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Panel V Maritime Security

Maritime security does not necessarily mean only the security of the sea around our lands. In our days of asymmetrical threats, the most important aspect of maritime security is protecting the sea routes, so that we will keep them open for our trade and for any goods transportation towards and from our ports.

It is not a coincidence that for almost a year already, ships of our nations work together, under European command to protect shipping in the Indian Ocean off the African Coast and to the Straights of Hormouz. Protecting this maritime route is for Europe, as essential as protecting our own borders and providing security in the mainland.

In our days, we do not face a military threat as we did during the Cold War era. So the issues and developments of the maritime strategy in the framework of NATO may sound out of date. However it was during the Cold War era, when we learned to work

together and to develop common procedures, on which is based today's operational orientation of our naval forces on patrol.

Needles to remind that the task of keeping the sea routes safe was the reason for which the multinational naval forces of NATO were organised (STANAVFORLANT, NAVOCFORMED later STANAVFORMED and now SNMG 1-2 and SNCMG). Still SNGM conduct operations similar to Atalanta.

From the legal aspect, there is the question of the rules of engagement. Ships under European Command, such as in Operation Atalanta are following clearly defined rules of engagement approved by the Council of EU. However every ship's Captain still has the obligation to follow national rules of engagement as well. Contradictions may appear only in case a certain ship may face an immediate threat and despite a case like that is at the moment theoretical, the question should be analysed, so that the solution will be given in the framework of the ESDP. After all, since EU is a global player for maritime issues, common maritime operations more complex than Atalanta may be conducted in the future.

As about safety at sea, apart of the fact that every maritime nation should be able to conduct search and rescue operations in his territorial waters but also to international waters in his FIR, there is already the obligation for protection of life according to the SOLAS (Safety Of Life At Sea) convention. No further clarification is necessary since this convention defines all the nations' obligations on that field. However the adoption of SOLAS by the EU will be an

act to underscore the determination of Europe to sustain the position of the global player for maritime issues.

On the field of safety as well as to any kind of maritime planning defining limits to operational areas may not be very wise. Protection of shipping may require operations far from the mainland of Europe and yet be as important as an operation to protect our borders in land. This reality should be kept in mind every time such operations are under discussion in the United Nations. The auspices of the UN should be considered useful. But EU security priorities should stay on priority.

Finally allow me a comment on the equipment. The naval ships of EUMARFOR patrolling the Indian Ocean are fine vessels able to deal with any kind of threat. They are however optimised for operations against enemy surface ships and submarines. Their capability to deal with the asymmetric threat imposed by pirates or terrorists is not the best possible. So looking to the future we may conclude that the European Maritime Security Strategy should be supported by the European shipbuilding industry which should contribute, by developing the next generation of naval ships. Ships able to meet the operational situation of the new era, already in place.

