

The Indian Ocean – A Maritime Region on the Rise
Speech by EEAS Deputy Secretary General Maciej Popowski

[Panel 1: The Indian Ocean on the World's Centre Stage (5 panelists) 09.45-11.15]

Ministers, Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Thank you very much for inviting me to speak at this conference. First and foremost I would like to express my gratitude to the German Federal Foreign Office, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung for organising this conference. It is indicative of the fact that maritime security is high on the political agenda. Not only in Europe but also in Africa, the Americas and in Asia. Worldwide. The African Union, for example, will convene its first ever Maritime Security and Development Summit in Togo later this year.

2. In my intervention I would like to address two issues: firstly, the EU approach to maritime security, and secondly, I would like to share with you some examples of concrete and successful international cooperation in the Indian Ocean. I personally have had the pleasure of chairing the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia since January 2014 and I have become convinced of the effectiveness of this extraordinary motor of international and institutional innovation.

3. But as I have been requested to address the issue of the Indian Ocean taking the world's centre stage, let me begin by asking a simple question: "Why is the Gulf of Aden important?" "Easy" you will say, "the Gulf of Aden is important because of its strategic location in the network of international maritime trade routes." And that answer is of course correct. From an EU perspective, however, there is another reason why the Gulf of Aden is so important: over the past few years, the Gulf of Aden has become a key arena for international cooperation in the fight against piracy. Last week, close to 70 warships from over 20 nations were present in the Gulf of Aden. Through Operation Atalanta, the EU cooperates operationally with South Korea, China, Japan, India, the US, NATO and regional navies, and does so on a daily basis. And, as you all know, good cooperation at sea often has a positive spill-over into other policy areas as well.

The EU approach to maritime security

4. Now let me turn to the European Union and the EU's approach to maritime security. The European Union Member States last year endorsed the first ever EU Maritime Security Strategy and an associated Action Plan. The EU Maritime Security Strategy is an ***inter-agency strategy***. Europe has close to 400 civil and military agencies, organisations and departments that, in one way or another, are involved in or are responsible for maritime security. Bringing this diverse group of stakeholders into a single, integrated strategic framework and approach is one of the core objectives of the strategy.

5. The EU Maritime Security Strategy and the Action Plan develop a ***cross-sectoral approach*** to maritime security. The term "cross-sectoral" refers to actions or cooperation between and across (policy) sectors and instruments, both civil and military, at national and at EU-level. It is acknowledged that modern maritime risks and threats are multifaceted and can have implications across many (maritime) sectors involving different policies, strategies and instruments. In order to respond effectively to this type of risk or threat, the EU's response should mirror this multifaceted nature, hence the need to integrate policies, strategies and instruments into a single strategic cross-sectoral and civ-mil framework. The Action Plan contains over 130 actions that, with their combined potential effect, can alter the organisation of maritime security in Europe forever.

6. A second characteristic of the EU MSS is that it is a ***partnership document***. Europe is built on cooperation and inclusiveness, which is why we put a premium on a multilateral approach. A cornerstone principle of the EU approach to maritime security is what we refer to as effective "***Maritime Multilateralism***". To address the main challenges in the global maritime domain, we will have to cooperate more and more extensively with partner nations and organisations in a cross-border, cross-sector and cross-cutting fashion. The EU MSS strengthens the EU's capacity for cooperation – our ability to work with international partners to address common challenges.

The Contact Group on Piracy

7. My second topic is the Contact Group on Piracy. It was established in 2009 to coordinate maritime and naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean. The Contact Group brings together all stakeholders, public and private, civil and military, that are affected by Somali-based piracy. It is a unique and inclusive construct that represents a new international governance model for truly comprehensive approaches to complex problems. As such it is a governance and crisis-response model that deserves further study and wider exposure.

8. The Contact Group has been instrumental in bringing the number of successful pirate attacks down to zero. The EU, NATO and the US – as those responsible for three independent naval counter-piracy operations in the Indian Ocean – have found each other to be natural allies in the Indian Ocean through the establishment of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction Mechanism, which has led to far better coordination of operational deployments in the Indian Ocean. By voluntarily agreeing to coordinate operational deployments, the three partner operations have improved the overall operational effectiveness of the many warships in the region, including of the so-called "independent deployers". It is my firm belief that we should learn the lessons from the Indian Ocean and apply these in addressing challenges elsewhere.

9. It gives me great pleasure to see that Mr Jean-Claude de l'Estrac, Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission, is participating in this Conference as well and I would not like to miss this opportunity to acknowledge and congratulate him personally, as well as the IOC, on their commitment and involvement in making the Indian Ocean a safer place.

10. Before finishing allow me to mention two other innovative examples of cooperation in the Indian Ocean: the "Smart Fish" programme, supported by the European Commission and executed by the five Indian Ocean Commission member states in the Southern Indian Ocean, and the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean project, "CRIMARIO".

11. It is a fact that the small Indian Ocean island states of Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar and Comoros, as well as the French island of Réunion, have enormous EEZs, and few resources to protect their natural wealth. So they had to be smart and decided to combine their resources, reaching a political agreement to create a combined EEZ and establish a Joint Fisheries Patrol Programme. This is, by all standards, a best practice. It is quite a paradox that Europe now faces the challenge of trying to import to Europe a best practice that we've helped to create outside Europe.

12. The objective of the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean project, or "CRIMARIO", is to improve maritime security by strengthening the interoperability of existing information sharing and communication networks in the Wider Indian Ocean. CRIMARIO is based on the belief that information sharing is necessary for improved Maritime Situational Awareness. CRIMARIO aims to reinforce the level of cooperation among the countries of the Indian Ocean Rim and connect the region to the global information sharing network, from the Western Indian Ocean coastal countries to India, Sri Lanka and all the way to South-East Asia.

Concluding remarks

13. Ladies and gentlemen, it is too early to say whether the 21st century will be a maritime century, but what we can say is that the global maritime domain – as a strategic space – will offer unprecedented opportunities and challenges as an arena for international cooperation.

14. The fight against piracy in the Indian Ocean has taught us how, on a voluntary basis, we can coordinate operational deployments to the benefit of all involved. It has taught us that, to create sustainable solutions, we not only need a coalition of states but that we need a comprehensive coalition of stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, brought together in an inclusive approach.

15. The Indian Ocean stands out, within that global maritime domain, as an arena for international cooperation. It is an ***Ocean of Opportunity*** and it is in that vein that I am convinced that for the Indian Ocean the best days are yet to come.

Thank you for your attention.

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