

Joint Communication for a renewed impetus of the Africa-EU Partnership

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This Communication proposes a revitalised framework for joint action that the EU and its Member States could bring to the Summit and that could be reflected in a Road Map for 2018-2020. It envisages a stronger, deeper and more action-oriented strategic partnership for more prosperity and stability in the two continents. It sets out policy priorities and an initial set of concrete initiatives for 2018-2020 and beyond, to be coordinated and strengthened with EU Member States and further developed jointly with African partners, in response to Africa's own Agenda 2063 and building on the Global strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. It pays particular attention to the aspirations and needs of youth, whose involvement in the overall process will be strongly encouraged.

It contributes to the ongoing reflection, launched through the Joint Communication on A renewed partnership with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, which will inform the negotiations that will start in 2018, in view of renewing the EU's longstanding partnership with African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, in particular the Africa pillar.

It is guided by international frameworks, such as the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on financing for development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. It is consistent with other relevant EU policies.

Communication conjointe: un nouvel élan pour le partenariat Afrique-UE

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Press release – MEPs vote to lower VAT on e-books, aligning them with printed books – Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs

EU citizens could pay less for e-books after plans to allow member states to reduce VAT on e-publications were backed in committee on Wednesday.

An EU Commission proposal to enable member states to charge a reduced rate of VAT on e-books, which would bring them into line with VAT levied on printed matter, was backed by the 48 votes to 1 with 2 abstentions in the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee.

"Our way of reading has changed rapidly over recent years. Now, it makes no sense to apply a double standard whereby an online newspaper is taxed higher than a printed one you buy in a shop. This new directive will give Member States the option to align VAT on digital content with printed matter," said the rapporteur Tom Vandenkendelaere (EPP, BE).

Currently, e-books have to be taxed at an EU minimum standard rate of 15%, whereas member states are free to charge the reduced rate of at least 5% – and in some cases, even zero-rates – on printed publications.

Music and videos, as well as publications predominantly consisting of music and video content, would continue to be taxed at the standard VAT rate.

Next steps

The proposal will now be voted by Parliament as a whole on May 31st or April 1st.

Press release – Committees again reject blacklist of states at risk of money laundering – Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs – Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

- EU needs own process, separate from FATF, to identify possible high-risk countries
- Current list excludes countries suspected of tax crimes

The EU should have an autonomous process for judging whether countries are at high-risk of money laundering, say committee MEPs after rejecting for a second time, by 61 votes to 7 with 32 abstentions, a blacklist of countries drawn up by the EU Commission.

The Commission is responsible for producing, under the EU's Anti-Money Laundering Directive, an inventory of countries thought to be at risk of money laundering, tax evasion and terrorism financing. People and legal entities from blacklisted countries face tougher than usual checks when doing business in the EU.

An earlier list, drawn up last year – a duplicate of one produced by the international body, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) – was rejected as too limited by Parliament.

In Wednesday's resolution, MEPs from the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee and the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee said "the Commission's process was not sufficiently autonomous" and that the criteria for its list excluded offences giving rise to money laundering, such as tax crimes.

MEPs say the Commission should not be bound by FATF standards when drawing up its own blacklist, which they want to be more expansive and wide-ranging. The Commission says this would require more resources than it has.

The Commission currently identifies eleven countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Syria, which it judges to be deficient in countering money laundering and terrorist financing. This second update makes a minor change to the previous list by dropping Guyana and adding Ethiopia.

Next steps

The resolution now goes to plenary. If it is supported by more than half of the constituent members of Parliament, the delegated act will be rejected.

Article – Private security firms: call for stricter rules and ban on military combat tasks

Private companies are increasingly used by European countries and the EU to provide security and military services in missions abroad. However, military tasks and the protection of civilians are heavy responsibilities and if something goes wrong it can have fatal consequences. Parliament's foreign affairs committee has drafted rules to increase the accountability of private security firms and prevent them from taking on military combat tasks. MEPs will vote on the report during the June plenary.

When 17 innocent civilians were [killed on Nisour Square](#) by the employees of private company Blackwater contracted by the US army in Baghdad on 16 September 2007, it caused outrage and raised questions on why security was being outsourced to the private sector. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident as [private contractors have been involved in wounding and killing civilians](#) in Iraq and Afghanistan on various occasions. In addition, their employees are rarely convicted.

What private security companies do

Private security firms provide services ranging from armed security guards, to maintenance and operation of weapon systems, combat support, running prisons and interrogations, intelligence and research.

They are used in the EU and outside the EU to compensate for shrinking armed forces or to avoid limitations on the use of troops. According to 2013 [figures](#), there were 40,000 private security companies in the EU employing more than 1.5 million people

Risks and challenges

Private companies have been accused of human rights violations and even causing casualties. They are also subject to less accountability and government control. Some are concerned that they might be above the law and

unaccountable for human rights violations and abuses.

What Parliament is considering

The own-initiative report by the foreign affairs and defence committees call for EU-wide rules on private security companies and say their use should be limited to logistical support and the protection of installations, while only EU-based firms should be used for protection tasks abroad.