

EN
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Answer given by Vice-President Mogherini
on behalf of the Commission
(20.3.2018)

The Commission is routinely made aware of reports of alleged violence occurring on the high seas in the Central Mediterranean region. Whilst the Commission is not in the position to confirm the veracity of such reports, any acts of violence in the Central Mediterranean, if proven, are both deplorable and clearly in breach of international maritime law.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States have progressively laid out a stronger policy response to tackle illicit activities and related violence in this part of the Mediterranean.

In addition to European Border and Coast Guard Agency's (EBCGA) efforts through Operation Themis, EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia continues to operate on the high seas in the Central Mediterranean thereby providing a significant contribution to the improvement of maritime security.

Initially designed to counter human trafficking and smuggling by taking action against the criminal networks and disrupting their business model, Operation Sophia's mandate was broadened in June 2016, to include two supporting tasks, namely capacity building and training of the Libyan Navy and Coastguard, and contributing to the implementation of the United Nations (UN) arms embargo in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2292. This addition to the original mandate was underpinned by the objective to contribute to the return of stability, both off and along the coast of Libya. On the one hand, the contribution to the fight against weapons smuggling on the high seas, as defined under UNSCR 2292 (2016) and 2357 (2017), aims at preventing the security situation from deteriorating further. On the other hand, the decision to support the building of a Libyan coastguard capacity aims at enhancing the Libyan Navy and Coastguard's ability to disrupt smuggling and trafficking activities, perform search and rescue activities and improve overall security in Libyan territorial waters.

In line with this approach, on 25 July 2017, the Council prolonged Operation Sophia for a further 17 months until 31 December 2018 and amended the mandate inter alia to conduct new surveillance activities and gather information on illegal trafficking of oil exports from Libya in accordance with UNSCR 2146 (2014) and 2362 (2017), as well as to enhance the possibilities for sharing information on human trafficking with Member States' law enforcement agencies, as well as EBCGA and European Police Office (EUROPOL).

The EU is engaging in dialogue on fisheries issues with all non-EU Mediterranean countries through its MedFish4Ever initiative. Sixteen riparian states have signed the Malta MedFish4Ever Declaration¹ to work towards safeguarding the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources, protecting the environment, promoting blue growth and reinforcing regional cooperation.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/inseparable/en/medfish4ever#quicktabs-medfish4ever=6>