



Chairman of the European Union Military Committee

Mini Away Day – Introductory Remarks

"Maritime Security in the Context of EU CSDP Military Operations"

Brussels, 04 April 2017

Neville,

Dear friends,

The Maltese Presidency decided to dedicate this Mini Away Day to an issue that rarely attracts our attention, the EU Maritime Security. The recent piracy incident off the coast of Somalia makes today's event even more important and, of course, timely. So, before I proceed with my opening remarks, I want to thank the Maltese Presidency for organising this event and for hosting us today in their always hospitable premises!

Our naval colleagues take pride in reminding us all that 70% of this planet is covered by water. With more than 90 thousand kilometres of external maritime EU borders, 42% of value of global seaborne trade controlled by EU companies and with 22 trillion euros per year estimated GDP of world's oceans, I have to admit they have a strong case when they stretch out the importance of Maritime Security.

Maritime is also the domain where the internal-external security nexus is more clear. The Mediterranean Sea, for instance, acts as a natural **barrier** between us and the millions of migrants or the thousands of terrorists that are at the other side. At the same time, an all increasing number of invisible **bridges**, in the form of natural gas pipelines, communication and electrical cables connect us with this other side. This is an example of how the sea can be a fence, providing us with strategic depth and critical time for our reaction to unfolding crises, while at the same time being a connector, depending on the issue each time at hand. In a wider context and thinking globally, Sea Lines of Communication are the blood arteries of our economies. The well-being of the

European citizen is highly dependent on the free and unobstructed flow of goods, both inward and outward. Furthermore, the expected rise of the percentage LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas) currently holds in the European Energy Mix will drastically reduce dependency on any one source, providing cleaner energy. This reduced dependency is complemented by the numerous entry points into Europe. This is the nice side of the story. The other side, usually left untold, is that this turn to LPG will increase the European dependency, vulnerability if you wish, in the maritime domain.

It goes beyond saying that few, if any of the challenges in the maritime domain are genuinely or exclusively military in nature. Yet, two out of three executive EU military operations are deployed at sea, EUNAVFOR ATALANTA and EUNAVFORMED SOPHIA. This is by itself indicative and revealing of the importance the military instrument has. In a different perspective, in 2011 and 2014 EU naval units were tasked to help evacuate European and third countries citizens from Libya; most of the times they were hastily picked and sent on the spot.

I consider this rather extensive introduction useful as it highlights the points I want to make:

- First, the EU dependence on the maritime domain is already high; it will only get higher;
- Second, the military instrument has a significant role to play, as history shows, present situation proves and EU interests demand;
- Third, the military rapid response toolbox to external crises is not complete, as it lacks the maritime equivalent to Battlegroups.

Dear friends,

We, of all people know that security does not come cheap. Security is a lasting asset, without an expiration date. This makes its provision a never ending task, demanding a strong commitment, persistence and a long term view. The lesson we learned from the recent ARIS 13 piracy attack in Somalia is that unless the underlying factors that fuel a crisis have been dealt with, our mission remains unchanged. So should be our vigilance. The example of a Head

of State who was quick to triumphantly declare "**Mission Accomplished**" 14 years ago to the delight of his constituency, comes to the support of my position. Much to his detriment, today, the Armed Forces of this nation, leading a coalition of 64, the European Union included, are still in the same war zone, continuing an unfinished job. That extremely relevant and very recent example should educate us on what are the potential consequences and the associated risk that come along with ill-informed, over hasty decisions, taken exclusively with a view to obtain short term political or financial gains.

New geographical maritime regions should have our attention. **Gulf of Guinea** is already on our radar. The cancer of piracy metastasised there and it has become the new hub for African piracy. We have all attended a number of briefings on this issue. Despite any fluctuation on the frequency of attacks, the problem remains and, sooner or later, we may have to address it head on.

In the **South China Sea**, an area far away from Europe but still of strategic importance for our economies, following the developments and advancing maritime security cooperation with ASEAN is essential. The sharing of information, experiences, and best practices, as well as concrete cooperation measures, will lead to better management of maritime security challenges for the mutual benefit of ASEAN and the EU.

What we, in my opinion, are not following very closely is the developments in the **Arctic**. Developments that could result in ground-breaking geostrategic shifts. The increasing availability of the North-East Passage has the potential to transform the movement of global freight, shrinking sailing distances between Europe and Asian markets. The region's abundant natural resources and the rights for their exploitation could also be a point of friction. The Arctic is rich in hydrocarbons: 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of undiscovered natural gas could lie in the region. It is also a treasure trove of mineral wealth, such as gold, uranium and rare earth elements. The Arctic is getting increasingly popular with tourists and demand for polar voyages is rising. Increasing competition for scarce marine resources also raises new questions. Pressure on the regions' fishing grounds could increase as fish stocks further south are depleted. All the above justify our increased interest in Maritime Security in the region.

Dear friends,

I will close my opening remarks reminding us of what is at stake here.

The security of our nations' **shared** interests to begin with. I want to put emphasis on the word "shared". In the contemporary globalised and deeply interconnected world, even the land-locked Member States have interests that extend into the maritime domain. There is no division here between coastal and land-locked states. In the same manner, there should be no distinction between the ways we address challenges and threats on land or at sea. But in order to respond to them, we need to have the right tools.

What is also at stake is the credibility of the European Union as a security provider. At a time when the Union portrays itself publicly as a global security provider, it lacks a complete set of tools to back this position. On the contrary, discussions are made towards a possible drawdown of the strength of our operations, which is already minimal. At a time when we are prompted to do more for own security, a retreat from the responsibilities we have assumed will deliver the wrong messages and it would constitute a controversial decision to say the least.

Hence the need for the creation of an on-call Naval Task Force equivalent to a Battlegroup rises as more pressing, more demanding and more timely than ever.

Thank you.