

Quaker Council for European Affairs

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Report to the European Network Against Arms Trade meeting spring 1999

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The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) exists to bring matters of concern to Quakers in Europe to the European institutions. As part of our concern for peace, arms trade issues are part of our 1998-99 work programme.

In 2000, we hope in principle to coordinate Quaker involvement for the Eurosatory protest, subject to next year's work programme. Quakers in France are especially active on the arms trade campaign, and would like to be involved at a peaceful protest next year.

We also hope to fulfil a useful role as part of the International Action Network on Small Arms following its launch in May.

Currently, our focus is the Arms Transfers Working Group of the European Parliament, in which we participate largely as an observer. This group discusses the arms trade at the level of the European Union (EU), and works to use the influence of the Parliament to influence legislation. Normally, this means bringing resolutions to the Committees and the plenary sessions, and also drafting amendments for Parliamentary Reports which have a bearing on the arms trade and its regulation. The group also canvasses support among MEPs for the issues on which it works and maintains the profile of the issues on the Parliament's agenda. The Group is attended regularly by non-governmental organisations, the Canadian Mission to the EU, and Parliamentarians Assistants who are expert on the issues concerned. The group is very active, depending on the commitment of a few dedicated individuals, although it is open to all organisations which seek to improve regulation of the arms trade. Recently, the group has focussed on two Parliamentary Reports - one on the European Union strategy on defence-related industries (Titley) and another on the environment, security and foreign policy (Theorin). In 1998, the group worked on the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, adopted in June, and continues to monitor developments surrounding the Code with a view to finding ways to lobby for strengthening it. In particular, the group will lobby for parliamentary scrutiny of the Member States' annual reports on arms exports. So far, EU Member States have issued approximately 80 denials of export licences under the terms of the Code. This is an unofficial figure, as details of the denials remain confidential.

In December 1998, the Council of the European Union declared a Joint Action on Small Arms, which mentions technical and financial assistance to states attempting to tackle the issue. The Group is now looking for ways in which this Joint Action can be implemented, as it has no budget assigned to it. Awareness of the small arms issue is growing at the EU level among NGOs, EU officials and Member States. The International Action Network Against Small Arms, to be launched in May 1999, has received support from Canada. The Arms Transfers Working Group is likely to push for a full Parliamentary Report on small arms and light weapons for the beginning of the next legislature in September 1999. Heidi Hautala MEP asked the Commission for the original report on the Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. After permission was refused, she took the case to the European Court of Justice, claiming her rights as a European citizen and Parliamentarian. The case will appear on March 4.

Relevant documents can be found easily on the search engines of EU Internet sites. For further information, please get in touch. DG 19/2/99