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ANNEX 9.41

Libyan Arms Deals Come Back to Haunt Europe

By David Böcking

Helicopters from Italy, communication technology from Germany: When the arms embargo against Libya was lifted in 2004, the country's dictator Moammar Gadhafi went on a shopping spree in the European Union. Now he is using those weapons against his own people -- to the EU's shame.

The 27 states of the European Union have stopped all arms exports to Libya as the violence continues amid a popular uprising in the North African country. A spokeswoman for Catherine Ashton, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs, said she had received information that "all trade of arms, licensing (with Libya) is suspended by all (EU) countries concerned."

The fact that the British politician seems more like a bystander than a decision-maker is down to the fact that arms exports in the EU are the responsibility of individual countries. Indeed, Libyan ruler Moammar Gadhafi was easily able to stock up after the 18-year arms embargo on his country ended in 2004. According to an EU report, European Union member states provided the dictator with defense equipment worth €344 million (\$474 million) in 2009 alone.

But European leaders may be regretting having granted the export permits, now that Gadhafi is using those weapons against his rebellious population. For example, Italy has repeatedly supplied helicopters and other aircraft to the North African country; in 2009, those exports came to just under €108 million. Now Libyan refugees have reported being fired on by helicopters.

Questions have also been asked about other countries which have approved large-scale exports. Security forces might have used firearms which were possibly delivered via Malta against demonstrators. The small island state supplied small-caliber and automatic weapons worth nearly €80 million to Libya in 2009, according to EU statistics. According to the Maltese Foreign Ministry, however, the arms in question were Italian products that were merely transported via a port in Malta. "We do not have any weapons factories on Malta," said a ministry spokesman.

Blocking Mobile Phone Networks

The issue of German exports is also complex. After the embargo was lifted, Germany's arms business with Libya was quickly put back on track. German exports to Libya were worth €53 million in 2009, the third highest in Europe. But more than 80 percent of that fell into the EU's ML11 category, which largely involves military electronic equipment. "No complete weapon systems seem to have been exported from Germany since the 1980s," says Mark Bromley from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in Sweden.

Nonetheless, the German exports could still provoke criticism -- because the ML11 category includes electronic jammers. The Gadhafi regime has been blocking the mobile phone and GPS networks in Libya for days -- possibly with the help of German technology -- to prevent protesters from being able to communicate with each other.

And there is also controversy over the radar technology that Germany supplied to Libya to help it secure its borders. In 2010, the EU pledged to give the dictator €50 million so that Libya could prevent African refugees from reaching Europe's coasts. But this and other deals like it are now coming back to bite the EU, according to Bernhard Moltmann of the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). "The situation in Libya illustrates the fundamental problem that the long-term effects of arms transfers are not taken into account," he told SPIEGEL ONLINE.

If things had turned out slightly differently, however, some EU states might easily have found themselves in a much more awkward situation today. After the end of the embargo, countries like Italy, France and the UK were positively courting orders from Tripoli. A really massive deal never came off, however. "If one of the big deals had gone through, that could have been very embarrassing," says the SIPRI's Bromley.

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