

Wednesday, 17 January 2007 - Strasbourg

Seventh and eighth annual reports on arms exports (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) Mr President, may I offer my congratulations on your re-election. I commend Mr Romeva i Rueda on the outstanding work he has done, once again, which explains the almost unanimous vote in committee.

There are a number of reasons for this consensus in Parliament on the future Code of Conduct, but the main one is as follows: bucking the trend in some Member States, where there continues to be a lack of transparency and where arms exports policy is driven by short-term considerations, we in Parliament believe that the EU needs to have a common, effective and credible arms exports policy that respects fundamental values, especially human rights, and is linked to the Union's external and development policies, thus contributing to, and strengthening, their coherence.

Parliament's capacity to influence the Council and public opinion on this debate is based on the fact that our positions are coherent and principled, and free of national self-interest and of the detrimental effects of a short-term approach. Parliament has been the voice of Europe on this issue. Parliament's message on this latest report is as clear as it has always been. Firstly, we want to elevate this Code of Conduct to common position status. This is a necessary measure, proof of which lies in the fact that the European Council's working group has had a text ready to be approved since June 2005 but is dragging its feet as regards approving it. The resolution also reiterates the importance of this measure not being contingent on the fate of the China arms embargo, which remains justified. It is also important to strengthen existing mechanisms. National reports on the implementation of the Code of Conduct, for example, must accordingly be harmonised so that we can use them to assess the extent to which the Member States are complying with it. Mr Barrot spoke of arms trafficking by air, mainly to Africa.

The general laxness in European airports, as revealed by our investigation into the CIA flights, suggests that the worst, the unthinkable, might actually be happening on this issue. Furthermore, after two years of paralysis, the time has come to put in place a system of exceptional measures for countries that have recently had embargoes lifted, Libya, a country we have just been talking about, being a case in point. The immoral race to sell arms to Libya since 2004 clearly demonstrates the importance of establishing transitional rules when there are regimes that violate human rights.

Lastly, this resolution is not solely about the Code of Conduct. In the resolution, Parliament calls on the Member States to take the lead in creating more advanced international legal instruments that will regulate and, where possible, scale back the international arms trade. Just as Europe played a key role in the Ottawa Convention on Antipersonnel Mines, the EU must remain at the forefront of the process of drawing up a UN arms trade treaty.

The external action of the EU and its Member States should be underpinned by human rights, sustainable development, and lasting peace and security. Without a coherent and effective policy on controlling arms exports, the Union will not be able to meet its core objectives or to help improve the world.