

European Commission strengthens control of firearms across the EU

Adopted a package of measures

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USPA NEWS - The European Commission adopted Wednesday a package of measures to make it more difficult to acquire firearms in the European Union, better track legally held firearms, strengthen cooperation between Member States, and ensure that deactivated firearms are rendered inoperable.

The proposals presented were foreseen in the European Security Agenda adopted in April 2015, but have been significantly accelerated in light of recent events. The Commission is hereby supporting Member States in their efforts to protect Europe's citizens and prevent criminals and terrorists from accessing weapons. President Juncker said that "the recent terrorist attacks on Europe's people and values were coordinated across borders, showing that we must work together to resist these threats."

According Juncker, "today's proposal, prepared jointly by Commissioners Elżbieta Bieda, Kowalska and Dimitris Avramopoulos, will help us tackle the threat of weapons falling into the hands of terrorists. We are proposing stricter controls on sale and registration of firearms, and stronger rules to irrevocably deactivate weapons. We will also come forward with an Action Plan in the near future to tackle illicit arms trafficking. Organised criminals accessing and trading military grade firearms in Europe cannot and will not be tolerated."

Internal Market and Industry Commissioner Elżbieta Bieda, Kowalska and Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos added that "the adoption of the firearms package today is proof of the Commission's determination to address the new reality we are confronted with. We need to remove regulatory divergences across the EU by imposing stricter, harmonised EU standards for firearms and ensuring efficient exchange of information between Member States."

The measures

The package of measures on firearms adopted by the College of Commissioners today includes a revision of the Firearms Directive, to tighten controls on the acquisition and possession of firearms. The Commission has tabled proposals to amend the EU Firearms Directive, which defines the rules under which private persons can acquire and possess weapons, as well as the transfer of firearms to another EU country.

The main elements of the proposed revision are stricter rules to ban certain semi-automatic firearms, which will not, under any circumstance, be allowed to be held by private persons, even if they have been permanently deactivated; tighter rules on the online acquisition of firearms, to avoid the acquisition of firearms, key parts or ammunition through the Internet, and EU common rules on marking of firearms to improve the traceability of weapons.

Also includes a better exchange of information between Member States and obligation to interconnect national registers of weapons; common criteria concerning alarm weapons in order to prevent their transformation into fully functioning firearms; stricter conditions for the circulation of deactivated firearms, and stricter conditions for collectors to limit the risk of sale to criminals.

The proposed amendments which the Commission has tabled now need to be approved by the European Parliament and Council. The Implementing Regulation sets out common and strict criteria on the way Member States must deactivate weapons so that they are rendered inoperable. The possession of the most dangerous firearms "even if they are deactivated" will no longer be allowed. The Implementing Regulation is based on the criteria for deactivation developed by the Permanent International Commission for the Proof of Small Arms. Following a positive vote on the draft Regulation by Member States in a committee earlier this morning, the College of Commissioners formally adopted the text.

The package of measures to strengthen the control of firearms within the EU is based on a detailed evaluation of the implementation of the Firearms Directive carried out by the Commission last year in the context of its Regulatory Fitness programme (REFIT), which aims to ensure that existing EU regulation is fit for purpose. To ensure the best practical results on the deactivation of firearms, the

Commission will regularly review and update the technical specifications laid down in this Regulation.

In addition to the adoption of these stricter rules and standards, the Commission also announced today that it is developing an action plan against the illegal trafficking of weapons and explosives. Issues to be tackled in this future action plan will include the illegal purchase of weapons on the black market; the control of illegal weapons and explosives in the internal market (especially from the Balkan countries or ex-war zones), and the fight against organised crime.

While arms trafficking is mainly a national competence, given the clear cross-border dimension there is a need for stronger police and intelligence service coordination and stronger import checks. The Commission will propose actions to support Member States' activities, building on the Action Plan on illicit trafficking in firearms between the EU and the Western Balkans. The EU-Western Balkans summit of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs on December 7 will be a further opportunity to take stock of progress on the Action Plan.

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