

# VREDESACTIE

Press file November 2018

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND LACK OF TRANSPARENCY MARK EU DEFENCE POLICY

### Vredesactie files complaint with European Ombudsman for overrepresenting weapons industry

“Europe has to toughen up”. With that phrase, the president of the European Commission Juncker fired the starting gun for an unprecedented militarisation of the European project. The European Defence Fund, a 13-billion-euro military research fund, is the result of that. Research shows that the arms industry is overrepresented in the decision making of the fund, and that a total lack of transparency characterises its implementation. In the run-up to the annual conference of the European Defence Agency, Vredesactie files a complaint with the European Ombudsman.

On November 29th, the weapons industry and the European policy makers gather at the annual conference of the European Defence Agency (EDA) “*From Unmanned to Autonomous Systems*”. As in previous years, actions are announced. For activists, the conference has become the symbol of entanglement of policy and industry. Hundreds of arms industry representatives were invited, [Airbus alone received 22 invitations](#), meanwhile representatives of civil society are not welcome.

The absence of civil society or academic voices is the more remarkable, given the controversy surrounding the subject this year: autonomous weapon systems. In response to Vredesacties' inquiries, the European Defence Agency stated:

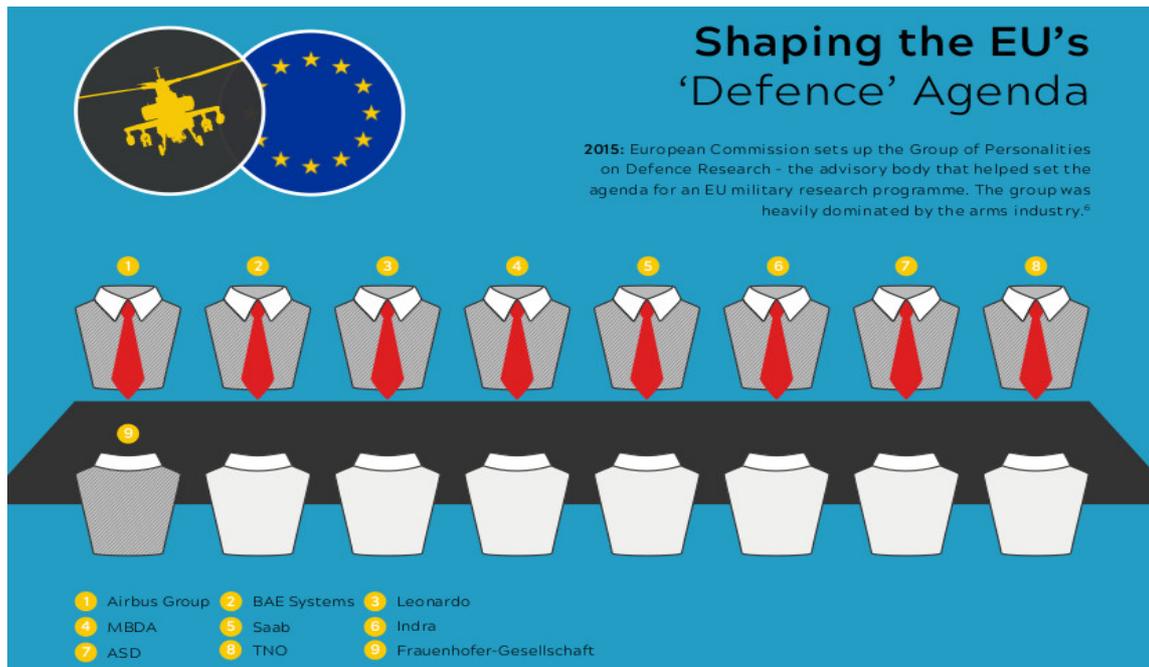
*“Political, legal or ethical considerations - while acknowledging their importance – will not be addressed at this conference [...] Against this backdrop, and taking into account other more logistical constraints, we decided not to specifically invite representatives of the civil society to this particular conference.”*

The weapons industry’s influence on the European institutions goes beyond the European Defence Agency. Last year already, Vredesactie mapped out how the links between the EU and the arms industry have tightened throughout the past 20 years, in [its report 'Securing Profits'](#). The European Defence fund is a present-day example of the degenerate effects of the conflict of interest, a military research fund amounting to 13 billion euro. European’s largest arms manufacturers were closely involved in establishing the fund. The very same companies appear to be the largest beneficiaries of the fund today.

### COMPLAINT AGAINST OFF-BALANCE REPRESENTATION

On November 29th, Vredesactie lodges a complaint with the European Ombudsman for the lack of balanced representation and bias of the *Group of Personalities* (GoP), and the lack of representation of the civil society.

