

Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport

Seminar on
PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AT SEA: HOW BEST TO PROTECT
SEAFARERS?

Closing address by Vice President Siim KALLAS

1. Introduction:

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished speakers and guests. It is a pleasure to be able to be here with you today at the end of this very rich day of frank and constructive exchanges.

The protection of human life is a fundamental universal value; protecting human life at sea is more than a simple need for the Union: **it is a mission that requires precise commitments and effective action.**

This seminar is the natural follow-up of the one held in January 2009 and we all shall benefit from addressing seafarers' security and welfare from various perspectives. For this, I would like to thank the distinguished guests who have agreed to share their professional expertise in order to facilitate the essential **interdisciplinary analysis of the sensitive aspects** related to the human element at sea.

Indeed, we the conference benefitted from the very welcome presence of senior representatives from the many different backgrounds and sectors concerned.

Let me also thank the organisers behind the scenes for their great support to making this a day of fruitful encounters.

2. Importance of maritime transport worldwide and for the European Union, in particular:

Acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea represent a **serious and intolerable threat against the life** of crews and passengers on board ships.

These crimes are also a major threat **to the sustainability of maritime transport** and endanger the stability of coastal states in piracy prone areas.

The importance of maritime transport for both the world trade and European economy has already been highlighted today. Let me only stress that in order to provide crews to more than 40,000 ocean-going ships worldwide about 1.5 million crewmembers are needed.

3. Snapshots on the current situation concerning Piracy and ARAS:

Pirates' attacks surged by 38% worldwide in 2009, which marks the **third year that reported incidents have increased**. More than 400 attacks and 49 hijackings have been recorded and some sources say that a considerable number of attacks was not even reported.

More than 1 000 crewmembers were taken hostages and about 70 of them were injured and 8 killed. These are **painful numbers** – behind every single one a human life, families and existential distress.

The situation off the coast of Somalia currently is the focus of the attention of the international community. In this area pirates seem to have found a "very profitable business activity" despite the operational deployment of rather significant naval assets. Also the land-based logistic capability of Somali pirates has increased: **an average of 10 vessels is held by pirates off Somali coast at any given time, and the period of captivity has increased** as well as the amount of the ransom paid.

4. General approach of the European Union, and in particular of the Commission:

The EU and its Member States are amongst the most active actors and supporters of the various initiatives under the United Nations and its specialised bodies, **namely the International Maritime Organization (IMO)**.

- **On the political and legal level**, this allows repressive action also in Somali territorial waters, and includes capacity building programmes to create the bases for a regional approach, notably through the adoption of the "Djibouti Code of Conduct";
- **On the technical level**, this means participating in the reviewing and updating of several relevant IMO instruments. The **Commission intends to adopt next week formal Recommendations concerning ships' self protective measures ("Best management practices" BMP)**. The Commission is also facilitating the exchange of information relevant to anti-piracy activities amongst Member States, Norway and Iceland within the framework of the Regulatory Maritime Security (MARSEC) Committee;
- **On the ground**, Member States within the Council started the first naval operation of the European Union (EU NAVFOR, ATALANTA operation) aiming at contributing to the security of waters off the coast of Somalia.

Furthermore, the Commission has defined specific programmes for a total of some EUR 280 million, directed to the **medium-to-long term in order to help addressing the root causes of such crimes at sea**, such as:

- The "**Somalia Special Support Program**", to develop governance, education and the productive sectors;
- The "**Commission's Assistance to Somalia**" in support of Somali police forces and AMISOM; and
- The "**Instrument for Stability**" to support the implementation the Djibouti Code of Conduct.

5. Focusing on the result of the seminar:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enhancing safety and security of persons on board ships is a top priority for the Commission, for the evident reason of protecting human lives but also in defending free trade, effective transport routes and the rule of law. The Commission's commitment is unfaltering and I am very pleased to see effective action following.

The human resources and technology devoted by EMSA so far and the foreseeable further improvements in **tracking ships and information sharing, not only in piracy prone areas** are a clear demonstration of this commitment;

Protection of seafarers from acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea is also **one of the main themes in the Social Area that we will consider.** Beyond **safeguarding of seafarers' rights, we** will look at **appropriate mechanisms**, to be enforced both by Flag states and ship-owners, in order to guarantee protection of crews when transiting in risk areas.

On the result of the seminar:

- Training is crucial. "Failing to plan is planning to fail": Best efforts should be made in order to prepare crew before entering piracy-prone areas, taking into consideration pirates behavioural differences depending on the geographical regions.
- Information gathering, assessing and sharing of data about seafarers being held captives in a confidential way since their future employment might be affected.
- Taking care of hijacked seafarers' families is a compelling need. It should be ensured constant information on the ongoing situation and families' economic needs should be addressed, both during and after the hijacking.

The **Commission stresses the importance and fully supports IMO efforts to tackle the complex problems arising from unlawful acts at sea.** In doing so, I would like to highlight the importance of an effective implementation of the "Guidance to ship-owners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships" adopted by IMO in June 2009.

As I said the Commission intends to issue, in the coming days, a formal recommendation to Member States encouraging effective and swift implementation of IMO guidance.

Reducing the vulnerability of ships and enhancing seafarers' awareness about anti-piracy tools and action are compelling needs and I strongly hope that the

related EU proposal will be agreed at the next Diplomatic Conference on the comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and Code.

It is the shared responsibility of all actors involved to implement the commonly agreed international rules and recommendations. **The Commission at its level will monitor and support the efforts needed in this domain;** to see effective improvements, administrations, ship-owners and security forces need to co-operate hand in hand, day to day.

Thank you for your attention and participation today!