

# LETTERS

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## Partnership in colonial times

## Youth participation is still missing

**FAR FROM HOME** A Sahrawi women and her children collect water at a refugee camp near Algiers. REUTERS



The European Union's envisioned "continent-to-continent partnership" with the African Union is indicative of a commendable shift in approach toward Africa by the European Commission ("Africa's competing influences", 16-22 September).

But how is the Commission to build up political capital with the African Union (AU) when it undermines the AU's decisions? How can the EU support the illegal occupation of one of the AU's member states and still

believe that the AU will take its voice seriously?

That member state is the Saharawi Republic – the Western Sahara, which has been occupied by Morocco for 35 years. The AU advocates the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

This is a position that is completely in line with international law. It reflects the view of the United Nations, which lists Western Sahara among the world's 'non-self-governing territories' – that is,

non-decolonised territories. This is Africa's last colonial conflict.

The EU does the opposite. Via bilateral agreements covering the territory of Western Sahara, the EU provides Morocco with millions of euros. It thereby implicitly legitimises Morocco's illegal and untenable claim to its southern neighbour. In choosing to pursue economic interests over its international legal obligations, the EU undercuts both the AU and the peace process led by the UN.

Because of the Western Sahara conflict, Morocco is the only African country that is not a member of the AU. Yet Morocco was the first country with which the EU established 'advanced status' relations.

If the EU is to raise its credibility with the AU, reviewing its stance toward Africa's last colonial conflict would be a good place to start.

**Sara Eyckmans**  
Western Sahara Resource Watch  
Brussels

## The sooner the better for a visa deal with Russia

"Visa-free travel between Russia and the EU?", your Wi(l)der Europe columnist asked and then answered: "Yes, but not yet" (9-15 September). Not yet? Why not yet?

He said it would not be 'fair' to the countries of the Eastern Partnership. 'Fair' means little in the context of nations. A massive and strategically im-

portant country (Russia) can extract better diplomatic outcomes. So what? That does not change the incentives or pay-offs for smaller countries in the Eastern Partnership.

The second set of concerns – whether Russia shares European values – is more pertinent. A visa-free travel deal ought also to abolish visa-like restrictions,

such as registration requirements or onerous entry screening. That should obviously be part of the deal.

But if you care for human rights, 'Western values', Western interests, visa-free travel is too good to be used just as a bargaining chip. By opening Europe to the Russian people, you let Russians see for themselves what they are missing.

You encourage cultural exchange, migration and business ties. That changes attitudes and expectations. Visa-free travel is vital if we want a European Russia in future. The sooner the better – strike a deal that works and get it implemented.

**Shaun Daley**  
London

The European Commission's communication on 'Youth on the Move' is timely: the economic and social crisis has hit the EU's 100 million young people particularly hard ("Commission seeks to cut youth unemployment" 9-15 September).

It is also good to see young people finally being put at the centre of the EU's agenda. The communication's clear framework for youth employment and its proposal of a "youth guarantee" – ensuring that all young people are in a job, further education or vocational training within four months of leaving school – are steps forward in tackling youth unemployment.

These, together with the development of a 'European quality framework for internships' and the provision of adequate social safety nets for young people, are crucial to improving young people's access to the labour market.

However, the communication mentions non-formal education only with specific reference to disadvantaged youth. This is not enough. Non-formal education is very important to all young people, as a means of fostering skills that the economy needs, such as creativity, team-work, problem-solving and flexibility. These are skills

that youth organisations across Europe are working to develop. It is time to recognise and promote the work they do to improve young people's social and economic integration.

The Commission's plans should also underline more clearly the long-term impact of youth exchange programmes: strengthening the Youth in Action programme in the next budget cycle would be a concrete way of doing so.

To ensure young people help the EU meet the objectives of its Europe 2020 strategy, the focus should not be put exclusively on employment targets. To achieve their potential, young people need investment whose goal goes beyond their integration into the labour market. Europe 2020 seeks to develop a strong, smart, inclusive and sustainable society. That requires the engagement of young people.

For this reason, the Commission should establish a framework in which young people can contribute to decision-making, by proposing a Green Paper on Youth Participation.

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