



Revised EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan, Regional and Global Maritime Affairs

Factsheet: Horn of Africa-Red Sea

Summary

The revised EU Maritime Security Strategy (EU MSS) Action Plan contributes to the implementation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy and the Joint Communication on International Ocean Governance. It features, for the first time, a section dedicated to regions and sea basins, including the Horn of Africa-Red Sea, which is a major choke point of international trade and the crossroads between the Mediterranean basin and the Wider Indian Ocean region. The threat posed by Somalia-based pirates to maritime trade routes is now largely in check, with incidents occurring sporadically. EU NAVFOR Operation ATALANTA has played a major role in securing this area.

1. Maritime Security Policy Framework

1.1 The Horn of Africa-Red Sea in the Revised EU MSS



Maritime traffic off the Horn of Africa as identified by the [European Maritime Safety Agency's \(EMSA\) maritime surveillance service](#)

The revised EU Maritime Security Strategy (EU MSS) Action Plan features, for the first time, a section dedicated entirely to actions with a regional focus, including four related to maritime security in the Indian Ocean. They support the implementation of instruments such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct and the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (B.7.1); call for supporting EU counter-piracy activities, in particular the mandate of EU NAVFOR (Operation ATALANTA) (B.7.2); promote a wider approach to maritime security policy in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea region (B.7.3); and encourage continued support for the establishment of

a maritime information-sharing environment and information fusion centres in zones of strategic EU interest (B.7.4).

From 2008 onwards, rising levels of pirate activity off the coast of Somalia led to hundreds of attacks on merchant shipping. At its peak in January 2011, some 736 hostages were held in 32 ships. The situation only stabilised thereafter thanks to concerted military and commercial efforts, whereby EU NAVFOR has been instrumental both in providing deterrence and in encouraging self-protection. Since 2012, the number of pirate attacks has sharply reduced in the region to just a few residual cases annually.

However, with no end in sight for instability in Somalia, and more recently in Yemen, combined with growing competition for influence and strategic assets as well as increasing militarisation of the Red Sea coast, concerted efforts involving the EU and third countries are still necessary.

1.2. Relevant EU Policies in the Horn of Africa

The [Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa](#) (2011) guides the EU's engagement in the region, which extends from the Suez Canal to the north and Socotra to the south and the Wider Indian Ocean in cooperation with international partners. The Strategic Framework spells out the EU's objectives in the Horn of Africa: peace, stability, security; prosperity and accountable government; and identified actions to further these goals. The EU subsequently appointed an EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa and reviewed the Strategic Framework in January 2013, which has led to the [Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Horn of Africa and Yemen](#). In 2015, the Council adopted the Horn of Africa Action Plan 2015-2020 to adapt to a broader geopolitical framework, the flows of mixed migration and violent radicalisation. On 25 June, the EU adopted Council Conclusions underlining the



importance of the Red Sea region in geopolitical and strategic terms to global trade, regional economics and overall stability and agreed to boost EU engagement to foster an inclusive regional dialogue on issues such as economic integration and peace and security, including maritime security.

These key policies feed into to the Integrated Approach to the Horn of Africa and have largely contributed to the success story of the international community's activities in countering piracy. The [EU Global Strategy](#) identifies the Integrated Approach as the framework for a more coherent and holistic engagement by the EU to external conflicts and crises and promotes human security and thereby also increases the security of the EU and its citizens. Maritime security and development are strictly linked; thus maritime security is an indispensable requisite for sustainable development in and around the Horn of Africa region. All operations, missions, programmes and projects listed below aim to contribute to the EU integrated approach in the region from a security standpoint.



[ITS Carabinieri personnel liaise with Somali fishermen](#)

2. The Special Representative for the Horn of Africa

The European Union appointed a Special Representative (EUSR) for the Horn of Africa, Mr. Alexander Rondos, on 1 January 2012. His mandate, which is based on the policy objectives of the European Union in relation to the Horn of Africa, is to contribute actively to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the region.

