

DECISION n°171 of the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Railways on the opt-out from Commission Decision C(2017) 6760 – employment of contract staff employed by the Commission under the terms of Articles 3a and 3b of CEOS

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News story: Royal Navy and Royal Marines join major French deployment

Around 40 Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel and two Wildcat helicopters have joined the French naval task force, Jeanne D'Arc, for a five-month mission. The ship's port calls will include Jakarta, Bali, Darwin, Saigon and Singapore. British personnel will take part in amphibious exercises and Defence Engagement. This builds on the UK's very successful participation in last year's Jeanne D'Arc mission.

The UK's contribution to France's annual Jeanne D'Arc naval deployment demonstrates a shared commitment from both countries to enhance their maritime cooperation in home waters and around the world, in support of global security and prosperity and protection of freedom of navigation. This priority was agreed at the UK-France Summit in January 2018.

The deployment is part of the UK's wide-ranging programme of bilateral defence cooperation with French forces, which includes the development of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, a rapidly deployable joint UK-French force that can respond to crises.

British and French forces also operate together as members of NATO, with

France agreeing to contribute troops to the UK-led enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup in Estonia in 2019.

Remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at the Roundtable on Cryptocurrencies

Good afternoon,

I would like to debrief you on a roundtable discussion with key authorities, industry representatives and experts who shared their insights and views on cryptocurrencies.

The aim of this roundtable was first and foremost to feed into our upcoming Action Plan on FinTech, and the EU's position for a possible discussion at G20 level. As you know, there is already a joint Franco – German letter on this point.

Crypto-asset markets are global, with worldwide transactions between investors, consumers and intermediaries.

On its own, Europe represents only a small share of global cryptocurrency trading, so we need to work together with our partners in the G20 and international standard-setters.

Today's roundtable focused on three main topics:

- the implications of crypto-currencies for financial markets,
- the risks and the opportunities associated with their use,
- and the recent development of Initial Coin Offerings.

We concluded that:

First, the blockchain technology holds strong promise for financial markets. To remain competitive, Europe must embrace this innovation.

Second, crypto-currencies, which are not currencies in the traditional sense, and whose value is not guaranteed, have become subject of considerable speculation.

This exposes consumers and investors to substantial risk including the risk to lose their investment.

This is why our third conclusion is that warnings about these risks to consumers and investors are important: these must be clear, frequent, and across all jurisdictions.

Fourth, Initial Coin Offerings have become a way for innovative firms in this field to raise substantial amounts of funding.

This is an opportunity, but there are also problems that expose investors to substantial risk, such as the lack of transparency regarding the identity of the issuers and underlying business plans.

Fifth, we need to assess further under what circumstances crypto-currencies and related services are covered by existing regulation.

This depends very much on the facts and circumstances around specific crypto-tokens.

Based on the assessment of risks and opportunities and the suitability of the existing regulatory framework for these instruments, the Commission will determine if regulatory action at EU level is required.

Finally, crypto-assets present risks relating to money laundering and the financing of illicit activities.

That is why the Commission proposed that virtual currency exchanges and wallet providers should be subject to the Anti-Money Laundering Directive.

The co-legislators reached an agreement in December, and we invite Member States to prepare for a speedy transposition of this legislation.

To sum up, the Commission will continue to monitor these markets together with other stakeholders, at EU and international level, including in the G20.

We stand ready to take action based on an assessment of risks and opportunities.

Following upcoming international discussions, we will decide on how to follow up today's roundtable.

Thank you.

[Syria: EU adds two new ministers to sanctions list](#)

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On 26 February 2018, the Council added the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Information of the government of Syria to the list of those targeted by EU restrictive measures against the Syrian regime in view of the gravity of the situation in the country. These additions were made to take into account recent ministerial changes, as both ministers were appointed in January 2018.

Today's decision brings to **257 persons** the total number of persons targeted by a travel ban and an assets freeze for being responsible for the violent repression against the civilian population in Syria, benefiting from or supporting the regime, and/or being associated with such persons.

