

INSIGNIA-I

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Czech Republic

Arms production and Export

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Introduction

There are weighty difficulties in obtaining appropriate information from the authorities, data are insufficient, in the Czech Republic campaigns for removal of arms export are too tiny and immature, there is de facto no organized movement. In addition the data are outdated, mainly concerning 1997. That's why this report is very concise.

The situation of the arms export from the Czech Republic is alarming. The Czech Republic is the 7th greatest exporter of weapons in the world, no conversion of arms production is supposed. On the contrary, the government is planning new development of arms-plants, production and export. The government has announced its design for "unification of armament companies", sustained by the state, which will result in fierce boom and increase in military production and sales.

Recipient Countries

The Czech Republic exports military equipment, apart from other, to Russia, Georgia, Peru, Colombia and Indonesia.

In May 1998 the Ministry of Industry and Trade was inquired for information about possible export to the following countries (where abuses are expected, concerning 1997): Guatemala, Colombia, Peru, Turkey, Israel, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Nigeria. The Ministry admitted sales to the five underlined ones. Export to U.S.A. and Chile is likely.

Export to many other (including some very controversial) countries can be alleged.

Sales to Turkey (extensive in the past) have been cancelled since Turkey had sought other suppliers.

The government differentiates between export of actual weapons and other military equipment. According to information from the ministry of Industry and Trade, export of weapons made up 3.1 % of the entire export of military equipment in 1997.

Law and Transparency

Process of considering and granting licences belongs to the authority of Ministry of Industry and Trade and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As the Ministries informed:

The export of military material from the Czech Republic is allowed to be carried out only by authorized Czech firms on basis of granted individual export licences. This matter is ruled by the act 38/1994 Sb. and the practise decree 89/1994 to this act.

The total value of export of military material, with certain commodity sorting and mentioning the main recipient countries and the most important Czech delivering companies, are always published in the media, concerning the previous year.

In reality, the transparency is insufficient and it is extremely difficult to get appropriate information. No real publishing in the media is carried out. The authorities are very reluctant to provide information, inquiries made to them usually remain without any responses. According to the legislation, the ministries refuse to "tell private subjects detailed data relating to individual arms deliveries." The armament companies actually never inform on their business activities.

Some arms-companies can be suspected of concealing their sales from the authorities or even of selling dangerous materials to private subjects or whatever regimes (recent case of offering collections of bacteria, usable for germ weapons, without any licence).

Present-day development of arms production and sales

As mentioned in the 'Introduction', the arms production and new markets will even increase, not decrease. The Prime Minister has recently condemned any effort at conversions of military production and stated that it is necessary to develop "Czech arms-companies in order that they succeed in arms races within NATO."

Besides the designed "great unification of armament companies", the government is planning to found a "sustaining fund" for development of armament production, as announced. Also co-operation on armaments with various companies within NATO-members is supposed after Czech Republic accession to NATO, e.g. building so-called "defensive industry" is intended.

Campaigns and perspectives

As all alternative movements in the Czech Republic, also campaigns against arms export are very tiny, not organized.

Unlike in the other European countries, this movement is, instead of development, declining and, unless it is supported from abroad, it can completely vanish soon.

After the change of the government in July 1998, some members of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (HCA) became officers of ministries and governmental institutions. They can be supposed to be more willing to accept motions to reconsideration of arms export.

Nevertheless, the inquiries and protests to the government should be actively made by various European organizations, not only by the ones in the Czech Republic which are not able to manage all the campaigning by themselves.