

# INFO FLASH 09/01

In its last round of policy initiatives of 2017, the European Commission has held discussions on hate speech, visa liberalisation and integration of refugees. The European Parliament has taken initiatives on the ACP countries and published, through its research service, briefings on EU-Africa relations, development cooperation and the upcoming 2018 policy agenda.

## EU INSTITUTIONS

### European Commission

**(8/01) Removing illegal content online: Commission calls for more efforts and faster progress from all sides.** Five Commissioners will meet tomorrow in Brussels with representatives of online platforms to discuss progress made in tackling the spread of illegal content online, including online terrorist propaganda and xenophobic, racist or hate speech as well as breaches of intellectual property rights. Ansip, Commissioners Dimitris Avramopoulos, Elżbieta Bieńkowska, Věra Jourová, Julian King and Mariya Gabriel said ahead of the meeting: "Terrorist propaganda and content that incites violence and hatred online is a serious threat to security, safety and fundamental rights. It demands a collective response – from all actors, including the internet industry. In recent years, online platforms have significantly increased the resources they devote to removing violent and extremist content as soon as possible, including through automated removal. This is starting to achieve results. However, even if tens of thousands of pieces of illegal content have been taken down, there are still hundreds of thousands more out there. And removal needs to be speedy: the longer illegal material stays online, the greater its reach, the more it can spread and grow. Building on the current voluntary approach, more efforts and progress have to be made. The Commission is counting on online platforms to step up and speed up their efforts to tackle these threats quickly and comprehensively, including closer cooperation with national and enforcement authorities, increased sharing of know-how between online players and further action against the reappearance of illegal content. We will continue to promote cooperation with social media companies to detect and remove terrorist and other illegal content online, and if necessary, propose legislation to complement the existing regulatory framework." Full press release [here](#).

**(8/01) EU strategy on Iraq: new proposal to strengthen support to the Iraqi people.** Today, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission adopted a Joint Communication proposing an EU strategy for Iraq in order to address the many challenges the country faces following the territorial defeat of Da'esh. The proposal outlines both ongoing and longer term EU support to the country, fully taking into account the Iraqi government's priorities. Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission said: "Iraq is at a crossroads in its history following the territorial defeat of Da'esh at great sacrifice. It is now crucial to act quickly and rebuild the country with the participation of all the components of Iraqi society, to promote and protect fundamental rights and the rule of law in each and every area: only inclusiveness can guarantee true reconciliation so that Iraqis can close once and for all with the past. This needs international support and we are ready to contribute, to keep supporting the Iraqi people and government

in these challenges, for the sake of the people of the country and the region". Full press release [here](#).

**(21/12) Commission proposes to improve transparency and predictability of working conditions.** As part of the follow-up to the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Commission has adopted today a proposal for a [new Directive for more transparent and predictable working conditions across the EU](#). The Commission's proposal complements and modernises existing obligations to inform each worker of his or her working conditions. In addition, the proposal creates new minimum standards to ensure that all workers, including those on atypical contracts, benefit from more predictability and clarity as regards their working conditions. The Commission estimates that 2 to 3 million additional workers on atypical contracts will be covered and protected by the proposal compared to existing legislation. At the same time, the proposal also puts measures in place to avoid administrative burden on employers, for instance by giving them the possibility to provide the requested information electronically. The new rules will also create a level-playing field for companies, so that employers will benefit from fairer competition in the internal market, with fewer loopholes. More transparent and predictable working conditions are also important for a more motivated and productive workforce. Full press release [here](#).

**(20/12) Integration of refugees: Commission joins forces with social and economic partners.** Today, the European Commission and the EU Social and Economic partners will sign a 'European Partnership for Integration', laying down key principles and commitments to support and strengthen opportunities for refugees and migrants legally residing in the EU to integrate into the European labour market. Integration can only be effective if all relevant actors play their role: EU Institutions, national and local authorities, Social and Economic partners and civil society organisations. The Partnership for Integration lays down key principles for the integration of refugees into the labour market, including providing support as early as possible, ensuring that integration benefits refugees as well as the economy and society at large and ensuring a multi-stakeholder approach. Among the commitments the Social and Economic partners have undertaken is the sharing of best practices for labour market integration of refugees, for instance the organisation of mentoring programmes to integrate them into the workplace or facilitating the identification, assessment and documentation of skills and qualifications. They have also committed to promote the Partnership amongst their members, and strengthen cooperation with public authorities at all appropriate levels. The European Commission will endeavour, amongst other things, to promote synergies with EU funds, ensure synergies with other related initiatives at European level and continue to work with relevant EU bodies, groups, committees and networks as well as Social and Economic partners to support the labour market integration of refugees. Full press release [here](#).

**(20/12) Visa liberalisation: Commission reports on implementation of benchmarks for Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries.** The Commission is today reporting on the continuous fulfilment of the visa liberalisation benchmarks by the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) as well as the Eastern Partnership countries (Georgiam Moldova and Ukraine). The report shows that, whilst the visa liberalisation requirements for the countries concerned continue to be fulfilled, action is required in a number of specific areas to preserve their sustainable implementation. Today's report is the first assessment under the new monitoring mechanism for the eight countries that have concluded visa liberalisation dialogues with the EU. The assessment shows that all eight Western Balkan and Eastern

Partnership countries have demonstrated strong commitment to meeting the necessary requirements and have undertaken important efforts to implement a number of far-reaching reforms set out under the visa liberalisation process. It is now imperative that those reforms are sustained and that the countries do not backtrack on their achievements. Today's report focuses on the areas where further actions are required, in particular irregular migration and readmission, fight against corruption and money laundering as well as public order and security. Full press release [here](#).

