

# Burundi, Comoros apply for membership to SADC

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BURUNDI could join Tanzania as a member of the Southern African Development Community, a move that complicates the direction the East Africa Community takes for the remaining phases of integration.

Burundi has applied alongside the Union of Comoros for membership in the 15-country regional grouping headquartered in Gaborone, Botswana.

The applications were to be assessed first by the Inter-State Politics and Diplomacy Committee of SADC's Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Co-operation which convened in Dar es Salaam on February 24.

"This meeting has been tasked to assess the eligibility of both states to join SADC before advising our heads of state accordingly," said Tanzania's Foreign Affairs and East African Co-operation Minister Augustine Mahiga

He added that the two countries' applications would be decided by the organisation's heads of states at a later date.

Ever since President Pierre Nkurunziza pushed through his third term in office, Burundi has appeared reluctant on EAC matters, boycotting East African Legislative Assembly meetings over its differences with Rwanda and sitting out of the EAC-led Intra-Burundi Dialogue over the involvement of political rivals.

Bujumbura and Dar are also opposed to an economic partnership



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agreement between the EAC and the EU that Kenya and Rwanda have signed as Uganda tries to reconcile the positions.

SADC and EAC, however, have joined hands with Comesa in a Grand Free Trade Area launched last year.

Mr Mahiga said the expulsion by Mozambique of 200 Tanzanians and other foreigners was also to feature during the meeting.

"We have been informed some of those expelled were involved in criminal activities such as the drugs trade," said Mr Mahiga.

He dismissed claims that the Tanzanians were targeted in the crackdown but added that Tanzania will continue to investigate how its nationals were treated before being deported, amid claims that some of them were beaten up.

The crackdown was conducted in the district of Monte Puez in Cabo Delgado Province, where more than 3,000 Tanzanians live.

Ministry of Home Affairs Permanent Secretary Maj-Gen Project Rwegasira said last week the government sought to verify claims of abuse, including allegations that the passports of some deportees were seized and torn up.