

EU urged to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia in wake of Khashoggi murder

Written by Martin Banks on 24 October 2018 in News
News

The European Union is under increasing pressure to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia after the brutal murder of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi.



Photo credit: Press Association

German socialist MEP Udo Bullmann has called for a suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia in the wake of the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Speaking at a news briefing in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Tuesday, Bullman described Khashoggi's death as "shocking" and demanded a "full investigation."

The leader of parliament's second biggest group also called for a suspension of arms sales to the

Kingdom by all EU member states including the UK which, after the US, is the world's second biggest arms seller to the Saudis.

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"I do not see the need, currently, for any arms or military exports to the Saudis, certainly not when set against the backdrop of recent events," Bullmann told reporters.

He also said the case highlighted the need for "Europeans to stand together on a common position" in their relations with the Saudi regime.

"It is high time the Europeans realised that, in a critical situation like this, that it is not up to just one member state to react. This is a scandal and it is up to the EU to have a joint position. This is the only language they - the Saudis - will understand."

"You only have to see who sells most arms to them - the UK, France and Germany - to see who stands to lose most [from an arms embargo]. The only solution is for the EU to adopt a joint position in order to help in the fight for democracy and freedom."

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Saudi Arabia admitted on Saturday that Khashoggi had died inside its diplomatic mission in Istanbul, having previously insisted he had left the consulate alive. His death, Saudi Arabia said, was the result of an argument and fight with other men at the consulate.

However, on Tuesday, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, rubbished these claims, and instead maintained that Khashoggi's "savage" murder was premeditated and carried out by a hit squad.

In a speech in the Turkish parliament, Erdogan said he was not satisfied with Riyadh's suggestion that the killing was a rogue extradition operation gone wrong, and called for the "highest ranked" of those responsible to be brought to justice.

EU VOICES MOUNT IN CONDEMNATION

The EU was at first accused of reacting slowly to the Khashoggi murder and there are now increasing calls for a suspension in arms sales to the Saudis.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that Berlin will not export arms to Riyadh "in the current situation," despite Germany's approval last month of €416m worth of arms exports in 2018.

On Sunday she said, "We received the confirmation of the violent death of Jamal Khashoggi with great shock," and in a joint statement with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Merkel added, "We condemn this act in the strongest terms."

EU High Representative Federica Mogherini has called for a "thorough, credible and transparent investigation."

"After almost three weeks, facts are finally emerging, confirming that Khashoggi was killed in the premises of the Saudi Consulate on 2 October. The EU pays tribute to the memory of this respected journalist who was in direct contact for his work with many European institutions and organisations. We reaffirm our commitment to the freedom of the press and the protection of journalists across the world," Mogherini said in a statement.

"The emerging circumstances of Khashoggi's death are deeply troubling, including the shocking violation of the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and particularly its Article 55. The EU, like its partners, insists on the need for continued thorough, credible and transparent investigation, shedding proper clarity on the circumstances of the killing and ensuring full accountability of all those responsible for it. The memory of Khashoggi, the family of the journalist, as well as his friends deserve justice," she added.

Several member states have already cut or confirmed prior cessation of arms sales to the country, but an EU-wide ban would severely hit the lucrative arms trade to the Saudis for some member states, particularly those whose trade links with the country are deep-seated, such as the UK.

CRACK DOWN ON SAUDI ARMS DEALS

Last month, however, Spain broke ranks and became the latest country to halt an arms deal with Saudi Arabia when its government cancelled a contract to sell 400 laser-guided bombs to Riyadh. A down-payment of €9.2m was returned to the Saudi government. Spain sold \$352m worth of weaponry to Riyadh between 2014 and 2017.

Germany, Norway, and the Walloon region of Belgium have already taken similar action.

In 2016, Germany authorised licenses for the export of "war weapons" valued at €21m to Saudi Arabia. "Military equipment" licenses, which are broader than just weapons, were valued at €530m.

In January, however, Germany said it would no longer sell arms to parties fighting in Yemen. Some German arms manufacturers, such as gun-maker Heckler and Koch, have reportedly since found it difficult to secure export permits for sales to the Middle East.

Norway already had a pre-existing ban on export of arms and ammunition to Saudi Arabia while, also in January, Belgium's Walloon region stopped granting licenses to export weapons to the Saudi Ministry of Defence.

The French-speaking region, which has the authority to make independent decisions on arms licenses, is home to firearms manufacturer FN Herstal SA, and Saudi Arabia has previously accounted for a large share of Walloon arms sales. The Flemish government has also blocked some arms exports to

Saudi Arabia although it has stopped short of imposing a blanket ban.

Belgium, Germany, and Norway have signed up to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), which includes provisions against selling weapons "where they can be expected to be used to commit abuses."

This, so far, does not appear to have materially altered the arms sales plans of the UK, France and the United States, whose governments have shown little interest in curbing their lucrative deals with Gulf countries.

On Tuesday, parliament president Antonio Tajani called for an international inquiry into the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

“This Parliament will always be at the forefront of defending the freedom of the press and journalists”, Tajani said, calling for a rigorous, international inquiry to clarify the circumstances of the murder.

“Parliament demands that the Saudi Arabian authorities find and punish the perpetrators of this heinous crime,” he told MEPs.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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