



Union Française des amateurs d'Armes

BP 55122
31504 TOULOUSE Cedex 5
09 84 07 33 64

French national report

2023 FESAC meeting

Dispossession, mobilization, and European appeal

Following the transposition into national laws of the 2017 European directive on firearms, automatic firearms converted into semi-automatic, manual repeating, or single-shot firearms have been classified into category A, in France. As allowed by the directive, owners of these firearms who acquired them before 2018 were able to keep and use them, as well as purchase ammunition. But they could no longer sell them or acquire new ones.

In 2021, following a tragic incident, a decree reversed the decision regarding firearms converted into semi-automatic mode: owners had up until October 31, 2022, to dispose of their firearms or have them deactivated, without any financial compensation. Last year, UFA filed a lawsuit with the Council of State against this decree; it is the highest French administrative jurisdiction.

Unfortunately, all appeals on the matter have been rejected. Owners must therefore get rid of their legally purchased firearms or have them deactivated at their own expense. This unprecedented dispossession in France, since 1939, has created a strong mobilization among firearms enthusiasts who have asked us to go further on and try to prevent this from happening again for other types of firearms.

In April 2023, after consulting our lawyers and experts on the subject, we launched a crowdfunding campaign to file two European appeals:

- The first one with the European Court of Human Rights: it is a continuation of our lawsuit with the Council of State. We contest the decision of the highest French administrative jurisdiction.
- The second one with the Court of Justice of the European Union: this appeal is broader because it is not an appeal of a decision, so it is not limited to the very arguments presented in our lawsuit.

We set the crowdfunding goal at €25,000 to be raised over a two-month period. But in just two weeks, we raised more than €31,000, so we decided to close the campaign.

Both appeals have been filed. We are now waiting for the outcomes of this unprecedented operation in France, which has strongly mobilized firearms enthusiasts among the country and has led many of them to subscribe to our association.

National firearms surrender operation

In December 2022, for the first time, France organized a large firearms surrender operation: 300 collection points were set up throughout the country. A very effective communication campaign from the government promoted this operation.



Union Française des amateurs d'Armes

BP 55122
31504 TOULOUSE Cedex 5
09 84 07 33 64

It was possible to surrender a firearm for destruction, whether it had been legally held or not, without facing any legal actions. It was also possible to register and legalize illegally owned firearms by creating an "inherited or found firearms" account on the recently deployed firearms registration system: the SIA.

In practice, despite the government communication on both options - surrender and regularization - national media only reported on the surrender option and heavily emphasized the fact that illegal possession of firearms is strongly punished by the law. Many people were therefore afraid, unaware of the possibility of regularization, and uninformed about the different firearms categories, particularly the fact that some firearms are not to be registered, such as antique.

150,000 arms were abandoned and 50,000 were officially registered. Among the abandoned arms, 10,000 were not firearms (knives, swords, etc.) and 80% were old smooth bore shotguns that could have been regularized as they do not even require registration in France if acquired before December 2011. Only 1% of these firearms were truly of interest from a collector's point of view.

These 150,000 arms were intended to be destroyed. In an attempt to save the models worthy of interest, we tried to provoke a reaction by contacting various ministries, including the Ministry of Culture, as well as different political and parliamentary figures.

Our complaints were heard and the government eventually dispatched experts to sort the collected firearms across the country. The firearms of interest saved from destruction will soon be presented to us: they should be given first to police or army collections and then to museums who file a request. Museums will only be able to solicit firearms that are consistent with the historical period they present and in reasonable quantities compared to their current collection.

The French government presents this operation as a success, with 200,000 firearms being taken out of illegal possession. On our side, we deplore the disastrous and anxiety-provoking communication of national media on the subject, as many people surrendered arms that could have been regularized and sold to sport shooters, hunters, or collectors. Furthermore, many arms that were already legally owned were abandoned out of fear and lack of knowledge.

The ministry initially intended to repeat this operation yearly, but eventually abandoned the idea in favor of reforming the process of firearms disposal in France. They chose to involve gunsmiths and allow them to dispose of firearms anytime. The firearms worthy of interest will be saved from destruction. Previously, the disposal had to be done through the police, and the firearms were systematically destroyed. This new system will soon be tested in a few Departments of France before being more widely deployed, if conclusive. Firearms that come from judicial or administrative seizures will follow the same path and should also be saved. We are happy to have contributed to changing the regulations for the respect of the historical heritage, that is very important to us.

Deployment of the firearms information system

In 2022, the French government deployed the brand-new firearms information system (SIA). All firearm owners will be required to create an account and keep their "digital gun rack" up to date in order to continue having the right to possess firearms.

For now, only hunters have access to the SIA. As of April 2023, around 500,000 hunters have already created their accounts (out of the 1.5 million active hunters in France). The SIA is expected to open for



Union Française des amateurs d'Armes

BP 55122
31504 TOULOUSE Cedex 5
09 84 07 33 64

sport shooters very soon, simplifying some procedures, particularly for the acquisition of category B firearms.

For hunters, it is now mandatory to open an account if they want to buy or sell firearms. By the end of December 2023, it will be mandatory to have an account in order to maintain the right to possess firearms.

The deployment for all gun owners (sport shooters, hunters, collectors, as well as for Police and professionals) was originally scheduled earlier, but unforeseen events, bugs, special cases, and difficulties in getting the elderly population to open an account have led to various delays and postponements. Currently, it is planned that the entire system will be fully operational by the end of 2024.

After a difficult start, we are beginning to see the simplifications that the SIA brings, particularly for firearm purchases where the gunsmith can access key data from the buyer's account to know if this person is authorized to possess firearms.