**(20/12) EU strengthens its support to the Geneva peace process to end the conflict in Syria.** The European Union adopted the second phase of the "Syria Peace Support Initiative" under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). As the continuation of phase I, the new phase will further provide financial, technical and analytical support to the overall work to reach a negotiated political transition in Syria. It will in particular continue accompanying the mediation role of the United Nations Special Envoy in the framework of the political negotiations in Geneva. The programme will build on an earlier funded intervention launched in the wake of the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254 on 18 December 2015. The initiative has been instrumental in supporting the UN-led peace talks in Geneva, the consolidation of the Syrian opposition's negotiation platform, as well as efforts to promote an inclusive vision of transition for Syria –including through direct support to civil society networks, women and human rights organisations. Full press release [here](#).

## European Parliament

**(21/12) ACP-EU: leading sustainable economic development for local communities.** At the 34th session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), which brought together African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and European Union (EU) countries, MEPs discussed the negative and short-term effects of mass tourism with Isabelle Durant, Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD. Sustainable tourism, respectful of the needs and traditions of local communities, must be encouraged as a vehicle for potentially significant economic development in ACP countries, said MEPs. Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, ACP-EU members noted in an emergency resolution referring to the damage caused in September by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which devastated several Caribbean islands. Members adopted an emergency resolution calling on the most vulnerable states to integrate climate change adaptation strategies into their sustainable development policies and for the EU to incorporate these efforts to build the resilience of local people into its programmes and projects. Finally, the sustainable exploitation and processing of natural resources should be a source of economic and social development for the ACP and should benefit local communities, say Members. They call for action against the illegal exploitation of minerals. Full press release [here](#).

**(19/12) ACP-EU: "Promoting the resilience of populations to natural disasters".** The 34th session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) bringing together African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and European Union (EU) countries was officially opened on Monday in Port-au-Prince by Haiti's President Jovenel Moïse, accompanied by Youri Latortue, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Haiti. The co-chairs commended the Haitian authorities for their welcome in spite of the terrible hardships they had endured. During the ceremony, Ibrahim Rassin Bundu (Sierra Leone), the JPA Co-Chair for the ACP, stressed how "the Assembly and its members have been a positive force in the quest for sustainable development and poverty eradication". He reiterated the importance of the parliamentary dimension of the ACP-EU partnership to "give a democratic nature to

cooperation". "The post-Cotonou Agreement must therefore continue to have a strong parliamentary dimension", he added. Full press release [here](#).

## [European Council / Council of the EU](#)

### Others

**(5/01) Frontex - Migratory flows in 2017 - Pressure eased on Italy and Greece; Spain saw record numbers.** In 2017, the number of detections of illegal border-crossings into the European Union dropped for the second year in a row due to lower number of migrants reaching Italy and Greece. According to preliminary data, there were some 204 300 illegal border-crossings in 2017, 60% fewer than the previous year. Meanwhile, Spain saw the number of irregular migrants detected at its Western Mediterranean borders more than double to the highest level since Frontex began systematically collecting data in 2009. Full press release [here](#).

**(22/12) EASO - Press Release: Afghanistan Security Situation.** Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published a Country of Origin Information (COI) Report entitled 'Afghanistan – security situation'. The report is a third update of the version first published in February 2015<sup>1</sup> and provides a comprehensive overview of the security situation in Afghanistan, information relevant for the protection status determination of Afghan asylum seekers. In the first ten months of 2017, more than 40,000 applications have been lodged in the EU+ by Afghans, ranking third in the top countries of origin in EU+ countries<sup>2</sup>. In addition, Afghan applications constitute the largest backlog of all countries of origin. At the end of October 2017, there were more than 64,000 asylum applications from Afghan nationals in the EU+ pending at first instance. The 'Afghanistan security situation' report provides a general description of the security situation in Afghanistan, covering the following topics: a brief context of the situation; actors in the conflict; security trends and armed confrontations; description of tactics and arms used; state ability to secure law and order; impact of the violence on the civilian population; and the geographical overview of the security situation. Full press release [here](#).

**(21/12) EIB - Creating jobs and building resilience in the Mediterranean region: the European Investment Bank and Arab Bank join forces with a EUR 300 million regional facility in support of local private sector.** The European Investment Bank (EIB) and Arab Bank has signed a financing agreement of EUR 300 million to support small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and midcaps in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and the West Bank. The operation comes under the EIB's Economic Resilience Initiative (ERI), aimed at enhancing the prospects for more resilient and inclusive growth as well as creating sustainable employment opportunities in the region. This new credit line brings the overall EIB finance to private sector development in the EU Southern Neighbourhood region to EUR 1.8 billion over the last two years. Full press release [here](#).

## [COUNCIL OF EUROPE](#)

## [CIVIL SOCIETY](#)

## **PUBLICATIONS**

**Arcturus** - [T\(h\)racing the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council](#)

**EPRS** - [Ten issues to watch in 2018](#)

**EPRS** - [European Development Days 2017](#) (Briefing)

**EPRS** - [High-Level Conference: Towards A Renewed Partnership With Africa](#) (Briefing)

**OECD** – [International Forum on Migration Statistics](#) (Event)

**European Commission** - [Citizenship Education at School in Europe 2017](#)