

ISS ELIAMEP Workshop on Maritime Challenges for the EU

Athens, 6 June 2014

Welcome Dinner Speech by Maria Damanaki

Your Excellencies,

Dear Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to open this workshop. I am very grateful to the Greek presidency for organizing it, because it coincides with the ongoing discussions in Brussels on the development of a EU maritime security strategy. This is an issue which is dear to me and to the Commission.

Ensuring the security of our seas and ocean has never been so important.

Today's risks and threats have to do with piracy, terrorism, drugs, human trafficking and organised crime. They are so complex and multifaceted that they impact not just maritime transport, but also tourism, environment, fisheries, immigration... in one word: the economy.

These new challenges require a new response, equally integrated and equally far-reaching. A response that is exhaustive, powerful and coordinated between Member States and EU institutions.

International organised crime does not fit into national boundaries – nor should our response.

It's time now to apply that comprehensive philosophy and develop the **broadest possible vision** of what security is about and what the response to threats and risks should be.

It is for this reason that earlier this year Catherine Ashton and I tabled a joint communication for a Future European Maritime Security strategy. The proposals followed up a request from Council and were elaborated in close collaboration

with Member States experts in order to achieve their buy-in. We have brought in law enforcement, naval and transport monitoring, customs control... to forge a more exhaustive approach.

This is by the way not an isolated action in the EU. We have also seen that key third country allies such as the US, relevant international bodies such as NATO and individual Member States such as the UK or Spain take similar initiatives.

Let me stress one thing: elaborating something as completely new and groundbreaking, involving 28 Member States, is no easy task. It requires changing the mind-set of many players, who are traditionally used to working in distinct sectors and in isolation, not bothering too much of what the other sectors are doing at sea.

But at the same time, I am happy to report that the initiative is receiving wide support. In fact we are now witnessing a very collaborative process among EU Member States and institutions to elaborate a fully-fledged strategy for adoption by Council at the end of June. And we are hopeful that this will continue under the Italian presidency with the adoption of a corresponding action plan before the end of the year.

With a bit of luck, five to ten years from now we should have a different approach compared to today, where Member States work much more closely together, share their assets and capabilities much better. And in particular the collaboration between civilian and military authorities is much tighter than today.

It is my firm opinion that it is only through such collaboration that we can ensure the safety and security of our seas and oceans and avoid disasters like the one that occurred near Lampedusa.

So what is this strategy trying to do in a nutshell?

We are trying to identify the strategic maritime security interests of the EU: the prevention of conflicts, the protection of critical infrastructure and of the global trade support chain, the effective control of external borders and so on. There we have to identify the corresponding response.

In this respect, it is no coincidence that two watchwords for this new endeavour are **cooperative** and **comprehensive**.

In the maritime sense *comprehensiveness* means investing in early warning and risk analysis; being prepared in accident prevention just as much as in crisis response and in rescue operations.

Cooperation means working systematically and closely with partners on the full range of issues that may pose security risks.

Let me give you a couple of examples of why this would work.

The simple sharing of surveillance data and information can give us a much clearer idea of the global picture and allow us to react quicker to any crises. I say let us have a joint situational awareness picture five years from now.

Improving interoperability, for example between Coast Guards, stops us from duplicating work and frees up valuable resources to use elsewhere. I say let us improve daily operations at sea with a network of Coast Guard functions five years from now.

There are at least 20 other actions where I can show you that cooperation is the smart way to go. And it makes sense that the European Council endorsed defence cooperation.

Cooperation is not a luxury, or some sort of diplomatic weasel-word.

It's a necessity. In today's – and probably tomorrow's – Europe of continually squeezed budgets, cooperation is the only way. The maxim "*pool it or lose it*" has never been truer.

But cooperation is often not instinctive. On defence issues it may even be counter-intuitive.

That is where the new Strategy comes in. We don't propose to create additional structures or increase red tape, but to make the best use of **existing resources** and be **cost efficient**. We can't do it overnight, but we can do it step by step.

At its heart the strategy will promote effective and **credible partnerships** and encourage our EU countries to work hand in hand.

Last week I addressed the Heads of European Navies and heard a clear message from them that there is a need for closer cooperation – between NATO and the EU, between the military forces, but also between military and civilian authorities.

So many key technologies have both civil and military applications. Ever since the internet or satellite navigation, the distinction between military and civilian technology is becoming increasingly blurred anyway.

Defence is a sector that generates an annual turnover of almost 100 billion Euros, and almost half a million jobs. The maritime industries are worth almost 200 billion, and employ several million people.

So harnessing those synergies is vital.

Perhaps in the last two decades we in Europe could afford the luxury of designing, developing, and manufacturing three different combat aircrafts, fourteen different types of frigate, and eleven different types of fighting vehicles. Those days are over!

We must therefore reverse the trend of fragmentation and move towards consolidation.

We should not be too modest either, because we do have some really good examples where cooperation works very well already.

It works in the Horn of Africa, where **operation ATALANTA** has made international shipping lanes much, much safer.

Did you know it reduced pirate attacks from **176** in 2011 to **7** last year?

And as we help build up government institutions and maritime capacity in the region, we also work with nations to control and manage fisheries, comply with international rules and stop illegal fishing. And having made tangible progress in West Africa, we are now closing in on illegal fishing in the Pacific Ocean.

To conclude, we are on the right track. **Cooperative and comprehensive** – that is the way forward.

I would like to thank the ISS and ELIAMEP for bringing us all together. It is reassuring to see so many people committed to making our seas open, secure, and able to deal with the wide array of maritime threats out there.

Use this event to challenge each other, exchange ideas and to create the partnerships we need.

Enjoy your dinner.