

"Piracy, the curse of maritime transport"- Seminar on piracy and armed robbery at sea

"The Human Cost of Piracy"

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29/03/2012

Piracy has severe effects on the international trade and shipping, regional development and international security.

But above all, it affects the lives of thousands of seafarers transiting the high risk regions, especially off the coasts of Somalia, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and Indonesia.

Even if all the other negative implications did not exist, the human dimension itself would justify the need for immediate action against the scourge of piracy.

I am deeply concerned with the escalating violence against seafarers that is being reported.

Seafarers are physically and psychologically traumatised. Their families fear for the seafarers' lives and are often subject to extortion from pirates who demand too high ransom.

It can not be acceptable that people work under these circumstances and run the risk of being kept hostages.

There are no easy responses to this challenge. There are only some temporary measures.

- Many but not all shipping companies adhere and apply the "Best Management Practices for protection against Somalia Based Piracy".

- Moreover, the use of private armed guards aboard is a measure that cannot substitute for the needed comprehensive solution.

- At this point I would like to welcome the decision of the EU Council to extend not only the duration of the EU NAVFOR ATALANTA mission until 2014 but also its geographic scope. From now on, the ATALANTA mission will be allowed to operate also in the coastal territory of Somalia apart from its territorial and internal waters.

All these steps are important but they are in no case enough.

We need to assess precisely the human cost of the multifaceted piracy threat and take action in order to effectively address the humanitarian dimension of piracy.

I would like to underline, though, that the assessment- diagnosis stage can not last for long. The same would apply for the diagnosis of a disease and the corresponding treatment. Both diagnosis and treatment must take place the soonest possible, now, with no delays and obstructions.

In this context I am happy to pass the floor to the experts that will give us a holistic and insightful view on this very sensitive issue.