

Workshop on:

# Maritime challenges for the EU

The EU Institute for Security Studies and the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) organized a workshop entitled “Maritime Challenges for the EU”. The workshop focused on the maritime interests of the EU and more specifically on threats such as piracy, the protection of the EU global supply chain, illegal migration and other illegal activities (transnational organized crime, unauthorized fishing and environmental pollution, terrorism, etc.). The workshop opened with the speech of Ms. Maria Damanaki, EU Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, which underlined the main risks and threats that the EU faces today regarding maritime security of the sea, also emphasizing their importance and impact on the Union’s economy. She also described the EU’s new Maritime Strategy, which will be based on the best use of the existing resources with an emphasis on cost efficiency. Finally, the key point of the Commissioner’s speech was that the only way forward is through cooperation and comprehensiveness.

**The first session of the workshop** focused on European maritime security interests. The EU has an extensive maritime coast and its economy requires sustainable and accessible maritime resources. The maritime security threats are multifaceted, often posing a risk to citizens and are detrimental to the EU’s and Member States’ strategic interests. Therefore, it

is crucial to introduce the maritime security risk assessment into EU policies in order to implement the relevant policy objectives. Furthermore, full commitment by Institutions and Member States is needed to implement the strategy, whereas the close cooperation of the EEAS, Commission and Council would have an added value for the success of the upcoming Action Plan.

The speakers frequently emphasized the importance of the sea for the EU, describing the Union as a maritime one and referring to the political will which is necessary for the Union to promote its maritime interests. Also, maritime trade and security are extremely important for globalization. There was also reference to the energy parameters of Europe's Maritime Security Strategy, especially in the context of instability in the southern neighborhood and its impact on Europe's energy security. It was suggested that LNG has the advantage of maximum flexibility with minimum risks, although the price may be higher.

There was also a presentation on Greece's contribution to the development of a European Maritime Strategy, in the context of the Hellenic Presidency. It was emphasized that Greece has every reason to promote EU's maritime policy, given that a large part of the country's economy is based on maritime activities and that the Law of the Sea should remain the lighthouse of the EU maritime policy. It was argued that it is very significant that the next EU rotating president will be a country that shares the same interests and concerns with Greece as far as the maritime security issues are concerned: Italy.

The second session focused on maritime security threats in the Mediterranean and neighboring maritime regions. Migration was the main issue at this session. Immigration by the sea is not a new problem for the EU but countries facing migration problems still find it difficult to cooperate and follow an effective policy. The speakers agreed that the time has come to promote a common policy, as it will be more difficult and costly to intervene later, when illegal migration will be at even higher levels. The discussion also focused on the problems that Greece is facing with significant numbers of economic immigrants that cross the Greek maritime and land borders, plus refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries. Unfortunately, the predictions were not optimistic as Greece's neighborhood is

becoming more volatile and unstable and the economic and material assistance from Frontex remains limited.

The vulnerability of European borders, as well as the need for centrally coordinated border control management was emphasized. Incidents such as Lampedusa are increasing in frequency and the EU needs a more effective policy, perhaps like the Italian operation “Mare Nostrum”. Addressing the problem of criminal networks that control migration flows should be a high priority.

**The third session dealt with** maritime security issues in the regions of the Middle East and Asia. In this context, the relations between China and the EU were discussed. Europe has an interest to build up strong relations with China, its most important partner in Asia, and to support maritime security in that part of the world. Also, the EU has to strengthen international norms and regulations regarding freedom of the seas and maritime security, as stability in Asia’s maritime regions is a very significant factor for regional and global economic cooperation and growth. Furthermore, Europe should try to play a more active role in the mitigation of the disputes in the South and East China Seas, because its interests are affected due to economic interdependence and the potential blockage of the free flow of maritime trade. There was also extensive discussion of another important maritime security issue: piracy. The phenomenon of piracy was in decline but during the last years it is rising again, creating significant problems to maritime trade. The different kinds of piracy were examined as well as the available countermeasures.