

Arms exports to Israel from EU worth €200m

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CET EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS – European Union member states authorised the export of €200 million in arms exports to Israel in 2007, the latest figures from Brussels disclose, with France far and away the Jewish state's biggest European weapons supplier. According to the EU's 2008 report on arms export licences, published in December for the 2007 calendar year and consolidating the accounts that member states must annually submit, 18 member states authorised a total of 1,018 such licences to Israel worth €199,409,348.

France, Germany and Romania were the top three exporters. France issued export licences worth €126 million, Germany authorised €28 million and Romania €17 million, the EUobserver can reveal. In response to calls from opposition politicians that the UK government halt its arms exports to Israel and push all other EU member states to do the same, a British foreign office spokesperson said: "We do not approve any defence related exports if we judge that there is a risk that they will be used for external aggression or internal repression. "We routinely refuse export licences where we believe that there is a risk of this. Any application relating to Israel is considered on this basis," the spokesperson continued. EU arms code of conduct The EU has maintained an arms export code of conduct since 1998, but it is overseen at the member state level, not in Brussels, so if Mr Brown were to push for such a move, he would have to convince the 26 other member states.

In 2007, €12 million in small arms and ammunition were exported to Israel by Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Romania and the UK. Another €23.5 million in "light weapons," meaning those that require two to three people to operate them, such as bombs, torpedoes and explosive devices, were supplied by the Czech Republic, Germany, Romania and Slovenia. Belgium, France and Romania also sent Israel €18.5 million worth of aircraft and related material. Paris is responsible for €10 million of this sum.

In a fourth, very broad category of armaments in the EU's consolidated report, "electronic equipment" – referring to electronics specifically modified for military use, navigation and guidance equipment, and satellite jamming systems, some €94 million was exported by France (€89 million) and Germany (€5 million).

The rest of the €200 million consists of weapons that fall into other minor categories beyond small arms, light weapons, aircraft and electronics.

Italy, traditionally a major arms exporter, only supplied Israel with €0.5 million in weapons in 2007. Spain, also a leading trader in the sector also sold Tel Aviv just €4.5 million worth of armaments. Sweden, another major European weapons producer, along with eight other EU member states, delivered nothing to the Jewish state. Across the EU, only 28 export licences were refused as a result of human rights, internal security or regional stability reasons.

Kaye Stearman, of the UK-based Campaign Against Arms Trade, told this website: "The UN and impartial observers have regularly documented how Israeli military actions have violated international humanitarian law. "Although the UK's own Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria is supposed to assess the impact of arms sales on regional peace, security and stability, and the country's human rights record, it seems that this is ignored in the case of Israel."

"Britain must immediately stop selling arms, including arms components, to Israel and also stop buying arms from Israeli companies – arms that have been 'tested' in the laboratories of the occupied territories."

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