

Citizens' feedback on the draft Regulation establishing an EU Defence Industrial Development Programme

Founding fathers of the EU had an ideal of a “peaceful, united and prosperous Europe” that should prevent any new arms race in Europe by encouraging cooperation, interdependence and solidarity. It should promote the same approach at global level instead of contributing to the global arms race.

I do not agree that my taxpayers' money will be used to research and develop new weapons and military technology:

For decades we have been told that weapons and military spending would lead to more security and stability. However, none of the major conflicts of the last decades have been solved through military means. The military interventions in Afghanistan, Libya and Iraq were disasters which have only made matters worse. Rather than repeating the mistakes of the past, the EU should come up with innovative and courageous solutions in tackling the root causes of conflicts and drastically increase its support to peaceful ways of resolving them.

The EU has a critical role to play to confront the major challenges we face, but these problems will not be solved by investing more in weapons. On the contrary, higher military expenditure means less money to tackle these challenges in a peaceful and sustainable way.

The arms industry is an industry unlike any other but one that profits from selling weaponry worldwide. It should not receive funding from the European budget. The EU Defence Fund and this proposal in particular are initiatives that favour arms companies, including their capacity to export sophisticated weaponry to non-EU countries. This not the EU I want!

Indeed, the draft Regulation clearly states that the objective is to support the competitiveness of military industry, and expects as one result a “positive effect on exports”. It also says that the ownership of the results or products will remain to the private companies and that the EU countries will keep full control on their arms exports decisions; in other words, European taxpayers pay for arms development but companies keep the profits and member states the freedom to export the end product outside the EU. I completely disagree with this policy.

The mission of the EU is instead to look for, promote and fund alternative ways to prevent and resolve conflicts: the EU should invest more in tackling the root-causes of conflicts such as climate change, access to land and resources, inequalities, poverty and lack of education, or lack of political freedoms. Resolving those problems at local and regional level are also costly and long-term if to be done efficiently, and will bring sustainable peace.

And because this EU funding would add to national expenditures rather than replace them, it will not bring savings contrary to what is claimed.

These proposals have been developed under intense lobbying from the arms industry itself, who is telling the Commission why and how to fund the arms industry. This is further undermining the legitimacy of the EU and not responding to citizens' expectations in terms of democratic and transparent functioning of the EU.

Last but not least, the jobs and growth argument is not well founded. The EC claim that this is demonstrated by studies but peace groups draw different conclusions from the literature: as the arms industry is dependent on public funds, it creates fewer jobs at a higher cost than other economic sectors; and R&D investments rather shifts jobs from the civil to the military sector because of skills scarcity. There are more efficient ways to create jobs and support growth without the negative impact linked to the production of arms.

For example a much better use of tax payers' money would be to focus on renewable energies, where the high-skilled workers from the arms sector could easily adapt while contributing to the Paris agreement. The same could be said of the 'circular economy' sector, and investments in civilian R&D are still much needed in many other areas like affordable health technologies or sustainable food and farming systems.