

UK Working Group on Arms

News Service 191/99

AI INDEX: IOR 61/02/99
11 October 1999

EU Arms Report – Public but Opaque

Today the EU Council of Ministers will publish a Consolidated Report on the First Annual Review of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. The UK Working Group on Arms¹ welcomes this move but is concerned that the Report contains insufficient information to allow assessment of how the Code has worked in practice. The Working Group says “it’s good that the Report is public, but it’s a shame it’s so opaque”.

The Code of Conduct does not require Member States to publish the Consolidated Report and it was feared that some governments would block such a move. The publication of the Consolidated Report thus represents important progress towards improved transparency in EU states’ arms negotiations.

The Report contains information on the operation of the Code and experiences of its implementation and on priorities for co-ordinated action in the future. Whilst these are important issues, which need to be addressed, the level of information provided is disappointingly sparse. There is only basic information on the number of licenses granted by Member States, their total value and the number of bilateral consultations on undercutting which each Member State initiated. This is minimum information, which gives little indication on how Member States have implemented the Code.

Since not all Member States produced detailed annual reports on their arms exports, this situation needs to be addressed urgently. All EU citizens have the right to know what arms are exported by their governments and to whom.

The UK Working Group would like the Member States to publish information on:

- What arms export licences have been granted by Member States and to which destinations;
- Which export licenses have been refused and why;
- The outcome of the bilateral consultations which took place when one Member State sought to take up a license which had been refused by another.

Furthermore it is essential that the Member States urgently address the need for a common rigorous system of end-use monitoring and agree controls on the licensed production of arms by EU companies abroad. Both of these issues have caused concern during the recent violence in East Timor where arms of EU origin have been used.

In addition NGOs are urging EU governments to expedite their development of a common system of controlling EU arms brokering and trafficking agents. Since the German government tabled proposals during its Presidency earlier this year, progress on this issue has ground to a halt.

The UK Working Group on Arms hopes that the Member States will work speedily to address these important issues.

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¹For the purposes of this briefing the UK Working Group on Arms comprises Amnesty International, the British American Security Information Council, Christian Aid, International Alert, Oxfam and Saferworld.