

SHADE MED – OPENING REMARKS

EUNAVFOR MED Operation SOPHIA Op Cdr Rear Admiral (ITA-N) Enrico CREDENDINO

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am pleased to see many organisations among us today that also participated in the inaugural SHADE MED meeting in November last year, chaired by Operation SOPHIA. I hope that both new and old participants will all have fruitful discussions during these two days.

When I had the idea to launch the SHADE MED, I thought that the best framework to carry out that initiative would have been to have the rotation of the Chairmanship among the main organisations involved in maritime operations in the Mediterranean. This brings shared ownership to the SHADE MED forum, which rests on the idea of the many benefits resulting from collective discussions and efforts. I would like to extend my appreciation to the Italian Navy for hosting and chairing this second meeting of the SHADE MED forum.

As you know, the SHADE MED is an entirely voluntary network, which shall continue for as long as nations and organisations consider it useful. I am happy to see that the network keeps growing. Operation SOPHIA remains strongly committed to the SHADE MED forum, and this is why we will also, in the future, fulfil the role of its permanent secretariat, thus bringing the needed continuity.

As we just heard from the Italian Navy, much has happened in the Mediterranean during the past six months since our last meeting. It is clear that the magnitude of the current migration phenomenon calls for enhanced information exchange.

The need for a forum where we can discuss our joint challenges and identify solutions has also been a consistent message that I have received in my many meetings with representatives of national governments, institutions, civil society organisations and others.

This was the founding idea of the SHADE MED initiative, and it is also with this objective in mind that we launched the eight associated SHADE MED working groups, that are dealing with thematic issues that have been identified as particularly important in addressing the migration related challenges facing the Mediterranean today.

The first SHADE MED working group met on 15 March this year, and since then six further working groups were convened in April, leading up to the meetings that will take place today and tomorrow.

Valuable work is being done on issues such as identifying legal solutions to defining human smuggling in international law, and finding technical solutions such as establishing a Maritime Security Capacity, that will allow real time info sharing between maritime actors using a CIS system called SMART, which has similar functionalities to the MERCURY used in the Horn of Africa.

As we have seen previously, migration flows, and the routes used by migrant smugglers adapt, quickly to changes in the region. They quickly adjust to changes in policies, or the opening and closing of alternative routes, as was seen on the Eastern Route in 2015. Our cooperation with organisations like FRONTEX, EUROPOL, EUROJUST, the Italian Direzione Nazionale Antimafia e Antiterrorismo and the local Italian Prosecutors, has helped increase our understanding of how the smugglers' networks operate local.

SHADE MED is a forum where to share these experiences informally, and two working groups are working on striving to develop a common understanding of the smuggling and trafficking networks, how they are adapting their modus operandi, and identifying ways to counter them.

An important part of our work has been developing good working relationships with a range of international and non-governmental organisations that operate in the region, allowing us to improve our operational effectiveness.

The crews on our ships are trained in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. As a result of this cooperation, we developed a "Migrant Handling Training Manual", which introduces our staff and ships' crews to basic principles, policies and concepts when coming into contact with migrants rescued at sea. The manual was developed with the support of several organisations that we cooperate with such as FRONTEX, EASO, and UNICEF, in addition to our training partners. Continuing this mutually beneficial cooperation helps us ensure that all migrants receive proper assistance, in line with basic human rights principles.

This represents the essence of the comprehensive approach: a joint and common effort of all the Institutions and Organizations involved in dealing with the migration emergency in the Mediterranean, to share and find new procedures and aimed actions to tackle the problem. Thus not a competition among the various actors, but a common framework where to share experience and best practices, and put together the best of professionalism and experience of each player in a specific sector. Our experience of cooperation between civilian and military actors has been only rewarding, as I hope that your discussions will be here today.

To conclude, I just want to recall that EUNAVFOR MED was launched by the EU after the tragic event on the night of 18 April 2015, when a small boat that was travelling towards Europe capsized off the Libyan coast, resulting in the death of nearly 800 migrants. EU High Representative Mogherini later named the Operation SOPHIA, after a baby girl who was rescued and born on board our German ship. Today the little girl is safe and in good health

So far EUNAVFOR MED has rescued more than 13.700 migrants, contributed to the arrest of 69 suspected smugglers and prevented 114 boats from being re-used by smugglers.

With these words I wish to conclude my opening remarks and thank you for your attention