In addition, **67 entities** are targeted by an assets freeze. More broadly, sanctions currently in place against Syria include an oil embargo, restrictions on certain investments, a freeze of the assets of the Syrian central bank held in the EU, export restrictions on equipment and technology that might be used for internal repression as well as on equipment and technology for the monitoring or interception of internet or telephone communications. These measures were last extended on 29 May 2017 and are in place until 1 June 2018.

The EU remains committed to finding a **lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria** under the existing UN-agreed framework. As stated in the EU strategy on Syria adopted in April 2017, the EU believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict and strongly supports the work of the UN Special Envoy and the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva.

The legal acts adopted by the Council, including the names of the persons concerned, are published in the Official Journal of 26 February 2018.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

[Delivering on commitments: new programmes to protect migrants and support return and reintegration in Africa worth €150 million adopted](#)

The new programmes complement ongoing efforts of the European Union to protect migrants and provide them with sustainable reintegration options in

Libya, along the Central Mediterranean Route and in Ethiopia.

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, said: *“The EU stands by the many African migrants and refugees in need. With these new measures worth over €150 million we continue to save and protect lives and tackle the root causes of migration. Because we also want to support people in improving their lives in their home countries and look into the future with hope. The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa allows us to swiftly address the needs of people in despair, and together with our partners, we focus on protecting and supporting return and reintegration of especially vulnerable migrants and refugees.”*

Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn**, affirmed: *“With today’s new programmes we are delivering on the commitments made in the framework of the joint [EU-AU-UN Task Force](#) and increase our already significant on-going support to those in need in Libya. We are actively working to save lives, protect people, as well as offering humane alternatives for people to leave the country and return back home. Equally important, we are working on new measures to support Libyan municipalities enhance the delivery of basic social services and improve local governance for both local and migrant population”.*

As announced by High Representative/ Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the [Joint Task Force meeting last December](#), an additional €115 million have been made available to support migrants in Libya. This programme will be implemented together with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It complements an already existing measure worth €162 million. This new regional programme aims at protecting and evacuating additional 3 800 refugees from Libya, as well as providing protection and voluntary humanitarian return to 15 000 migrants stranded in Libya and support them with reintegration assistance in their countries of origin, as committed by the EU in the framework of the Joint Taskforce. It will also support the resettlement of more than 14 000 people in need of international protection from Niger, Chad, Cameroun and Burkina Faso.

Another measure worth €20 million will be dedicated to improve the assistance provided to vulnerable migrants, particularly young people and women, in transit countries in the Sahel region and the Lake Chad Basin. It will improve access to social and protection services, such as access to health care, education, security, housing, civil status, legal support or psychosocial assistance.

Through an action worth €15 million, the EU will expand its support to sustainable reintegration for Ethiopian citizens. They will benefit from social and psychosocial assistance at individual and community levels, as well as economic support such as business skills training or access to microcredits. The programme will in addition train relevant regional and local government organisations involved in the reintegration process to better support and empower returnees. This initiative complements the work done under the already existing [Facility on Sustainable and Dignified Return and Reintegration](#).

Background

The [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#) was established in 2015 in order to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

The Joint Initiative on migrant protection and reintegration by the EU and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) launched already more than a year ago (December 2016) has already provided significant results, by enabling, in particular:

- the rescue of more than 3 600 migrants in the desert;
- the voluntary return of more than 15 800 migrants to their countries of origin;
- the post-arrival assistance and reintegration to more than 23500 migrants returned by the EU-IOM Initiative or with the support of other donors.

The Joint Task Force was set up with the African Union and United Nations on 29 November 2017, committed to accelerate ongoing efforts to assist migrants and refugees in Libya and advance the programme of the International Organisation for Migration for assisted voluntary returns from Libya to countries of origin and the emergency transit mechanism of the UNHCR, to evacuate people in need of international protection.

For more information

[EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#)

[Factsheet: EU Trust Fund for Africa – North Africa Window: Improving migration management in the North of Africa region](#)

[Factsheet: EU Trust Fund for Africa – Support to Libya](#)

[EU – IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration: one year on](#)

[High Level Mission of the Joint AU – EU – UN Taskforce to Tripoli, 23 February 2017.](#)

[Joint Press Release – Meeting of the Joint AU – EU – UN Taskforce to Address the Migrant Situation in Libya, 14 December 2017.](#)