

country report

the Netherlands

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1. Developments in arms trade and arms export policy

This summer the 1998 annual report on Dutch arms trade and arms export policy was issued. In October the report over the first half of 1999 was presented. In November there was a meeting in parliament on both reports. Compared to earlier developments the following aspects are most relevant:

transparancy

In line with the EU commitment for the first time a list was published in the 1998 annual report with denial notifications, 16 in total since June 1998, 8 times with Pakistan as destination.

One MP mentioned the UK report as an more advanced model than the Swedish, which previously functioned as ideal model for the Dutch. In general there is a majority requesting more specific details, i.e. mentioning not only the country of destination and the total amount of money, but also including specifications on the kind of equipment exported to the respective countries. Still this form of information is denied to the MPs because it would harm the competitiveness of Dutch companies.

EU Code of Conduct

Because of opposition from other countries the government has partly dropped the proposal of adding as a new criterium to the Code that countries should report to the UN Arms Register to get access to EU arms. A compromise is being made now to include it in a softer way under the 6th criterium, the behaviour of countries of destination with regards to the international community.

The Foreign Affairs minister, Van Aartsen, mentioned in the MP-meeting that it had priority for him to make the publication of annual reports of all EU countries obligatory. Also he said that making the EU Code of Conduct legally binding was a next step.

Under pressure the minister promised to present in short term a more specific definition of 'areas of tension', which needs to explain why exports to countries like Taiwan, South Korea and several Middle Eastern countries are allowed.

EU embargo against Indonesia

The minister was questioned about the French and Dutch resistance within the EU against installing an arms embargo to Indonesia. Some wondered whether it had anything to do with the long-delayed Indonesian order for Hollandse Signaal electronic equipment for navy patrol ships, worth more than 80 million Dutch guilders (app. \$40m). Most parties were reluctant to support an extension of the embargo after the 17th of January, two weeks before the date of delivery expires for Signaal. Most of them wanted to wait and see till January, though the MPs required a debate on it before any government decision was made.

During the meeting a group of activists at the public gallery showed t-shirts, each with one letter and in total with the text: 'No arms to Indonesia'.

India and Pakistan

There was virtually no question of lifting the Dutch embargo against India and Pakistan, especially not after the military coup in Pakistan. Also the Kargil war in Kashmir last summer made it clear to most that maintaining of the military sanctions was most logical.

Nevertheless Dutch building and dredging company Ballast Nedam received a 120 million guilder contract for the new naval base in Karwar, India, which is claimed to become Asia's largest naval base. For it is expected that the base will also harbour the future naval nuclear

arm of India's nuclear triad, it was questioned why these activities, though of course not being arms transfers in a strict sense, are not included under the arms embargo. It is our plan to raise this issue again in the coming months, for the export of non-strategic goods/services for military use turns out to be a major part of Dutch military exports, though never calculated as such. Ballast Nedam is one of the five biggest players in the Dutch defence industry.

transit arms trade

A new law on transit arms trade is in the making. Though hard evidence is lacking, air- and seaports like Schiphol and Rotterdam are likely to be major transit points for the international arms trade. With control almost completely lacking, pressure was put on the government last year to develop a law to control transit trade. It is expected to be presented within weeks.

small arms

Like we've seen before with the campaign against landmines, not being a significant exporter or producer of small arms, the Dutch government is paying an enormous amount of attention to their efforts within bodies like the UN to promote the fight against (illicit) small arms trade. During the MP-meeting the minister used most of the time concentrating on this, leaving little time for issues regarding Dutch arms export policy. So, recognising the great importance to get rid of small arms, we try to avoid the issue as much as possible, because of these effects on the debate about arms trade in general.

Further recent Dutch arms deals:

General:

The Netherlands is still (for the sixth or seventh successive year) the world's 7th arms supplier over a 5-years period according to SIPRI's 1999 Yearbook. Surprising moreover is that in the calculations for 1998 only the Netherlands surpasses China and is sixth for that year. Though other sources put the Netherlands in a lower position, it at least shows that the public image of being an insignificant arms exporter is false.

Bangladesh: HSA secured a contract of unknown value to supply command and control equipment for Bangladesh' new frigate, which is built in Korea at Daewoo shipyard. It is the first time this decade that Bangladesh orders major Dutch military equipment.

Brazil:

For several millions of guilders Delft Instruments delivers night sight equipment to Brazil. The military part of the company, which furthermore mostly produces medical systems, is planned to be taken over by Signaal.

Sudan:

Almost completely unnoticed, shipyard Damen delivered 4 Fast Assault Craft to the Sudanese government late last year. Being delivered without arms, the boats are exempted from Dutch arms export controls. Also Algeria and Morocco placed similar orders with Damen.

Venezuela:

Becoming one of Signaal's most important clients, Venezuela is its first export customer for the improved Flycatcher air defence system which will be delivered together with Rafael's Barak missile system.

2. Dutch campaign against arms trade

Over the last year our work has received abundant attention. Our contacts with parliamentarians have been broadened and our access to more influential media eased. Still this is partly a result of last year's book on Dutch arms trade. Though we find this rewarding, we experience growing pressure on our regular research work.

Next year we'll largely concentrate on a large project which will review granted export licences over the last ten years. Also a project on South Korea will be launched.

lobbywork

Like last year we've briefed parliamentarians of most political parties in the weeks before the 1998 arms export policy report was discussed in parliament. It turns out that most representatives consider our briefings as important to their work. We can also see this in the issues discussed during debates; many times these issues are earlier raised by us.

media

Radio, television and printed media all reported on several occasions of our activities, mainly concerning the embargoes against Indonesia and India/Pakistan. We also focused attention on lobbywork for arms companies by our former Defence secretary and a pensioned top official of the Defence ministry, who both turned out to be contracted by Hollandse Signaal within weeks after their retirement in 1998. About five times this media coverage resulted in parliamentary questions.

actions

There were actions at ITEC, an arms fair for simulation equipment in the Hague last April. Growing opposition against the last remaining arms fair in the Netherlands offers chances to get rid of this one as well. For the next year a coalition of different peace organisations, in cooperation with some left wing parties in order to effectively achieve that.

Also a bus crossed the Channel late October to participate in the actionweek against the AFCEA arms fair. Ousted from Belgium in 1997 and not welcome in the Netherlands in 1998 we felt that AFCEA did not deserve the rest they might expect moving to the UK, where of course arms fairs are a more familiar kind of happening. With over 60 demonstrators and a variety of small-scale and larger actions at least the hotel management was "not amused". We expect that AFCEA will try and find a new home for their business next year again.

Next year's "Eastern March" has chosen our biggest arms producer, Signaal as special theme to raise public awareness on its activities.

Finally, with the French and we're preparing new actions against Eurosatory 2000, building on the experiences of 1998.

Value of granted export licences of military goods 1998 and the first half of 1999, in millions of Dutch guilders. (source: Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Netherlands)