Defence equipment: European policy, industry and market

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Luis QUEIRO (UEN, P) in response to a Commission paper on an EU defence equipment policy. Arguing that the EU needed to develop its own military capabilities if it wanted to ensure the credibility of its foreign and defence policy objectives, the committee called for the strengthening and rationalisation of the European arms industry. The EU Member States should therefore make a commitment to military expenditure over a period corresponding to their long-term defence obligations. MEPs called for the development of a European defence equipment industry which is competitive and viable and for a research and development programme to improve the EU's defence capabilities. They said that public defence spending by the Member States should be used more effectively and should avoid overlapping. Intra-European cooperation and the principle of Community preference were equally important. However, this did not mean ruling out cooperation with third countries or the buying of defence equipment outside Europe where supply proposals were more attractive economically than those available within the EU and where such purchases were complementary to the realisation of a European project. The report called for the progressive establishment of a European armaments market and for common rules on this issue. Controls on intra-Community transfers of defence equipment should be reduced, administrative procedures should be simplified and national licence systems should be approximated. At the same time the export controls at the EU's external borders should be strengthened further.