



PARLIAMENTARY FORUM
ON SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Euro – Latin American Parliamentary Assembly

VII MEETING EUROLAT – CIVIL SOCIETY

Thursday 18 July, 2013, 11.00 am

Vilnius (Lithuania)

Seimas Building (Parliament of Lithuania)

Room: European Affairs Committee

Arms transfers between Latin America and the European Union

Presentation held by Teresa Dybeck, Programme Officer, Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Latin America is a region severely affected by armed violence and has some of the highest homicide rates in the world due to firearms. According to the UN Global Homicide study, 42 percent of all homicides reported in 2010 were committed with a firearm. In Latin America, this percentage goes even up to 71 percent, and in some selected countries in Central America, it reaches peaks of more than 90 percent.

Firearms are also instrumental to support the struggle for power of criminal organizations, drug cartels, gangs, and terrorist movements, and represent also a lucrative trafficking commodities per se, often smuggled and trafficked to conflict zones or criminal groups, or exchanged for other illicit commodities such as drugs, precious metals, or even just food.

To tackle the issue, parliamentarians have a role to play in public awareness-raising, improving legislation, oversight of the government and contribution to the emergence of international norms.

The Parliamentary Forum is a global network of parliamentarians dedicated to the prevention of small arms and light weapons' proliferation and the promotion of disarmament and armed violence

reduction and prevention. The Forum is an organisation for and of parliamentarians and as such is directed and run by its members, with support from a secretariat based in Stockholm.

The Forum was founded ten years ago in the Spanish Congress and today it joins 200 parliamentarians from 70 countries in Africa, Latin America, North America, Europe and the Middle East and attracts politicians from all political factions – left, right and centre.

It provides a space for parliamentarians to debate, join forces, and contribute to the advancement of the small arms and armed violence reduction agenda. Over the years the Forum has contributed to strengthen the legislative framework for SALW control, increase the understanding of SALW violence and the development of best-practices on SALW violence reduction and prevention.

Although the substantial part of the Forum's regional and capacity building work takes place in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, the role of Parliamentarians from Western countries is extremely important.

Forum members from Latin America and Africa and the Middle East have for long time voiced a strong wish to have a dialogue with their colleagues in producing countries.

For instance, since 2008 the Forum has an on-going dialogue with the US Congress where a number of seminars and individual meetings with congressmen and congresswomen have been held. We can see how the political climate is changing and more US legislators are open to discuss the issue.

Upon request from our members, we wish to initiate a similar dialogue with parliamentarians in Europe which is where a large proportion of the world's largest arms exporting countries are found¹.

Although the situation here is slightly different, in 2012, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) the EU-27 authorised the export of €37 billion worth of military equipment, €10 billion more than in 2007. With a few notable exceptions, there is limited parliamentary oversight and scrutiny of these authorisations and insufficient informed consideration of the risks and benefits of particular arms exports.

A significant number of European produced weapons reach Latin America. European legislators must take their oversight role seriously to ensure that arms transfers are not fuelling conflicts. In this sense end user certificates ensuring responsibility not to send on is important. One example from my own country Sweden is a well-known case where Swedish weapons sold to Venezuela later on were found in the hands of the FARC.

Without any doubt, sovereign states have the right to self-defence, making legal arms trade necessary. However, we must acknowledge that both legal arms trade as it is regulated now and illegal circulation of weapons fuel armed conflicts all over the world which reminds us that the trade in weapons must be stronger regulated.

The total proliferation of arms is far beyond the legitimate need and the major problem might not

¹ SIPRI study of the world's top 20 arms exporters 2007-2010. - 1. USA, 2. Russia, 3. Germany, 4. France, 5. United Kingdom, 6. China, 7. Spain, 8. Netherlands, 9. Italy, 10. Israel, 11. Sweden, 12. Ukraine, 13. Switzerland, 14. Canada, 15. South Korea, 16. South Africa, 17. Belgium, 18. Norway, 19. Belarus, 20. Brazil

be how to handle weapons once they are in possession, but how to address the issue that there are simply too many of them in the first place.

The world came one step closer to tackle that problem in April this year when over 150 states voted yes to the Arms Trade Treaty. The ATT offers an international system and a more stable system. The remaining question is now how we proceed further from here in terms of ratification and – more importantly – implementation.

At the same time, Latin American legislators must address the demand for weapons in their home countries and recognize the link narco-trafficking and organized crime.

In Latin America there is also a need to strengthen national firearms control regimes and promoting regional harmonization efforts through enhanced parliamentary action and stakeholders' dialogue. Forum members in Latin America have for years worked to reduce armed violence and prevent and combat illicit trafficking and proliferation of firearms and ammunition and their links to organized crime.

A major achievement of the Forum is the Latin American Model Law on Firearms, Ammunition and Related Material. The Model Law was officially adopted by the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino) in December 2008 and has subsequently been used as basis for the revision and regional harmonization of national legislations in 7 of the countries the most affected by SALW-related violence.

The Model Law combines the two paradigms of 'control' and 'disarmament' and foresees the introduction of various control mechanisms throughout the weapon life cycle - from production to destruction. It has contributed to shift the focus of Latin American countries to away from control towards a broader approach recognizing that availability of weapons per se – legal or illegal, is a major risk to public security.

Together with our partners SIPRI, in Europe, the Forum is in the process of establishing a network of parliamentarians in Europe that can raise standards in parliamentary oversight and scrutiny of arms exports by sharing good practices and information about licensing decisions and exports that could be useful for oversight in other European countries. At the same time we wish to bring parliamentarians from Europe and Latin America together in order to foster a good dialogue and find workable solutions.

Today we would like to invite interested parliamentarians to join the Forum and encourage EUROLAT to consider this topic for its future meetings.

Thank you for your attention.