EUROPEAN UNION

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Declaration to the European parliament by Commissioner Piebalgs on behalf of HR Catherine Ashton

Mr. President, Honourable Members,

The Commission is well aware of the threat piracy is posing to European ships and crews. It is unacceptable that criminal gangs are allowed to continue taking hostage the international shipping lanes and bring suffering to thousands of seafarers and their families. Not to mention the threat to stability and prosperity of the region and Somalia itself.

We all agree that only a comprehensive approach can bring a sustainable solution to the problem of piracy.

Containing maritime piracy at sea - and ending impunity are two important elements of the EU comprehensive approach against piracy. Others relate to building regional capacities and the stabilisation of Somalia itself. And let’s not forget the cooperation with the maritime industry.

When it comes to containing piracy at sea, the most visible of all EU counter-piracy action is the EUNAVFOR – Atlanta mission. The Council has just decided to prolong its mandate to December 2014.

But how do we make sure justice is served, once suspects are arrested by the naval forces? One way of addressing impunity is prosecutions of piracy suspects in the region. The Commission directly supports countries in the region which accepted transfers for prosecution by EUNAVFOR and established a joint programme with the UN in support of judicial capacities. This cooperation is an excellent example of how Commission programmes and Common Security and Defence Policy actions go hand in hand.

Piracy has to be understood as organised crime that is happening at sea and on land. In the long run, only the establishment of the rule of law, good governance and economic development will bring lasting solutions.

The EU is therefore strongly committed to support Somalia in finding a political solution to the ongoing crisis. At the recent London Conference, the international community, including the EU, has shown strong determination to support the transition process in Somalia.

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To date, the EU is the biggest donor to Somalia having committed € 415 million for development aid through the European Development Fund for the period 2008 to 2013.

On top of these bilateral funds comes some €55 million from EU budget line programmes and € 77 million during 2011 for Humanitarian aid.

A part of the new development funds will be directed to support the fishing industry, building alternative livelihoods and help coastal communities and rural development more generally, thus tackling some of the root causes of piracy.

The EU is also supporting the development of Somali security capacities. In addition to the training and payment of police officers, we are the main donor to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, funded through the African Peace Facility. Since 2007, the EU has provided 325 Million euro, and the Commission is proposing to allocate additional 100 million for AMISOM.

As in the areas of counter-piracy efforts, the Commission action is closely linked with Council led CSDP actions, like the EU Training Mission to Somalia (EUTM).

There is also an important role for the maritime industry to play in containing the threat of piracy. It is vital to implement International Maritime Organisation supported Best Management Practices on board of ships under EU Member States flag.

Let me also assure you that the Commission is following very closely the case of 2 Italian marines who are now in custody in India.

From the beginning we have been in constant touch with the Italian government on this. Following Italy’s request to assist, the EU has raised the issue with the Indian authorities, both in Brussels and New Delhi, encouraging a positive outcome as soon as possible. Yesterday the High Representative Cathy Ashton discussed the matter with Prime Minister Mario Monti who thanked the High Representative for the EU's efforts.

It is clear that we need to put this issue in the broader context of our cooperation on counter-piracy and more specifically on the issue of regulating armed protection aboard ships. We need to see what lessons we can learn and prevent this type of incidents from happening again. The EU and India had already agreed in principle to work on these broader policy issues – and this is what we are currently taking forward.

But we have to differentiate between this case of EU Member States security forces protecting commercial shipment and using private contractors for armed deterrence on board commercial ships and even distant fishing vessels:

Due to the immensity of the sea area where Somalia pirates now operate and the scarce naval resources available to protect this shipping lane, the industry has had no other choice than to turn to the services provided by Contracted Armed Security Personnel (PCASP) on board ships transiting the High Risk Areas.

This is an increasing phenomenon that we cannot ignore.

The International Maritime Organisation has already addressed this item and issued interim recommendations but, as piracy seems not to find a solution in the short terms, this must be addressed in depth.

We are not confident with the idea of self-regulation of this new business considering the risks of this kind of activity, potentially leading to the lethal use of force.

In this regard we think that the IMO is the international body that should lead to the development of more stringent rules, and notably of a mandatory instrument.

Ensuring prosecution of pirates captured at sea only takes care of one part of the problem.
It is therefore vital to increase the "risk/reward" ratio for those who benefit most from piracy and the EU has decided to step up its efforts to break the underlying business model.

Law enforcement agencies of EU Member States, INTERPOL and Europol are currently cooperating, not only in attempting to trace any flows going into EU Member States but also in collecting evidence packages against leaders, financiers and instigators.

Another element of the EU comprehensive approach is in support of the region:

It is in the strategic interest of regional countries to engage in the fight against piracy. The EU is keen to assist and enhance local ownership. This is why the EU has been a strong supporter of the Eastern and Southern Africa – Indian Ocean Regional Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted in October 2010 in Mauritius to fight piracy and promote maritime security.

Support measures are under way and up to 40 million Euro of further support is currently under consideration. Even through the EU’s network of Fisheries Partnership Agreements (FPAs), which strengthens our relations with the countries in the Western Indian Ocean area, and the regional surveillance programme that we have been financing with 10 million Euro from 2007 to 2011, and is going to be renewed, we have been enhancing the surveillance capacities of our partner countries.

The Critical Maritime Routes Programme (€7.6 million), funded under the Instrument for Stability, has focused since 2009 on the security and safety of essential maritime routes in areas affected by piracy. In close coordination with the IMO, one of the projects contributes to the implementation of the regional Djibouti Code of Conduct.

I would like to thank the European Parliament especially for requesting a pilot project on "maritime awareness", which will provide technical tools to help the authorities to be aware of what goes on at sea.

These programmes will work very closely with the planned Regional Maritime Capacity Building Mission.

Thank you for your attention.