council, however, has failed to adopt this Common Position at the political level. Parliament states that the reasons for this have never been officially explained but are evidently linked to the wish of some Member States to lift the current EU embargo on arms exports to China.

It calls on the Slovenian Presidency to make the adoption of the Common Position a permanent item on the agenda of each General Affairs Council meeting until such time as the issue has been resolved. Those EU Member States that are opposed to a legally binding Code are urged to reconsider their position. This issue has acquired a new sense of urgency due to certain developments, which include the evolving European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), recent announcements by Member States indicating a willingness to increase arms exports as a tool to promote economic interests, and several initiatives to harmonise national arms procurement policies and intra-Community arms transfers and sales. The positive efforts by COARM (Council Working Group on Arms) are being undermined by arms exports from Member States to countries which are in a situation of conflict, instability or failure to respect human rights, and which are regarded as 'irresponsible destinations' under the Code. The lack of political will to turn the Code into a Common Position runs counter to the leading role played by the EU and its Member States in promoting legal instruments aimed at controlling all international public and private arms transfers, notably the Arms Trade Treaty,

Parliament believes that the EU's contribution to an internationally binding Arms Trade Treaty will gain in credibility as soon as its own arms control regime becomes legally binding. It is convinced also that, in parallel with the adoption of the Common Position, action should be taken, inter alia , to:

- prevent irresponsible arms transfers by strict application of the Code's criteria to both companies and national armed forces;
- improve and apply brokering controls, and prevent illegal arms trafficking by air and sea;
- ensure prompt investigation of recent allegations of violations of arms embargoes;
- prevent the selling-off to private brokers of arms collected in the course of ESDP and SSR operations and other EU initiatives and their subsequent transfer;
- improve the transparency and quality of data submitted by Member States in the context of the Annual Report on the Code.