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Finland / campaigning on arms trade issues – report

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1. Finland was EU chair in the latter part of 2006

Finland was the chair country of EU 2006. It meant that Finnish (and also other) NGOs lobbied the whole year the Finnish government for different issues to be taken in to the chairs program and on the EU agenda. Arms trade control issues and especially small arms was on this list.

NGOs also hosted a series of seminars and events during the chair-period and the arms trade issue was also kept on these meeting agendas as during the Asia Europe Peoples Forum, which was held just before the official ASEM meeting.

The main effort was made that Finland would manage to keep the EU and its member countries supporting a "progressive" line during the UN follow-up conference on small arms and light weapons in summer of 2006, and to follow up and facilitate forward the arms trade treaty (ATT) discussions before UN general assembly in autumn. The international NGOs and institutes (Saferworld, IA, Amnesty, Basic etc.) were also active directly towards the Finnish officials, but input was also made by Finnish involved NGOs, as the Peace Union, Committee of 100, KATU (our conflict prevention network), and the national small arms working group which also includes Amnestys Finnish branch.

2. Finnish arms trade – business and industry

The biggest arms producing company in Finland is still Patria (although actually they have also big amount of civilian production). Its owned partly by Finnish state (74 %) and partly by EADS (26 %).

There is nobody at this moment in Finland doing research and follow-up on actual armstrade license decisions and the developments of the industry and the market. There has been done some efforts to get somebody to do this.

Finland bought rocket-launchers from the Netherlands at the end of 2006 which was said to be a part of Finland's preparation to replace landmines from its Defence (we have the goal to join the Ottawa treaty in 2012). These launchers could be used for delivering cluster ammunition. As there have been earlier parliamentary questions and debate on the issue of buying cluster munition from Israel (possibly the same kind as was used later in Lebanon), the whole issue became quite political in the eve of Oslo meeting on banning Cluster-munition that cause humanitarian problems. (In the end Finland voted in support of the Oslo process).

In the past years, the trade with Israel has been problematic, and of course arms trade with the US is also a difficult question, considering the criteria of not selling to countries in war. However, pragmatism tends to win and the arms trade with the US hasnt been widely challenged publicly.

The arms trade debate has almost disappeared from the Finnish media. One reason is that Finland

follows the EU code of conduct quite prudently. Other reason has been the small resources of NGOs to follow up and feed cases to the public and the media.

3. International processes and Finland

The UN follow up conference on Small Arms (illicit.. etc) ended i no formal result. The "difficult" issues where questions on civilian possession of weapons, restriction of trade with non-state actors (if they are friendly or strategically important..), the question of developing and going forward with POA (program of action) in a situation where many of the states haven't even started to follow up the basic POA of 2001. There was a strong feeling from many opposing and so called "fence sitting" states that armstrade is essentially an issue of national sovereignty, and should not be intervened in from the international community.

What has been succesfully in the Small Arms process, is that it has given a push to several regional control and regulation processes, and for developing common standards on marking and tracing, and to tackle issues around brokering and brokers. Most importantaly, it has helped gather support for developing the ATT (arms trade treaty).

Finland has been very active on the arms trade-control issues, mostly in the framwork of small arms discussions, but also otherwise. On these questions the co-operation and information sharing on processes between NGOs and Finnish armstrade and arms control officials has been good. The Foreign Ministry called frequently to common information sharing meetings where NGOs, business, industry, an representants from all ministrys dealing with the issues were invited. Foreign Ministry also invited (and paid) an NGO-representative to be in the Finnish delegation at the UN conference in New York and also to an EU meeting in Brussels where an NGO conference was convened, and to a Helsinki process consultation on small arms in Canada.

Finland has been especially active in promoting the ATT (legally binding, scope including conventional arms, not only small arms.) Also EU has supported this process, and a resolution in favor of ATT was passed in UN in the First committee in the autumn of 2006.

<http://www.iansa.org/un/documents/ArmsTradeTreatyL55.pdf>

There is also an initiative on developing criterias on transfer controls (TCI transfer control initiative), which would be politically, not legally binding, and with the scope only on small arms. This will be further discussed in august i Brussels? It can be seen as a complementary process, as developing a legally binding ATT will take some time. The idea with transfer controls would be to agree on some recommendations for governments on what kind of transfer controls and criterias should be put in place on national level.

Some of the international NGO have also gathered a text called "global principles" which is basically a compilation of already agreed principles and formulations existing in different documents, and resolutions concerning principles on arms trade control.

One of more humoristic consequenses of the small arms debate in Finland has been the foundation of the Finnish rifle association, wchich has been active in media. The association wants to support the Finnish peoples rights to own guns and is worried that UN etc want to take away that right. Per capita, Finland has the third highest number of private weapons in the world, after USA and Yemen, mostly hunting rifles.

4. NGO activities

In the framework of KATU (conflict prevention network), Amnesty and the peace organisations have a Small Arms group that has discussed arms trade issues in "all its aspects" (= all kind of armstade issues). A control arms and ATT website was produced, in Finnish, but it has not been kept updated regularly. The organisations collected photographs of faces as part of the control arms "million faces" -campaign on ATT, which was handed over at the UN conference.

There has been some discussion with the finnish officials on EU and lifting of the China arms trade embargo. NGOs are trying to argue not to lift the embargo, which would give a wrong signal to China on the human right situation (the argument from the official side in favor of lifting the embargo has been more prosedural. As the embargo decision was taken before the code of conduct, it is outside the mechanisms of today) Journalists were also given background information on armstrade issues by the NGOs.

5. Legislation practises and Transparancy

Considering arms trade, Finland is still one of the most transparent countries in the world. Citizens can ask for information on all desicions made on arms trade licence applications. It is also possible to get information on pending and rejected applications. The decisions made by government (on weapons, weapon systems, or export seen as having impact on foreign politivity etc.) as a whole are reported at public minutes and also in the internet, as other goverments desions. If the desicion is made by Ministry of Defence (components licenses etc.), the information is given if asked for.

There has been pressure to make the applications non-public (so they wouldn't be misused for undercutting etc.). As only very few people in Finland have actually shown intrest, and also NGOs have tried not to misuse the transparent practice, the legislation has been unchanged. In practice, the companies and arms dealers first ask for unofficial advise, "green or red light", by phone from the official and these unofficial contacts are not diaried in any way. These kind of refusals do not get in papers and files.

If the production has been nordic co-operation (on which there exists a nordic defence industry co-operation framework NORDAC), the applicant can decide in which of the production countries they apply for the export license.

The Code of Conduct reports have been published on the internet with at least one year delay. The NGOs have asked the Defence ministry to get the reports published on time (the latest report for now is from 2005). http://www.defmin.fi/files/1056/National_Report_2005.pdf

Questions felt importat to deal with, but on which we haven't had resources

Follow up :

- EADS, as it is a partner and owner of Patria. We have not been able to follow up on EADS
- Eu arms industry and the EU defence agency EDA (thank You AMOK for the useful emails)
- finnish arms trade in detail

To produce :

- up-to-date materials on finnish arms export and industry, and updated webpage info on the issue.