3. CSDP Missions and Operations

[EU NAVFOR Operation ATALANTA](#) was launched by the EU in 2008 as a counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia, in accordance with UNSCR 1816 and subsequent resolutions, in response to the rising levels of piracy and armed robbery off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean. Its mission is to protect United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) vessels delivering humanitarian assistance to Somalia (as well as other vulnerable international shipping on a case-by-case basis); and to deter, prevent and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea. As a secondary supporting task, this operation monitors fishing activities and contributes to the EU integrated approach by supporting, within its means and capabilities, the EU Delegation in Somalia, the EUSR for the Horn of Africa, EUCAP Somalia, EU Training Mission Somalia (EUTM-S), the Programme to Promote Maritime Security (MASE) and the Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) project. Since its launch, Operation ATALANTA has safely escorted more than 1.75 million tonnes of food aid and 139 AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) shipments, while also transferring 166 pirates into African custody. The Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa (MSCHOA), to which ships register when transiting the High Risk Area, has been integral to the success of the operation: MSCHOA assesses vessel vulnerability, organises convoy protection, and runs MERCURY, the internationally-respected online coordination platform for all military and civilian law enforcement counter-piracy responders.

While implementing the Strategic Framework, Operation ATALANTA remains a valuable vehicle through which the EU cooperates directly with third countries, both militarily and diplomatically, in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Indeed, through collaboration with the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) – a multinational naval coalition currently comprising 32 members – more than 50 nations collectively provide maritime security in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman Western Indian Ocean. Notable levels of cooperation also still exist with the independently-deployed forces of China, India and Russia. EU NAVFOR also worked hand-in-glove with NATO's Operation OCEAN SHIELD for eight years until the conclusion of NATO's Indian Ocean presence in 2016.



In July 2012, the EU launched EUCAP Nestor, which was renamed [EUCAP-Somalia](#) in December 2016. This civilian CSDP mission is focused on strengthening maritime security capacity and the capabilities of the Federal Government of Somalia, and the Puntland and Somaliland authorities, through strategic-level advising, mentoring and training, to develop the normal suite of coast guard and maritime policing functions in the coastal zone on land and at sea. The Mission also works on specific rule of law and security issues, such as police-prosecutor cooperation and legislative drafting, and advises the Somali maritime security coordination structures. Its work is complemented by the coordination and facilitation of specialized operational training provided by UNODC, UNSOM and the AMISOM Marine Unit, in synergy with EU instruments and CSDP, notably EU NAVFOR.

[EUTM-S](#) aims to deliver capacity building to Somali security forces and authorities by providing political and strategic level military advice, training, and mentoring to Somali authorities within the defence institutions.

3.1 Protection of Critical Maritime Infrastructure (ICSP, article 5), and Maritime Situational Awareness

The [Critical Maritime Routes \(CMR\)](#) programme was set up in order to address the challenge of maritime security in different regions, such as South East Asia, the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea. CMR spawned six projects, two of which are still running: CRIMARIO and GoGIN.

[CRIMARIO](#) was launched in 2015 to support countries in the region to enhance their Maritime Situational Awareness through the sharing and fusion of data from various sources to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the maritime domain and to promote its security and safety, with a focus on combating piracy and armed robbery at sea.

3.2 Capacity Building and Development

[MASE](#) aims to enhance maritime security in the region by strengthening the capacity of littoral states to implement the Regional Strategy and Action Plan against Piracy and for Maritime Security adopted in October 2010 in Mauritius. Through MASE, the EU supports the [Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre](#) in Madagascar, which was created to gather and analyse maritime-related information for the sake of situational awareness, as well as the **Regional Centre for Operational Coordination in the Seychelles**, which coordinates the operational response to incidents at sea affecting maritime security.

4. Regional cooperation and Engagement in Regional Fora and Organisations

The revised Action Plan clearly calls for the EU to reaffirm its role as a global maritime security provider and reiterates its role in promoting wider maritime security cooperation with key partner countries and international and regional organisations. For example, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** and the EU enjoy a formal partnership. UNODC's [Global Maritime Crime Programme \(GMCP\)](#) and the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime are of particular interest in the maritime security domain.

Other key players in the region with which the EU has an interest in cooperating are the UN and its agencies, the African Union (AU), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). Furthermore, the EU is a member of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), which the EU chaired 2014-2016.

The EU supports the implementation of the AU's [2020 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy](#) and the [African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa](#), also known as the Lomé Charter, as well as IGAD's Integrated Maritime Strategy for Safety and Security (2015-2030).