

Arms exports

Ana Gomes (PSE). - (PT) According to a recent US Congress report, arms contracts to developing countries signed by the four main European exporters in 2004 totalled just under USD 5 billion. This is a fivefold increase on the 2003 figure. This will serve to hinder development by fostering the proliferation of conflicts in Africa and possibly in other continents, too.

Against this backdrop, strict and effective rules on arms exports are required, now more than ever. Europe cannot promote construction with development aid with one hand, whilst causing destruction, via the unregulated export of conventional arms, with the other.

It is for this reason that we believe, in common with the excellent Romeva report, that the code of conduct must be made legally binding as a matter of urgency. Along with the Commissioner, we welcome the Council's decision to fight for a proper universal Treaty at the UN containing common rules on the global armaments trade.

The arms embargo on China, a country that has repeatedly threatened Taiwan, must not be lifted until China has been held to account for the detention and disappearance of those involved in Tiananmen, and has improved its human rights record as a whole.

The Wuermeling report contains an aspect that is key to the future of the common European defence and external policy project, and this is reflected in Amendment 6 tabled by my Group. No world power has completely open defence equipment markets; the United States protects its defence companies with a 'Buy American Act'. We have a great deal to learn from our American friends.

European preference must be introduced when it comes to the Member States' defence procurement. This is essential if we are to ensure the survival of a sector that makes a significant contribution to the Lisbon Strategy, to technological innovation and to the Union's strategic autonomy. Let us not be naïve and delude ourselves: aeroplanes are not bananas and tanks are not refrigerators. Let us not treat this subject as though it were a simple question of markets. Parliament must take the lead in what is, more than anything, a political and strategic debate, and what we are proposing is a first step in that direction.

Lastly, I turn to the report by Mr Kristovskis, which I also welcome. I feel that it is not possible to have a coherent and effective non-proliferation strategy while the five authorised nuclear-weapon states, including two EU Member States, fail to honour their undertakings to disarm gradually, under Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and continue either to neglect, or take action against, nuclear powers such as Israel, India and Pakistan that are not signatories to the NPT. This is all the more serious when, in addition to other countries, non-state actors or terrorists seek to get their hands on illegal weaponry.