In 2015, Industry Commissioner Bienkowska set up an advisory group addressing a future EU military research program, the so-called *Group of Personalities*. The GoP was intended to provide [strategic input on the European security and defence policy](#), however it also provided detailed advice with respect to the form, content and budget of the European Defence fund.



The composition of the *Group of Personalities* is remarkable. Of its 16 members, 7 represented the weapons industry. Two other members represented private research institutes performing military research. The civil society or the academic world was not represented.

In 2018, decisions were made regarding the first [five projects](#) in the pilot program named *Preparatory Action on Defence Research*. The companies advising the European Commission in 2015-2016 turn out to be the biggest beneficiaries of the funds. Six members of the *Group of Personalities* participate in three out of five projects. This feeds the perception of conflicting interests.

Especially the [Ocean2020 project](#) stands out, a project reserving 35 million euro for the development of surveillance drones and autonomous submarines. Six of the participating companies were also represented in the *Group of Personalities*.

The dominance of the weapons industry in the *Group of Personalities* results in unbalanced policy. The European Commission should safeguard the common interest, not the economic interests of one single sector. And certainly not a controversial sector making human suffering a profitable economic activity. The lack of a balanced decision-making process is not only problematic on itself, it's a sign of misgovernment.

	Ocean 2020	ACAMSII	GOSSRA
Leonardo (previously Finmeccanica)	X		X
Indra	X		X
BAE Systems			
Airbus			
MBDA	X		
Saab	X		X
Liebherr-Aerospace Lindenberg			
TNO	X	X	X
Fraunhofer Gesellschaft	X	X	

Companies represented in the GoP and their involvement in EU military researche

## LACK OF TRANSPARENCY OBSTRUCTS DEMOCRATIC REVIEW

A second problem with the *Group of Personalities* is the lack of transparency. In a preceding statement, the European Ombudsman fiercely criticised the European Commission. Meeting minutes are not available, it's

unclear how members were selected or who contributed to the meetings. [After a complaint of the European Network Against Arms Trade \(ENAAT\), the Ombudsman decided that:](#)

*“in the case of the Group of Personalities, the Commission should now publish its meeting agendas and minutes as well as its participants’ submissions.”*

The Ombudsman explicitly referred to the overrepresentation of the weapons industry in the *Group of Personalities*:

*“Transparency in this regard should have been especially important in the case of the Group of Personalities given that companies represented within the group could be eligible for funding under the programmes that it was advising on. In fact, it is the case that companies represented within the group did subsequently receive such funding.”*

In spite of the recommendations of the Ombudsman, the European Commission refuses to publish this information.

The problem of transparency stretches beyond the *Group of Personalities*, however. Expert groups, instantiated by the Commission later on, suffer the same problem. In spite of the Unions own transparency rules, [minutes are not published](#), advisory groups [operate in secret](#) or [not at all](#). The communication of the European Commission in response to several requests to freedom of information leave much to be desired. Worse even, the Commission [rides roughshod over the freedom of information by systematically exceeding the statutory period for months](#).

The combination of these incidents casts a large shadow over the transparency of an entire policy area. It is only as a result of persistent pressure exerted by media, the European Ombudsman, the [European Parliament](#) and by [freedom of information requests](#) by civil society, that the Commission releases information.

Chances are this lack of transparency will be institutionalised from 2021 onwards. The proposal of the European Commission for the European Defence fund proposes to [retain the identity of the experts involved secret, deviating from the normal transparency rules](#).

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The entanglement of the weapons industry with the European Defence policy undermines a democratically legitimate policy. It raises the impression that the European Defence policy does not serve the interest of the public, but that of the weapons industry. The manifest lack of transparency impedes democratic checks of that policy.

For the first time in its history, the European Union is on the verge of investing at a large scale in defence. The technology that will be developed by means of these funds, are likely to be controversial. The demand of the European Parliament to exclude killer robots of the European funds, was blocked by the member states. Monitoring the EU defence programs by the civil society and the European Parliament are of great importance.

Vredesactie demands:

- A firewall between politicians and the weapons industry: The interests of the weapons industry are no peace and stability, but profit and growth. The weapons industry and politicians must be completely separated. The World Health Organisation of the United Nations states that the interests of the tobacco lobby and those of the public and public health are fundamentally different. Likewise, this holds for the weapons industry and our foreign and security policy.

- Vredesactie calls out to the European Commission to follow the recommendations of the European Ombudsman, and to immediately publish the agendas and meeting minutes of the *Group of Personalities*. Furthermore, the European Commission must guarantee the compliance of future advisory groups to the European transparency rules.