



PRESS RELEASE

FACE: EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF ASSOCIATIONS FOR HUNTING & CONSERVATION

Policy-makers and citizens criticize the proposed revision of the European Firearms Directive

The European Commission proposals are considered “rushed” and “unacceptable” according to MEPs who met yesterday to discuss the European Firearms Directive with citizens, hunters and sport shooters.

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 2 March 2016 – The Firearms Directive sparked yet another heated discussion yesterday amongst policy-makers and citizens. The proposals, tabled by the European Commission only five days after the tragic terror attacks in Paris last November, have been since targeted from several sides. Harsh criticism is not only coming from stakeholders directly involved in the legal use of firearms, such as hunters and sport shooters, but also from a vast front of Members of the European Parliament, who expressed doubts about the proposals and highlighted areas in serious need of improvement.

Although some points are generally thought to be acceptable, such as the better tracing of firearms and improved transboundary cooperation between police forces, the most recurring and shared critique is the absence of an impact assessment, which makes it impossible to estimate the consequences of the proposed amendments on criminal activities, as well as on the lawful use of firearms.

Representatives from the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the EU exchanged views during the conference, which was organised with the support of FACE (the European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation). The panel was composed of Mrs. **Vicky FORD** MEP, Rapporteur for the Firearms Directive, **Tomasz HUSAK**, Head of Cabinet of Commissioner Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs), **Torbjörn LARSSON**, Vice President, Nordic Hunters' Alliance, **Jürgen KOHLHEIM**, European Shooting Confederation, **Günther SABLATTNIG**, Advisor to the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Council of the EU.

MEP **Karl-Heinz FLORENZ**, President of the Parliamentary Intergroup Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside, who chaired the conference, commented that “the Commission proposal is rushed and drafted under time pressure. There is no relationship between the legal possession of civilian firearms, such as those used for hunting or target shooting, and the risk of terrorist attacks. I consider it unacceptable to hinder law-abiding citizens with unnecessary or even disproportionate restrictions, which would bring no gain in security in areas that are already subject to sufficient regulations at the national level.” It was clear that the absence of an impact assessment on the proposed measures could have a disproportionate impact on legal users of firearms.

One of the most controversial points is the proposed ban of firearms based on their resemblance to military firearms. While the Commission is not offering any justification for this measure, there is widespread agreement that restricting legal use will have no effect on the black market as legal and illicit markets are not complementary. Concerns were also expressed that common target shooting firearms used for Olympic shooting disciplines and World Championships could be considered as “military firearms”.

On issues concerning minimum age, storage, the time-limited validity of licences and medical tests, MEPs rejected the Commission’s proposal recalling the subsidiarity principle, which enables Member States to adopt legislation tailored to national requirements.

Existing best practices put in place by countries such as Sweden, which guarantee the continuous strict control of authorities over the sale of firearms by means of distance communication, namely the Internet, make a ban unnecessary. MEPs urged the European Commission to avoid discrimination towards specific user groups, such as hunters and sport shooters, by preventing individual owners to sell their firearms on-line, a tool which is otherwise fostered by EU policies.

MEP **Vicky FORD**, voiced the concerns of many MEPs stating that the Commission did not respond directly to the question asked by her committee. Mrs. **FORD** stated that the Commission had planned to protect the interests of sport shooters and hunters, but nonetheless the written text was not a reflection of their initial plan.

In his statement, Mr **HUSAK**, reiterated the intention of the Commission to improve the security of citizens declaring its willingness to constructively cooperate with stakeholders in view of finding common solutions, while denying widespread allegations whereby hunters and sport shooters would be the real target of the restrictions.

“From a hunters’ perspective, it has been a shocking and demeaning experience to be at the center of the discussion surrounding terrorism and illegal trafficking of firearms”, said **Torbjörn LARSSON**. “Hunters are nature-loving, law-abiding citizens that take great pleasure in the conservation of our natural resources for generations to come. We do not cause trouble. On the contrary, hunters actively invest their time and money in activities that directly benefit society, such as habitat and species management, tracking down game involved in traffic accidents, pest control and mitigating the effects of invasive alien species. Apart from some useful improvements on the traceability of firearms, the Commission’s proposals appear to respond to a non-existing problem.” Mr. LARSSON also explained how banning semi-automatic rifles would negatively impact both disabled and female hunters as well as restrict the hunting and tracking of certain species of large game.

“The European Commission’s proposals are unfortunately a good example of bad law-making” stated MEP **Bendt BENDTSEN**, Vice-President of the Intergroup Biodiversity, Hunting, Countryside. “This is a case of symbolic politics! The proposed revision is irrelevant for the fight against terrorism, which was presented to be its main objective. Instead, the proposal will affect a lot of hunters and sport shooters who simply exercise their hobby. Hunters and sport shooters are not the ones committing acts of terrorism in Europe, and no legal firearm has been used in the terrorist activities we have seen - only illegal weapons have.” Mr **BENDTSEN** also stated that it should still be possible for private persons to legally trade firearms between themselves. However, with this proposal, he stated “the Commission is shooting sparrows with cannons.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

FACE is the European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation. Established in 1977, **FACE represents the interests of Europe's 7 million hunters** as an international non-profit-making nongovernmental organisation. FACE is made up of national hunters' associations from 35 European countries including the EU-28. FACE is supported by 7 associate members and is based in Brussels.

FACE is the largest democratically representative body for hunters in the world, with elections for its statutory bodies taking place every three years. Each country represented within FACE receives one vote.

FACE upholds the principle of sustainable use, has been a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1987, and more recently of Wetlands International. FACE works with its partners on a range of hunting-related issues, from international conservation agreements to local implementations with the aim of sustaining hunting across Europe.

The Firearms Directive: Council Directive 91/477/EEC of 18 June 1991 on the control of the acquisition and possession of weapon as amended by Directive 2008/51/EC, is the overarching legal instrument for setting out certain minimum conditions for the acquisition, possession and transfer of civilian firearms inside the European Union (EU) territory. The Firearms Directive was adopted in the context of the completion of the Internal Market with a view to ensure the free movement of legal firearms, while enshrining safety and precautionary measures in the directive. The revision of this directive in 2008 partly arose from the international commitments of the Union, namely from the signing of the United Nations Protocol on the fight against illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms.

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