

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.