In order to populate the virtual gun racks of firearms owners, the Ministry has created a large database listing all firearms models used in France. It aims to be exhaustive. According to us it's overdone, because it not only contains all the variants and flavors of the same firearm, but also all its customizations (re-reamed chambers to circumvent the 1939 French law). Thus, some firearm models have over 30 different references, according to the exact length of their barrel, caliber, type of stock, etc. Some of these characteristics have no impact on the category of the firearm and their presence greatly overload the database. However, with so many details, it could perhaps be shared among European countries and adapted to local regulations. Currently, the file contains more than 54,000 records and an Excel export sheet is freely available from the French government website.

Increased controls and tracking

Since the deployment of the SIA, the number of people registered in the national file of people prohibited from possessing firearms has skyrocketed. They were 30,000 in 2019, and they will be more than 150,000 at the end of 2023. This is mainly due to the reinforcement of background checks, but also to the extension of reasons for being included in the file: there are currently more than 50 reasons that automatically lead to a registration in the database. In addition, prefects can sign in people if they suspect a dangerous situation could occur. Sometimes, old misdemeanors that no longer appear on the criminal record, or the fact that a spouse is registered, or even complaints that are classified without further legal action, can be enough to be denied from owning any sort of firearm.

Black powder ammunition and gun shows

Ammunition for antique firearms loaded with black powder was previously unregulated in France. Following our request to declare some collectible firearms as antiques, the government does not want to have both firearms and ammunition freely available for sale. Thus, original black powder ammunition will remain unregulated, but newly manufactured ammunition will be classified as Category B or C and will require a shooting or hunting license to purchase ammunition and their components.



Union Française des amateurs d'Armes

BP 55122
31504 TOULOUSE Cedex 5
09 84 07 33 64

In addition to the declassification of some antique or collectible firearms, the government wants to require a specific training for the sale of firearms at gun shows. It would be a streamlined version of the training for professional gunsmiths and would aim to teach how to properly sort firearms among the 4 categories (A, B, C and D). Focus is on properly identifying antique firearms. This decision appears to be a consequence of the 2017 European directive stating that firearms dealers and brokers must prove their integrity and competence. However, the same directive states that antique firearms are not covered by its scope!

French collector card

In 2022, the incompatibility of the French collector card with the sport shooting or hunting license was removed. However, the card still only allows the acquisition of category C firearms, so it is not very attractive, especially for someone who already owns a shooting or hunting license. We have been requesting for years the possibility for collectors to acquire categories A and B firearms, which could have been an honorable way out for transformed military weapons instead of being destroyed and depriving their owners. For now, we have not been satisfied with this issue, but you know we never give up!

Currently, the French collector card does not allow the collection of ammunition, which is a problem because an "ammunition collector card" is often required in other countries. In addition, France does not recognize the deactivation of ammunition over 20 mm in caliber. Thus, the collection of large caliber shells or casings is very problematic, except for what is considered as "trench art" (such as engraved or ornamented shells). UFA will work on the subject to request an evolution on these points from the government.

Renewal of the UFA board

The executive committee and the board of UFA was completely renewed at the end of 2022. Jean-Jacques Buigné, founder of the association, choose to step down from the presidency and administration, but he remains present and motivated to work on core topics about firearms. He brilliantly organized things so that the new team could take over and continue to develop the association.

Jean-Pierre Bastié was elected as the new president of UFA. He is the founder of the Académie des armes anciennes (the French antique arms association), expert at Toulouse court and also author of more than 20 books on portable weaponry. He has been very active with UFA for several years already and is working even harder to involve the association in any event related to firearms.

The UFA has a bustling activity, and we meet very regularly on virtual meetings:

- The executive committee meets weekly.
- The board meets every two months.
- The UFA delegates (over 150 people) meet every two months.

We have greatly strengthened our presence on social networks, in the national media, but also in such new grounds for us as shooting ranges and gun shows. The recent events and mobilization of sport shooters have boosted our number of members. We were 2,500 in 2022, and we will approach 4,000 memberships in 2023.



Union Française des amateurs d'Armes

BP 55122
31504 TOULOUSE Cedex 5
09 84 07 33 64

This year, Michael Magi, vice-president of UFA, and Thierry de Villeneuve, deputy treasurer, will attend the FESAC meeting to represent UFA and France. Jean-Pierre Bastié and Jean-Jacques Buigné will attend the general assembly of the French firearms and ammunition experts' association.

UFA's requests to FESAC

Legal firearm owners throughout Europe are at the mercy of any incident that politicians can blame on them. Governments will also justify new restrictions by explaining that it is not their fault, but it is required by the European directive! This is exactly what happened in France with transformed military firearms. Other types of firearms are also at risk.

Therefore, as with last year, UFA wishes to stress the urgency of taking actions at the European level to protect our common passion. The implementation of this directive has already had disastrous consequences for firearms enthusiasts, and the next revision could be catastrophic if nothing is done to prevent it. UFA is ready to help, including financially, to act on this matter. We had already presented a modification proposal of the directive and suggested hiring a lobbyist. We want to make progress on this topic, and we really want FESAC to work with various European governments and institutions to promote and defend legal firearm owners.

References

- French 2022 annual report, which contains our modification proposal on the directive:
https://www.armes-ufa.com/IMG/pdf/2022_fesac_annual_meeting_en.pdf
- Exports of the French general firearms registry:
<https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/referentiel-general-des-armes/>

Jean-Pierre Bastié
President of UFA

Michael Magi
Vice-president of UFA