Arms: code of conduct on exports. 6th annual report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Raül ROMEVA i RUEDA (Greens/EFA, ES) on the Council's Sixth Annual Report on the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. The committee regretted that the annual review had not gone further in developing clear criteria and wanted to see "substantial improvements" in the level of detail. It welcomed the prospect of the Code becoming a Common Position and hence legally binding, and urged the Council not to delay its decision on this any further. MEPs argued that "a clear, efficient and harmonised common arms control export policy, anchored in a legally binding Code of Conduct, can play a decisive role in the fight against terrorism, conflict prevention, regional stability and the promotion of human rights".

MEPs called on the Member States to agree on a list of countries to which arms exports should be banned because they are involved in armed conflicts or violate human rights. They also said that the quality of national reports needed to be improved and that minimum standards should be applied. The denial notification system - whereby Member States declare that a certain transaction does not involve the export of sensitive dual-use goods - also needed improvement.

Other issues raised by the committee included the need for stronger controls on exports to countries against which an arms embargo has been lifted; licensing of arms brokering abroad and the setting up of a national registry of arms brokers; and an international system for marking and tracing small arms as a tool to combat their illicit manufacture and proliferation. MEPs voiced particular concern over recent cases in which EU arms manufacturers had transferred their production facilities overseas, and they called for regulatory measures in this field.

Lastly, MEPs reiterated their strong conviction that the embargo on China should not be lifted until the human rights situation had clearly improved. They said that adherence to the arms embargo against China should be included in negotiations about the EU's Neighbourhood Policy and Partnership Agreements. And the Member States were urged to "commit once more to the principle that the criteria of the EU Code of Conduct will not be compromised in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives".