

Country report from SPAS on the Swedish arms trade

To the ENAAT-meeting in London, United Kingdom, May 2005. Covering the time since the meeting in Czech Republic, June 2004 until now. By Anja Skepstedt.

Increasing export to dictatorships

For the sixth year in a row the arms export from Sweden to dictatorships have increased (Countries classified as non-free by Freedom House). During 2004 Sweden exported arms to United Arab emirates, Kazakhstan, Oman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia for 119 million Swedish kronor together. In 1998 this number was 10 million, which shows a really worrying development. The arms export overall increased as well during 2004 for the third year in a row. The amount of money generated from this export during the 21 century is 48% bigger than the years 1995-1999. 48% is also the number of arms produced by Sweden going for export. This is remarkable since it is forbidden to produce arms in the pure purpose of export. The part going for export is also the highest since the figures were made public in 1998. The arms exports part of the total export is also the highest since 1998 and were 0,8%.

Fear for liberalization of arms export regulations

The biggest issue for SPAS in the field of arms trade since last summer is the work around a government investigation on arms trade. In the summer of 2003 the government of Sweden decided to set up an investigation dealing with the regulations on arms trade. The investigation was to be launched in October 2004, but it got delayed and not until February 2005 it became official. When this happened we found our worst fears to be true. The suggestions from the investigator are a clear liberalization of Sweden's arms export regulations. It proposes a general positive approach towards arms export where industrial economical interests should be one of the reasons for export. It also proposes weaknesses of the criteria on human rights and on conflict and declines democracy criteria which several parties have proposed.

SPAS have been co-ordinating the NGO-activities around this inquiry. At an early stage we invited the Swedish fellowship of Reconciliation, Amnesty Sweden, Diakonia (aid organisation) and the Swedish Red Cross to join in a new-formed Swedish working group on arms. The group has been focusing on this revision. We have had an joint petition, several op-ed articles and made several seminars in the parliament.

One week before the government inquiry delivered its findings we published an op-ed article in the main Swedish new paper where we revealed that the commission will present proposals that completely ruins the Swedish export control system. A big national debate followed and several other organisations and some parties have now joined in the critique.



During a hearing hosted by the government and the responsible minister in April we delivered the petition together with several letters from international NGO's as well as a report were SPAS give 30 proposals for the future export control system.

Ahead of us we now have an important job to stop the suggestions in the investigation from becoming reality.

JAS Gripen aircraft

Saab, the Swedish government and public authorities made a lot of efforts during last year to sell the military aircraft JAS. The marketing towards Southeast Asia was tuff and especially Thailand was targeted but also Singapore and Malaysia. Totally more than 40 countries in the world are subjected to marketing efforts on JAS. Our prime minister, Göran Persson, has been personally very involved and has visited several countries trying to sell JAS. Our defence minister, Leni Björklund, visited Thailand as well in November last year with the purpose to sell the aircraft. SPAS has not been silent on the fact that Sweden's top politicians are working as lobbyists for the arms industry. On the same day as Leni Björklund went to Thailand SPAS publicized an article together with Doctors without borders criticising the fact that the campaign works against the credibility in Sweden's politics on global development. The article says among other thing that "a Swedish development policy worthy of its name would instead be to help Thailand stand up against trade political pressures and being helpful in developing the domestic pharmaceutical industry and in other ways contribute to sustainable development".

Military cooperation with USA

During last year Sweden have further strengthened its military cooperation with USA, one example being a decision that a Swedish submarine are going to practice together with the American army for one year. SPAS of course put public attention to this. Our organisation has a campaign where we (and our members) send cards four times a year to persons that have done either something good or something bad for peace and in December last year the negative cards were sent to Sweden's defence minister for deepening the military cooperation with USA in spite of their aggressive foreign policy lately. The positive cards went to a politician in another political party who by reporting the minister to the legal authorities contributed to a wider discussion on the topic.

China embargo

As you all know the weapon embargo from EU on China have been a debate lately. Prime minister Göran Persson took part in the decision in December 2004 on the EU top meeting, opening for a removal of the embargo in the future, this in spite of all critique from the other political parties in Sweden. The card campaign mentioned above were used also in this issue ad the negative card were sent to our Prime minister while the positive went to a politician who clearly and officially spoke against a removal of the embargo.



Arms import from Belarus

Already in 2002 SPAS revealed that Sweden imported large amounts of arms material from Israel in spite of the fact that export to the country is forbidden because of the armed conflict with Palestine and its severe violations of human rights. SPAS further investigations on arms import has shown that Sweden does not have regulations for import of this kind and no guidelines whatsoever on which countries are approved and not. The area is also surrounded by secrecy and no public statistic is available. Following SPAS investigation on this several questions have been asked and motions handed in to the parliament demanding guidelines and public access. Last summer SPAS could again show new problems regarding arms import. In an article in one of Sweden's largest newspapers SPAS revealed that Sweden during 1996-2003 have imported arms for no less than 90 million Swedish kronor from the dictatorship Belarus. Through this Sweden have supported the power of the president in Belarus at the same time as our government claim distance from the regime.

Land mines

SPAS wrote the Swedish chapter in Landmine Monitor and took part in an international meeting held by ICBL in Sarajevo but the biggest event was of course review of the Ottawa convention in Nairobi in November last year. The Swedish delegation expressed some very backward opinions which arose a lot of anger among the ICBL people and Sweden were openly criticised in a speech made by Steve Goose. SPAS visited the Swedish delegation and uttered our ideas and position regarding the Ottawa convention.

Cluster bombs

Together with our local division in Stockholm SPAS have started to gather information and educate about cluster bombs in order to develop some kind of campaign around the problem with these bombs working as land mines.



Some statistics:

Arms export from the largest Swedish exporters:

Krigsmaterielexport från de största svenska vapenexportörerna						
Miljoner kronor. Källa: Forsvarsindustriföreningen och Svenska Freds						
	2001	2002	2003	2004	Summa	Förändring
Saab	1522	1727	2707	2740	8696	+24%
Hägglands	202	426	1639	2346	4613	+146%
Ericsson Microwave Systems	484	367	958	623	2432	+34%
Kockums	333	303	232	172	1040	-19%
Bofors Defence	51	185	104	330	670	+145%
Nammo Sweden	51	55	173	126	405	+65%
Volvo Aero	42	97	91	108	337	+48%

Number of recipient countries:

