

Peace Union of Finland

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Report on Arms Trade and Finland 1998

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Ammunition to Turkey

Not much new has happened during the last year in the armstrade- business in Finland. The only more controversial deal or given export- license, on which there was public debate, was in September when the government decided to permit export of 12 000 pieces of ammunition for air artillery to Turkey. The government had to vote on the issue (8 for and 4 against) and decisions was very much criticised. But it is difficult to tell if there has been so few controversial deals because of a improved policy, and our work to stop such deals, or due to bad luck on the arms markets? There is at least one open export license to Indonesia (armoured personnel carriers) and it has not been cancelled due to the situation in Indonesia, but it has not been used either, because the Indonesians had not money for it anymore due to the economic crisis. The responsible civil servant thought the license could be used as soon as the Indonesian economic situation should allow it. These kind of things suggest that the decrease of controversial arms export deals has more to do with the market situation than with a better policy.

Arms Industry

The biggest arms industry is Patria Industries, owned by the government. There was the big reorganisation 1997 of the military industry. Many private companies merged and the State bought them all. The biggest part of this merged conglomerate is Patria Vehicles, producing Armoured Troop Carriers and Mine Clearance Vehicles etc.. Vammass Defetec, the company that got a licence for Turkey, is also part of Patria. It employs around 1700 persons but has also civil production.

Interesting news was that the famous big company of electronics Nokia (Mobile phones) decided to stop with all its military production. It is commonly believed that this is because of pressure from peace groups and the bad image the company got from military production, damaging their civilian market. In fact the reason to stop military production was that it was not profitable enough. The Patria company bought all the Nokia production licenses. Finland is very interested in the future co-operation in the WEAG (Western European Armament Group).

Transparancy

The Swedish peace organisation SPAS made a study on different policies on how public information on arms trade decision making is and Finland seemed to have the most open and transparent policy. In Finland every decision made by government becomes public. But decisions on export of components, and a lot of decisions that are supposed not to be controversial, are made by the Defence Ministry alone, and that information is not made public so easily. Finland has started also a new era with putting all the government licence decisions on the governments www-pages.

But on European Union level the policy is not always transparent. A Finnish MEP has a interesting legal case going on against EU. She made a complain against the EU because she did not receive information on arms trade which she had she requested. Finnish European civil servants had also voted against giving her the requested information. Later on the Finnish Minister explained it as a mistake. It was said that the Minister had wanted to

support her demand for transparency, but the civil servants in the EU had not understood that they should have consulted Helsinki.

Finland and the Code of conduct

Maybe Finland is going to host, as the EU chair of the latter part of 1999, the first follow up meeting on the Code of Conduct on Arms Trade. It seems that the present German EU chair is not going to play an active role in improvement of the Code. All EU countries are now collecting information for the national reports requested by the Code. How transparent arms trade is going to be as a result of the Code is still a very open question. All different campaigns could ask their governments for the report and comment on it. If the follow up meeting is going to be in Finland the Peace Union of Finland and Committee of 100 are of course willing to facilitate any activity on the NGO-side concerning it.

Light Weapons, Small Arms

To make up for Finland's bad reputation on the Landmine issue (we have not signed the Land Mines Treaty) Finland has decided to be very active on the Small arms issue. It is not yet clear what will be done concretely, but it will be one of the Peace Union's priorities on the disarmament area. We have planned several activities such as international seminar.