

COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
Plenary session of the European Parliament
Brussels, 23 September 2008

Declarations of the Council and the Commission on acts of piracy at sea

I. INTRODUCTORY SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENCY

Mr President,

Mr Commissioner,

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the European Parliament,

On Saturday 14 September, a French tuna boat, *Le Drennec*, was pursued by pirates 420 miles off the Somali coast. This is not an isolated case as, since the beginning of July, there have been 10 ships held captive and 250 sailors taken hostage. As a result, fishing boats are unwilling to do their job and the fifty or so French and Spanish tuna boats which fish in the zone situated between the Seychelles and Somalia have decided to go to the Seychelles.

Apart from the fact that there is a recrudescence, acts of piracy no longer occur only near the coast and are tending to expand to wider maritime areas in international maritime zones, strongly disturbing not only the activity of fishing boats and trade ships in transit, but also that of the ships working on humanitarian aid programmes, especially the world food programme bringing humanitarian aid essential to the many displaced Somalis.

This phenomenon has become a source of concern on a worldwide scale. As the President of the French Republic declared on 16 September: "Today we can no longer talk of isolated incidents but a true industry of crime, which calls into question one of the fundamental liberties, that of free movement and international trade. The world cannot accept this."

In this context in May and June the United Nations Security Council adopted its resolutions 1814 and 1816.

To react against the worsening of this phenomenon, it is currently working on a new resolution to mobilise the international community with the aim of better applying the existing instruments of repression and prevention, in the framework of maritime law or the resolutions of the Security Council.

For their part, EU Member States are already committed to this, and on 26 May expressed their determination to work together to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia.

A crisis management concept was approved by the Council on 5 August. More recently, during the Council for "General Affairs and External Relations" on 15 September, the Council just adopted a strategic military option with a view to a possible naval military

operation under the European Security and Defence Policy.

I would like to remind you that the launch of a naval operation is definitely under consideration, as the French presidency announced last Tuesday before the commission for foreign affairs in your Assembly, following this Council of general affairs and external relations.

But pending any possible operation, and faced with the urgent need to take action, a preliminary stage has been decided by the Council with the setup of a military Coordination Cell. It is run by a Spanish senior officer, and comprises 4 maritime experts whose role is to facilitate the exchange of information between the merchant navy and the war ships that may be present in the area, either regularly or occasionally.

Located in Brussels, this Cell will be responsible for supporting the actions of surveillance and protection led by the Member States off the coast of Somalia. The initiative should comprise three sections:

- an escort for certain vulnerable ships in transit in the Gulf of Aden;**
- protection for the humanitarian convoys in the world Food Programme intended for Somalia;**
- and surveillance of the fishing areas off the south coast of Somalia.**

Those Member States who possess naval units operating off the Somali coast are therefore invited to inform this Cell, especially in order to maximise the possibilities for protecting the most vulnerable merchant ships.

At the same time, the European Union will continue to prepare a possible naval military operation under the European Security and Defence Policy. A mission to collect information, made up of European experts from the Headquarters of the European Union and the General Secretariat of the Council is currently in the region (Bahrain, Dubai and Djibouti) to refine our strategic planning.

It will announce its conclusions on 29 September.

So you see, the European Union is not only showing its determination to act, but is also coming forward as a central proposition force on an international level in the fight against piracy. We are giving ourselves the means to act quickly and with coordination for commercial and especially humanitarian interests.

Thank you.

FINAL REMARKS/CONCLUSIONS

Mr President,

Mr Commissioner,

My Lady and Gentlemen Vice-Presidents

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for this high quality debate.

Piracy is one form of terrorism which is getting quite out of proportion. If nothing is done, the freedom of maritime movement in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia may well disappear. The European Union is the first to assume its responsibilities in this respect.

We should be able to make a decision on how to continue planning for a naval military operation by the European Security and Defence Policy at the beginning of October.

NATO has no jurisdiction and has a warrant for terrorism, but not for piracy even if they are similar.

Until then, the Coordination Cell will continue to fulfil its role of support to the Member States, in favour of improving security conditions of the maritime communities of trade and fishing, and of the ships chartered by the World Food Programme which Somalia so needs.

At the same time, an action should be led to find a legal framework shared by the whole of the international community, enabling us more efficiently to bring proceedings against acts of piracy.

I am very pleased with the concrete assertive actions to "protect our interests and values", to take up the formula used by General Morillon in his speech.

Thank you.