

EU arms embargoes fail to prevent German engines being incorporated into military vehicles available in Burma/Myanmar, China and Croatia

This case study demonstrate a serious failure of the European arms export system. It shows that European arms embargoes are not robust enough to prevent European arms components being incorporated into Armoured Personnel Carriers found in three separate embargoed destinations.

Burma/Myanmar

According to the Ukrainian armoured vehicle manufacturer, Kharkiv Morozov Machine Building Design Bureau (Ukraine), Deutz engines are incorporated into the Ukrainian BTR-3U Armoured Personnel Carriers. These armoured amphibious all-wheel drive vehicles with rotating turret are specifically designed for transportation of troops in combat zones and to other difficult environments, and are fitted with several weapons systems including a 30mm gun, a 7.62mm coaxial machine gun, a 30mm automatic grenade launcher and an anti-tank guided weapon system.¹

Despite requests to the German government for clarification, we have been unable to clarify whether these engines have been exported from Germany or are made under licence in Ukraine.

Irrespective of whether the engines are supplied from Germany or manufactured in Ukraine, it was reported that in 2003, the Ukraine had signed a contract to supply 1000 BTR-3U to Burma over the next 10 years. The APCs would reportedly be sent in component form, to be assembled in Burma/Myanmar.² At the same time the Ukraine government reported to the UN Registry of Conventional Armaments that it had actually shipped 10 BTR-3U to Burma/Myanmar during 2003.³

Since 1996 there has been an embargo on the export of arms and military equipment from EU member states to Burma/Myanmar. The embargo specifically prohibits the export, directly or indirectly, of items including "All-wheel-drive utility vehicles capable of off-road use that have been manufactured or fitted with ballistic protection, and profiled armour for such vehicles".⁴

However the embargo does not explicitly mention components and it appears that the German government have chosen to interpret this embargo loosely, despite the appalling human rights record of the Burma/Myanmar security forces. The army, the Tatmadaw, have used military vehicles to capture, detain and enforce conscription of child soldiers. Burma/Myanmar is known to use child soldiers in its army, some as young as eleven have been abducted⁵ (Military vehicles have also been used to quell student pro-democracy demonstrations).

China

Further reports state that Deutz engines have been incorporated into a new range of Chinese APCs – the WZ 551⁶ despite an EU embargo on arms exports to China which was put in place after the terrible events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and which remains

in place today. EU countries have interpreted this embargo on China in different ways but the transfer of Deutz engine technology has certainly breached the spirit, if not the letter, of this embargo. Supplying parts for APCs to a country which is subject to an EU arms embargo seems unjustifiable.

Croatia

Further reports indicate that Deutz engine technology was transferred to another embargoed destination in the mid 1990s when Deutz engines were apparently used in Croatian armoured personnel carriers despite Croatia being the subject of a UN and EU embargo.⁷

¹ <http://www.morozov.com.ua/eng/body/btr3u.php?menu=m1.php>

² The arms keep coming, Ashton, Vol 12, No 6, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/aviewer.asp?a=3759&z=104>

³ http://disarmament.un.org:8080/UN_register.nsf

⁴ COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1081/2000 of 22 May 2000 prohibiting the sale, supply and export to Burma/Myanmar of equipment which might be used for internal repression or terrorism, and freezing the funds of certain persons related to important governmental functions in that country;

<http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/sanctions/BURMAreg1081.pdf> (You may want to use another web reference)

⁵ My gun was as tall as me: child soldiers in Burma, October 2002, Human Rights Watch

⁶ Jane's Defence Weekly 24 June 2004, 'More roles for Chinese APC'

⁷ Jane's Defence Weekly 23 April 1997, 'Croatia builds a Light Armour Capability'.