Parliament approves revised EU gun law to close security loopholes

Plenary sessions [14-03-2017 - 12:39]

Tighter controls on blank-firing and inadequately deactivated weapons, like those used in the Paris terror attacks, and an obligation for EU member states to have an appropriate monitoring system in place for the issuance or renewal of licences and to exchange information, are among the updates approved by MEPs to the 1991 firearms directive on Tuesday.

The provisional deal on the EU firearms directive reached by Parliament and Council negotiators last December was endorsed by the full House by 491 votes to 178, with 28 abstentions.

“Over the past 18 months I and colleagues across this Parliament have worked with many different stakeholders, as well as law enforcement authorities, proof houses and legal experts, in order to protect the interests of legitimate owners whilst also addressing the security issues. The Parliament text has made many significant improvements. The changes that we have now agreed will close the loophole and be an important contribution to our security, whilst also respecting the rights of legal owners”, said Vicky Ford (ECR, UK), who steered this legislation through Parliament.

Preventing guns falling into the wrong hands

EU countries will have to enforce tougher controls on blank-firing “acoustic” firearms, which can be easily converted to fire live ammunition. These firearms were used in the 2015 Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks.

Today, acoustic firearms can be sold without authorisation in some EU countries, but under the updated directive, they will have to remain licensed under the same rules as the original live-firing version.

Irreversible deactivation

The revised directive also strengthens the rules on marking firearms and clarifies the status of “deactivated” weapons (newly deactivated guns will have to be declared to national authorities). Following pressure from Parliament, the EU Commission pledged to adopt, by the end of May 2017 and in collaboration with national experts, revised deactivation standards and techniques for ensuring that deactivated firearms are rendered irreversibly inoperable.

There are new, stricter controls on certain semi-automatic firearms when they are fitted with high capacity magazines ((i.e. over 20 rounds in short semi-automatics and over ten in long ones) and on automatic firearms that have been converted into semi-automatics. However, individuals who legally own these today will be able to continue to do so provided their own member state agrees.

Member states will be able to grant “Category A” authorisations to certain types of individuals, e.g. target shooters and reservists, as well as to recognised museums and, in exceptional and duly reasoned cases, to collectors, subject to strict security measures.

The new rules also require that all information needed to trace and identify firearms be recorded in national data-filing systems and that arrangements be made to improve the
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exchange of information between member states.

You can find more information on the revised directive in this background note.

Next steps

The draft law still needs to be formally approved by the other co-legislator, the EU Council of Ministers.

Member states will have 15 months from the date of entry into force of the directive to transpose the new rules into national law and 30 months to put in place data-filling systems for registering all information needed in order to trace and identify firearms.

Note to editors

The 1991 EU firearms directive, last updated in 2008, sets out the conditions under which private persons may lawfully acquire and possess guns or transfer them to another EU country. In the

European Agenda on Security for 2015-2020, the EU Commission said it would review the existing firearms legislation to improve information sharing, reinforce traceability, standardise marking, and establish common standards for neutralising firearms.

Procedure: Co-decision (Ordinary Legislative Procedure), 1st reading agreement

Facts

• Category A firearms are prohibited for civilian use except for certain types of individuals, Category B firearms need an authorisation, and owners of Category C firearms need to declare their ownership but do not need authorisation.

Further information

• Steps of the procedure:
• Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection:
• Adopted text - Revised EU firearms directive:
• Background note on revised firearms directive (EN/FR):
• Video recording of debate (click on 14.03.2017):
• EP Research Service - Control of the acquisition and possession of weapons:
• Data on firearms ownership in the EU (Eurobarometer from 2013):
• Audiovisual material for professionals:
  http://www.audiovisual.europarl.europa.eu/firearms

Political groups

• Press release by the EPP group:
  http://bit.ly/2mHRZlM
• Press release by the S&D group:
  http://bit.ly/2mHpRza
• News pages of the ECR group:
• News pages of the ALDE group:
  http://bit.ly/2kKQqK
• News pages of the GUE/NGL group:
  http://bit.ly/1UrAlM9
Press release


Contacts

Isabel Teixeira NADKARNI
Press Officer
Telephone number: (+32) 2 28 32198 (BXL)
Telephone number: (+33) 3 881 76758 (STR)
Mobile number: (+32) 498 98 33 36
Email: isabel.nadkarni@europarl.europa.eu
Email: imco-press@europarl.europa.eu
Twitter: EP_SingleMarket