

OACPS Ministers express concern over the closure by Belgian Banks of bank accounts held by some OACPS Diplomatic Missions

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Brussels, 14 June 2022/OACPS: Some Diplomatic missions and members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) accredited to the Kingdom of Belgium and/or the European Union, have, since 2021, been confronted with the closure of their bank accounts by Belgian banks in Brussels, Belgium. The closure of these accounts causes enormous difficulties that affect the proper functioning of the diplomatic missions concerned and disrupts the fulfilment of their mandate as stipulated by the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

The approaches made by the OACPS to the Belgian political and monetary authorities and to the European Union (EU) have so far failed to resolve the issue. The Belgian authorities have indicated that the relationship between banks and their customers is a private matter and that they cannot intervene in the matter. However, discussions have been initiated with the Belgian Federation of the Financial Sector (Febelfin) and are ongoing with a view to finding solutions.

The information available to date, indicates that the closure of the bank accounts results from the application of European Union law on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT). Credit and financial institutions are regulated entities and are subject to strict rules that require them to take enhanced customer due diligence measures throughout their business relationships to prevent money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities. The EU, through its policy on AMC/CFT is a stakeholder in this problem and the OACPS calls on it to become more involved in finding a solution.

The Members of the OACPS are committed at the highest political level to combat illicit financing flows, including addressing the important issues of AML/CFT. It is noteworthy that the Kingdom of Belgium, as host country, has a responsibility under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to ensure the smooth functioning of Diplomatic Missions accredited to the Kingdom.

The OACPS also urges the European Council and the European Parliament to address this issue in the context of the 2021 Spring Package on AML/CFT, currently under examination, in order to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

The approaches made to the EU and the Belgian authorities are not intended to seek an exceptional treatment for the diplomatic missions affected by the application of the law. They seek, rather, to find practical solutions to enable diplomatic missions to continue to access adequate financial services and perform their functions. Furthermore, the diplomatic missions are concerned about the reputational damage arising from their inability to conduct the necessary financial transactions in a timely and transparent manner.

The Ministers of the OACPS at the 114th Session of the Council of Ministers have therefore entrusted the Committee of Ambassadors to prioritise the finding of a mutually agreeable solution for the banks and the diplomatic missions affected.

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