Press release | 17.04.2012

Syria – arms embargo

EU cannot allow flouting of arms embargo

In spite of an EU arms embargo prohibiting 'the sale, supply, transfer or export of arms and related materiel of all types' to Syria from EU member states, there have been two reported cases of EU member states being potentially directly or indirectly complicit in the transfer of arms to the Assad regime this year, with the latest occurring this weekend (1).

In response, the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament has sent an open letter to the EU high representative for foreign policy Catherine Ashton calling for an EU mechanism to ensure respect of EU arms embargoes by all member states and an investigation into Cyprus' role in the Russia-Assad arms deal (2). Commenting on the initiative, Greens/EFA foreign affairs spokesperson **Franziska Brantner** (Germany) stated:

"EU member states have a duty to ensure the EU arms embargo is not flouted. In the case of the Cypriot authorities facilitating the transfer of arms to Syria this is clearly not the case. In the case of the German cargo ship 'Atlantic Cruiser' apparently circumventing the embargo it is at least questionable if the German government could not have done more to prevent this incident. The failure to vigorously enforce the embargo will not only exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, it also undermines this key foreign policy tool and, thereby, the EU's foreign policy efforts and credibility with regard to the Syrian crisis.

"The EU needs to improve the monitoring and oversight of the implementation of sanctions, and hold those member states accountable that do not comply with the rules. EU high representative Ashton must raise the arms deal between Russia and Assad with the Cypriot government and investigate Cyprus' role in the incident. Cyprus financial bail-out by Russia cannot be at the expense of the Syrian people and opposition."

(1) On 10 January, Cypriot authorities allowed the docking and refuelling of Russian ship MS Chariot, carrying more than 59 tonnes of Russian weapons for the Syrian authorities.

On 13 April, the German cargo ship 'Atlantic Cruiser', sailing under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda, was stopped on its way to Tartus, Syria. According to media reports it was carrying heavy weapons and ammunition from Iran for the Assad regime. After public protests the ship reportedly changed its course to Turkey but then switched off its transponder and could no longer be located. The German government is currently investigating the case.

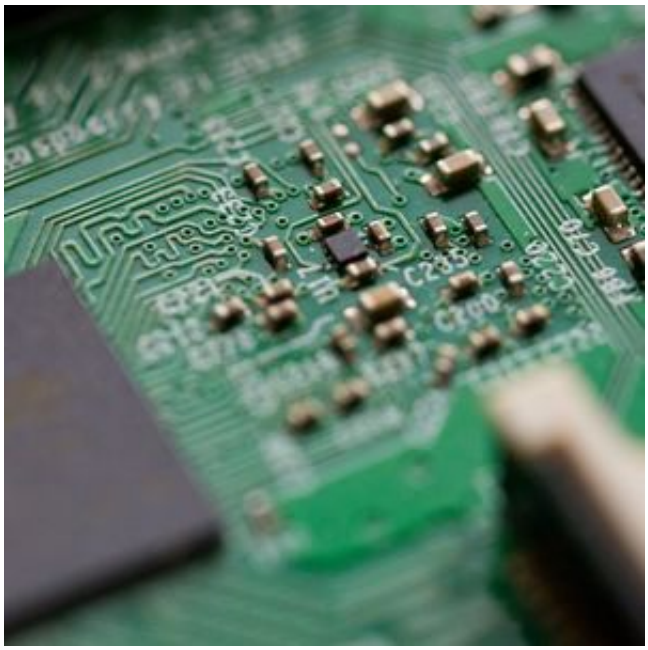
(2) The open letter is available at:

/legacy/fileadmin/dam/Documents/Letters/Open_letter_to_Ashton_on_Syria_17.04.2012.pdf
A brief note on the current mechanisms to implement EU sanctions and how these could be improved is available at:
/legacy/fileadmin/dam/Documents/Background_notes/Note_implementation_of_EU_Arms_Embargos_2012-04-17.pdf

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