

Wednesday, 20 June 2007 - Strasbourg

Towards an arms trade treaty (debate)

Ana Maria Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) In recent years, there has been little cheer for those in favour of arms control and disarmament rooted in multilateral legal instruments. Last December's decision by the UN General Assembly officially to launch the process of drawing up a global arms trade Treaty (ATT) gives rare cause for celebration.

Although it came as no surprise, the solitary vote against the resolution that launched the process, by the United States, was sad. The Treaty is aimed at finding a common legal denominator for the import, export and transfer of arms, at offering a global response to a completely globalised trade and at creating uniform criteria that make the arms trade subject to the imperatives of human rights, stability and sustainable development.

It is also intended to mobilise public opinion in developed countries against the opacity that characterises the millionaire legal contracts governing arms sales to allied countries. The United Kingdom's scandalous decision to block the latest investigation into the country's arms sales to Saudi Arabia, and into the accompanying high-level corruption, is a perfect example of the true nature of the arms trade.

Only in this field would a European government dare to block a serious investigation in the national interest. It is because of special treatment that governments the world over have taken special measures to control the arms trade. The EU can and must take the lead in this area. It must fight for the lessons learnt from the interpretation and implementation of its code of conduct - in particular as regards the criteria of sustainable development and human rights - to be applied to the new Treaty, because these two aspects are especially pertinent, as Mrs Ferrero-Waldner pointed out.

In this regard, I welcome the conclusions of the last 'General Affairs Council', which highlighted the importance of joining forces with other countries and regional organisations to draw up a new Treaty. All that remains is for the EU to transform this good will into a diplomatic strategy, properly rooted in a Council common position, in relation to the ATT. While reason and scruples are not around to dignify the White House with their presence, European leadership in this area is particularly urgently needed.