



# TEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE EUROPEAN UNION ARMS INDUSTRY

**Q1: Does the European Union (EU) have any agreed policy on the arms industry?**

**A1:** Yes. The current policy was agreed unanimously by the heads of government of the 28 EU Member States at a summit meeting held in Brussels in December 2013. According to the agreed policy, the EU arms industry “*should be strengthened to ensure operational effectiveness and security of supply [of armaments], while remaining globally competitive and stimulating jobs, innovation and growth across the EU*”.<sup>1</sup>

**Q2: Is this policy in place to ensure that EU national governments can buy armaments, or to help the EU arms industry to make additional profits by selling armaments outside the EU?**

**A2:** Both. The agreed policy treats the EU arms industry both as a source of military strength, and as part of the economy – a means of creating jobs and growth. Given that the EU arms industry produces more armaments than it can sell to EU national governments, the only way that the industry can continue to create jobs and growth is by also selling armaments outside the EU.

**Q3: Aren't there laws restricting arms exports?**

**A3:** Yes, but these laws tend to be applied in a way that favours the arms industry. In all EU Member States, anyone who wishes to export armaments must obtain an export licence. But arms export licences are not difficult to obtain – over 99 per cent of arms export licence applications made in the EU are approved.<sup>2</sup> So, for example:

- In the six-month period from April to September 2015 the UK granted licences for the sale of armaments (including military aircraft and bombs) worth a total of 2.8 billion pounds sterling to Saudi Arabia – in spite of Saudi Arabia's poor human rights record, and in spite of Saudi Arabia's recent illegal bombing of civilians (during the Saudi military intervention in Yemen).<sup>3</sup>
- The French arms industry has recently been permitted to sell large pieces of military hardware to Egypt – propping up a dictatorial regime where arbitrary imprisonment, arbitrary executions, and torture are common. In 2015 contracts were signed for the sale of 24 fighter jets and two large warships to Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

**Q4: Who decides whether or not to grant an arms export licence?**

**A4:** In most EU Member States, a national government department makes the decision.<sup>5</sup>

There are some EU-wide licensing rules, to which all 28 EU Member States have signed up.<sup>6</sup> These rules require the Member States to make licensing decisions by referring to certain criteria (including the destination country's record on respect for human rights and international law). However, the rules are open to interpretation, and there is little accountability for licensing decisions. In practice, an arms dealer with enough political influence may be able to obtain a licence even in circumstances where the rules would suggest otherwise.

**Q5: Why would governments be so willing to support the arms industry?**

**A5:** The arms industry keeps close to those in power. It does this partly by paying professional lobbyists, and partly by offering jobs to retired government ministers, retired senior civil servants, and retired high-ranking army, navy, and air force officers. There are always plenty of well-connected people promoting the arms industry's interests at the highest levels of government. Moreover, political decision-makers have a clear incentive to support the industry: they know that the industry rewards its supporters with well-paid retirement jobs!

**Q6: Are all EU national governments equally involved in this?**

**A6:** Yes and no. All 28 EU Member States are equally signed up to the EU's agreed policy on the arms industry, but not all Member States are equally involved in the arms trade. In fact, the figures show that more than three quarters (by money value) of the arms export licences granted in the EU are granted by just five Member States: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK.<sup>7</sup>

**Q7: Apart from the question of where the arms exports are going, are there any other reasons to be concerned about the arms industry's influence over governments?**

**A7:** The political influence of the arms industry is a threat to peace. The industry has a financial interest in persuading governments to pursue militaristic policies. The more that governments arm themselves – and the more that governments go to war – the more profit the industry makes. With the industry being so influential, we should not be surprised if governments adopt militaristic thinking in their approach to foreign policy, and respond to conflict with violence.

**Q8: Just how big is the EU arms industry, anyway?**

**A8:** Big. According to the European Commission, in 2012 the EU arms industry's total turnover for the year was 96 billion euros.<sup>8</sup>

**Q9: If the EU arms industry is so big, is there any merit in the argument that governments should support this industry because it forms an important part of the economy?**

**A9:** The arms industry's lobbyists are very keen on this argument. However, it is an argument that depends on a false understanding of economics. If governments followed policies that reduced the size of the arms industry (for example, if they took a tougher line on arms export licensing), the capital currently invested in the arms industry would not simply vanish – it would become available for investment elsewhere in the economy. Even if jobs were lost in the arms industry, the reinvestment of the capital would create other jobs in other industries.

That said, we need to recognise that reducing the size of the arms industry would lead to some people losing their jobs – indeed, the arms industry currently provides much of the employment in some areas. Governments would need to plan for the economic redevelopment of the areas that would be affected. Also, governments would need to help arms-industry employees to find other work (e.g. by offering them retraining). In 2014 the UK-based organisation Campaign Against Arms Trade published a paper entitled *Arms to Renewables*,<sup>9</sup> proposing that many arms-industry employees could move into the renewable energy industry.

**Q10: Is there anything that I, as a concerned citizen, can do about these issues?**

**A10:** Yes, there is! There are many peace and human rights organisations throughout the EU that campaign on these issues. If you search the Internet, you can find one in your area. The European Network Against Arms Trade website ([www.enaat.org](http://www.enaat.org)) is a good place to start looking.

There are a number of ways in which you can offer your support to a campaigning organisation:

- By adding your voice – signing petitions, writing letters, attending demonstrations, etc.
- By providing financial support – because campaigning organisations are always short of money (unlike the arms industry, which is never short of money).
- By volunteering – because campaigning organisations depend on committed volunteers.

***Speak truth to power! Join with others to oppose the influence of the EU arms industry!***

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**Notes:** [1] From the December 2013 European Council conclusions, paragraph 16. See [bit.ly/1drf2Up](http://bit.ly/1drf2Up) [2] Based on an analysis of the European Network Against Arms Trade's figures for 2009-13. See [bit.ly/1o2iGPJ](http://bit.ly/1o2iGPJ) [3] For the arms export licensing figures, see [bit.ly/20e1lkO](http://bit.ly/20e1lkO) – for Saudi Arabia's human rights record and illegal bombings, see [bit.ly/1YJyKUP](http://bit.ly/1YJyKUP) and [bbc.in/1SbGTAq](http://bbc.in/1SbGTAq) [4] For arms sales to Egypt, see [bit.ly/20XFnD0](http://bit.ly/20XFnD0) and [cnn.it/1Pt44Rm](http://cnn.it/1Pt44Rm) – for Egypt's human right record, see [bit.ly/1QtZ6TD](http://bit.ly/1QtZ6TD) [5] For a list of arms export licensing authorities in the EU, see [bit.ly/1TaK4a2](http://bit.ly/1TaK4a2) [6] For the EU-wide arms export licensing rules, see [bit.ly/1AlpSLC](http://bit.ly/1AlpSLC) [7] See note 2. [8] See [bit.ly/1Q9lkbP](http://bit.ly/1Q9lkbP) [9] See [bit.ly/20qKDNs](http://bit.ly/20qKDNs)

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