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Water covers more than two-thirds of the Earth's surface and affects life everywhere. Africa the planet's 2nd largest continent and the second most-populous continent (after Asia), is 30 million km² area, stretching deep into the southern oceans. It covers one-fifth of the total surface of the earth covered by both land and water. Its total length of coastlines ranges more than 39.000 kilometers.

Africa is a BIG Island, and needs to have a better situational awareness of all activities in its adjoining oceans and seas.

Africa borders the major sea lanes of the world and is therefore strategically situated. This in and of itself demands great attention on the part of Africa's costal States in terms of protection of maritime domain that had so far not been comprehensively secured for the African people. As the backbone of international commerce, oceans and seas are vital to African expectations in peace, in security, in economic development, transportation, trade, environmental and scientific research, historical and cultural heritage, etc.

Thirty-eight (38) African countries are either coastal or island states. Only 15 African countries are landlocked, non-coastal, or preferably "landly connected". Fifty-two of its one hundred ports handle containers. Whilst African owned ships account for about 1.2% of world shipping by number and about 0.9% by gross tonnage, these ports handle 6% of worldwide water borne cargo traffic and approximately 3% of the worldwide container traffic.

Over the past four decades, total sea borne trade has more than quadrupled. Ninety percent of world trade and two-thirds of its energy supplies are conducted by sea. The world's oceans and seas are interlinked, and action in one sea or one policy area with a direct or indirect impact on the sea may have positive or negative effects on other seas and policy areas.

African maritime domain provides a lifeline and a means of live hood for various communities (transportation, fishing, marine resources, tourism, wave energy, maritime industry, harbor and transport infrastructures…)

It is against this background that the Commission pays a particular attention to the matter of maritime security and safety in Africa.

These last years, there was a tendency to approach the question only from the angle of piracy off the coast of Somalia. World attention on piracy off the coast of Somalia has, for instance, diverted attention from the growing threat of attacks off West Africa. The International Maritime Bureau (IBM) informs that whilst 111 attacks occurred off the coast of Somalia in 2008, more than 100 pirate attacks had taken place in 2008 off West Africa.

The Commission actively participates in many of the initiatives underway to comprehensively address this phenomenon, to include the International Conference on Piracy held in Nairobi, in December 2008, the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) established in January 2009 pursuant to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008), the IMO-led Djibouti Code of Conduct adopted in Djibouti in January 2009. The Commission also actively participated in the International Symposium on Piracy held in July 2010 in the Seychelles. Tomorrow, Samuel, our lead expert in the field, will go to Mauritius to take part in the 2nd Regional Conference on Piracy scheduled to take place on 6-7 October 2010.

I personally contributed in the panel discussion organized during the Sixty-fourth UN General Assembly Informal Meeting of the Plenary on Piracy held in New York on 14 May 2010. At that meeting, I stressed the following points :

Piracy had evolved in scope and in involvement of larger criminal networks and had become a threat to efforts to bring an end to conflict in Somalia and beyond. The situation called for a comprehensive approach to addressing poverty and instability, including strategies for effective environmental conservation and fisheries management. It called for a truly holistic approach covering the political, security and humanitarian tracts. The efforts to prosecute piracies should also include the issue of illegal fishing and toxic dumping. Perpetrators of those crimes were no lesser criminals than the pirates. One good and practical idea was to encourage Governments, mostly from developed countries, whose citizens were involved in fishing off the coast of Somalia and other African countries to pay license fees to the Governments of these countries, including the TFG.

It is worth recognizing other significant initiatives to include (i) «NATO counter piracy operations» (Ocean Shield) off the Horn of Africa, (ii) the «African Partnership Station» (APS), designed by U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa to foster enhanced maritime safety and security in Africa, and (iii) the European Union Naval Force (NAVFOR) Somalia – «Operation ATALANTA».

The fact that NATO's Operation Ocean Shield and EU NAVFOR's Operation Atalanta have both been extended until December 2012, indicates that they are not expecting piracy off the coast of Somalia to be resolved in the near future. The United Nations Security Council on 27 April 2010 unanimously adopted the Russian-sponsored Resolution 1918 (2010), which called on all states to criminalize piracy under their domestic law. The Resolution also asked the UN Secretary-General to report to the Security Council within three months on "possible options to further the aim of prosecuting and imprisoning persons responsible for acts of piracy." This indicates that the axis of effort is towards prosecution.

The Commission on its part continues to believe that the issue of piracy is a symptom of the broader challenge to peace and security in the Horn of Africa. Any effort to address piracy in isolation from its wider context would not produce results.

The need for Africa to address these cross-cutting challenges by developing an Integrated Maritime Security Strategy is in line with the solemn declaration of the Heads of State and Government at their Second Extraordinary Session on 28 February 2004 in Sirte, Libya, which decided on the development of a Common African Defense and Security Policy (CADSP) for the AU.

Council will recall the Decision adopted by the 13th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (Assembly) held in Sirte, Libya, from 1st to 3 July 2009 on the matter of maritime security and safety in Africa.

On 31 August 2009, the special session of the Assembly of the Union on the consideration and resolution of conflicts in Africa, held in Tripoli, Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, adopted the Plan of Action which recommended the convening of an international conference to discuss the adoption of an international convention on maritime piracy and its underlying causes as well as the promotion of international cooperation.

An AU Charter for maritime transport has also been adopted, which constitutes an additional legal and operational tool to promote Africa's collective interests in this particular area.

As a follow-up to that decision, the Commission organized, from 6-7 April 2010, here at the AU Headquarters a workshop of Experts on maritime security and safety, from all Member States.

This workshop provided an opportunity to review the challenges facing Africa in terms of maritime security and safety. In this respect, and in the context of relevant national legislations and international conventions and instruments, emphasis was dully placed on issues relating to «illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing» (IUU Fishing), dumping of toxic wastes, arms and drugs trafficking, human trafficking, oil bunkering, piracy and armed robbery at sea, etc.

This workshop stressed on the need to assess the broad spectrum of current marine activities, and take full advantage of the potential for wealth creation from sustainable governance of the whole maritime domain of Africa. This workshop also stressed on the need, as the case of Somalia clearly demonstrates, to promote holistic approaches to address the issue of piracy. Such approaches should be informed by a proper understanding of this phenomenon and the context in which it is taking place, and involve both security measures at sea and efforts to promote land-based initiatives, i.e. enhancement structures of governance and protection of the livelihoods of coastal populations.

Participants to this workshop agreed on the crucial need for development of a sound Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIM-Strategy), articulating a multilayered long-term common vision and addressing aspects relating to maritime security and safety comprehensively, focusing on wealth creation from sustainable governance of Africa's seas and oceans.

The Commission is working towards the implementation of the conclusions and recommendation of the workshop. Efforts are underway to put together a comprehensive «AU Maritime Security and Safety Strategy», in line with the decision adopted by the 15th Ordinary Session of the Assembly held from 25 to 27 July 2010 in Kampala, Uganda, whereby the Assembly lent its support to the efforts being undertaken by the Commission including the elaboration of this continental integrated strategy for the management of the continent's maritime domain and stressed, in this context, the importance of adequate protection of the African maritime domain and that of Island States in particular, against all organized crimes, as well as illegal fishing and dumping of toxic waste.

I thank you.