

Vicky Ford MEP's report closes firearms loophole exposed by Paris terror attacks

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New firearms legislation which imposes restrictions on the type of guns used in the Paris terrorist attacks has today been steered through the European Parliament by East Anglia MEP Vicky Ford.

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Revisions to the EU's Firearms Directive mean that guns converted to fire blanks will in future be licensed under the same rules as the original live firing version. Currently these are able to be sold freely in certain European countries despite the fact that some versions are easily converted to use with live ammunition.

Other measures tighten the rules on the ownership of semi-automatic weapons fitted with high capacity magazines, require national authorities to keep details needed to trace firearms and improve information sharing between Member States.

Speaking after her report was approved by MEPs by 491 votes to 178, Mrs Ford said: "The attacks on the Charlie Hebdo headquarters and at the Bataclan theatre in Paris exposed a dangerous loophole which allowed poorly deactivated firearms, known as salute and acoustic weapons, to be freely available. A number of similar items were amongst a cache of over 30 illegal firearms found by British police on a boat in a Kent marina in August 2015. Following today's vote, this loophole will be closed.

The European Parliament has spent 18 months scrutinising the issue and Mrs Ford met organisations from the UK and across the EU, including the Countryside Alliance, British Sports Shooting Council, British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Royal Armouries, the European Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation and the Nordic Hunters' Alliance. The Imperial War Museum in Duxford also hosted a meeting for Mrs Ford to meet representatives from British museums and collectors. Mrs Ford's report makes sure that museums will be able to continue to hold category A firearms with strict safety and storage requirements, as is already the case in the UK.

She said: "It has been a long and difficult process to reach a compromise which protects the public by making it more difficult for terrorists and criminals to get hold of higher capacity firearms while also safeguarding the interests of lawful sports shooters, collectors, re-enactors and other groups.

"It was not helped by the European Commission's original proposals which were very poorly drafted, contained many technical errors and would have had many disproportionate restrictions on legal owners. However, I believe we have now achieved a sensible balance."

Under the new rules, Member States will be able to authorise target shooters to possess and use higher capacity semi-automatic firearms which are otherwise restricted provided they are training for, or taking part in, competitions. The changes have been drawn up in collaboration with sport shooting organisations, including the International Practical Shooting Confederation.

Exemptions are also made for military and civil defence personnel, especially in countries such as Finland, where reservists traditionally own their firearms and keep them at home.

Museums, military re-enactors and even film companies, whose ability to possess firearms would have been compromised by the Commission's proposals, are now catered for, subject to safeguards. Historically important firearms will not be covered by new marking requirements, nor will the rules apply to antiques.

The legislation now goes to the Council for formal approval, after which Member States will have 15 months to incorporate the new rules into national law.

Mrs Ford is the UK Conservative MEP for the East of England and Chair of the European Parliament's Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee.

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Note for Editors Background on the revised Firearms Directive can be found here:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20170126BKG59909/revision-of-the-eu-firearms-directive-an-overview>