Annual report on arms export

2020/2003(INI) - 17/09/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 341 votes to 124, with 230 abstentions, a resolution on arms exports: implementation of Common Position 2008/944/CFSP.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, arms exports from the EU 28 accounted for 26% of total world exports over the period 2015-2019, making the EU-28 as a whole the world's second largest arms supplier after the US (36%) and ahead of Russia (21%). The EU-28 is the second largest arms exporter to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Parliament stressed that maintaining a defence industry contributes to the EU's ability to defend itself and is a component of its strategic autonomy. For this to become possible, Member States are called on to give priority to European products in their equipment programmes. A viable European market would reduce dependency on arms exports to third countries.

The 20th and 21st EU annual reports on arms exports

Members believe that the publication of the two reports represents progress towards a common EU position on arms exports. However, they pointed out that although all Member States had submitted their data for the 2018 report, a third of them were not complete.

They called on all Member States to:

- comply fully with their obligations, as set out in the Common Position 2008/944/CFSP by submitting the total quantity and value of both the licenses granted and actual exports, broken down by country of destination and Military List category;

- strengthen their coordination and define common best practices for the collection and processing of information and data, with a view to producing more harmonised annual reports and thus improving transparency and user-friendliness of data.

Parliament also called on Member States to develop, implement and enforce common standards for the management of transfers of military technology and equipment. It called on the EU to help strengthen Member States' capacity to implement strict procedures to monitor the compliance of all Member States with EU arms embargoes and to make the relevant results public.

Member States are invited to:

- refrain from selling arms or any other military equipment to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and any other member of the international coalition, as well as to the Yemeni government and other parties involved in the war in Yemen where 22 million people are in need of humanitarian aid;

- respect the Council conclusions of 21 August 2013 on Egypt by announcing the suspension of export licences for all equipment that may be used for internal repression;

- halt all transfers of weapons, surveillance and intelligence equipment and material to all the parties involved in the Libyan conflict.

Parliament warned against the absence of sanction mechanisms in the event that a Member State engages in exports that are clearly not compatible with the eight criteria of the Common Position.

The Council's review of the Common Position

Parliament welcomed the Council's intention to strengthen convergence and transparency, which are the main objectives of the latest review of its common position, as well as the Council's conclusions on the review of the Common Position, according to which 'the strengthening of a European Defence Technological and Industrial Base should be accompanied by closer cooperation and convergence in the field of export controls of military technology and equipment'.

Condemning the intensification of the global arms race, Members recalled the EU's ambition to be a global actor for peace and therefore called on the Union to play an active role in the fields of non-proliferation and global disarmament.

Increasing cooperation between Member States

Parliament recalled that since the adoption of a legally binding Common Position in 2008, Member States have strengthened the control of their arms exports. In addition, an increasing number of weapons systems produced in Europe incorporate components originating from several EU Member States and reflect bilateral or multilateral cooperation motivated for technical, industrial or political reasons.

While welcoming the positive role of this type of cooperation in promoting a relationship of trust between Member States and third countries, Parliament stressed that the ambition to increase the competitiveness of the European defence industry must not jeopardise the application of the Common Position's eight criteria, as they take precedence over any economic social, commercial or industrial interests of Member States.

The increasing cooperation of the EU level in arms production

Stressing the importance of strengthening the industrial and technological base of the European defence sector, Parliament called on Member States to overcome the current lack of efficiency in defence spending due to duplication, fragmentation and lack of interoperability, and to aim for the EU to become a security provider also by better controlling arms exports.

Deploring the current divergences between national arms export policies and Member States' decision-making processes, Members called on the Council to continue its efforts to achieve convergence of policies and decision-making in the field of arms exports. They considered that there is still room for improvement in the area of transparency, in particular as regards the quality and comparability of data transmitted by Member States.

Parliament welcomed in this context the decision to transform the annual report into an interactive and reliable online database. It urged the Council's Working Party on Conventional Arms Exports (COARM) to apply a solution that is user-friendly and easily accessible by European citizens and civil society.

The resolution stressed that enhanced cooperation on armaments policies and public procurement is only possible if strong export controls, a system of information exchange and regular parliamentary scrutiny are put in place and if robust sanction mechanisms in the event of non-compliance with common rules are enforceable as regards EU-funded projects.

Expressing concern about the increasing use of certain dual-use cyber-surveillance technologies against politicians, activists and journalists, Members called on the Council on Conventional Arms Exports

(COARM) to address the issue of transparency of arms exports in parallel with the issue of transparency of export authorisations for dual-use goods and to consider seeking common approaches to transparency in both areas.

Members believe that the growing importance of the EU level in arms production, the recent Council conclusions on convergence in arms exports and the establishment of the European Peace Facility must be complemented by an EU-wide monitoring and control mechanism based on full compliance with the eight criteria set out in the Common Position. They called for measures to be adopted for the establishment of an EU mechanism of sanctions mechanism against Member States infringing the Common Position.

Lastly, the report asked the Commission to keep the Parliament duly informed on the use of EU funds for all research and development projects associated with the construction of drones. It also urged the VP/HR to ban the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons, which enable strikes to be carried out without human intervention.