Mission

The European Union is concerned with the effect of Somali-based piracy and armed robbery at sea off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean. Somali piracy is characterised by criminals taking control of vessels transiting the High Risk Areas in the Region and extorting ransom money for the crew, the vessel and cargo; this bearing all features of organised crime. Crews held hostage by pirates often face a prolonged period of captivity, the average being 5 months but some hostages have been held for over four years. Moreover, piracy impacts on international trade and maritime security and on the economic activities and security of countries in the region.

As a result, and as part of the Comprehensive Approach to Somalia, in December 2008 the EU launched the European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia – Operation Atalanta.

EU NAVFOR operates within the framework of the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and in accordance with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) and International Law in response to the rising levels of piracy and armed robbery off the Horn of Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean.

Mandate

Under EU Council Joint Action 851, which is based on UN resolutions, Operation Atalanta:

- Protects vessels of the World Food Programme (WFP), African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other vulnerable shipping.
- Deters and disrupts piracy and armed robbery at sea.
- Monitors fishing activities off the coast of Somalia.
- Supports other EU missions and international organisations working to strengthen maritime security and capacity in the region.

On 21 November 2014 the Council of the EU extended the Mandate of Operation Atalanta until December 2016.
The EU Comprehensive Approach against piracy in the Horn of Africa

EU NAVFOR is one part of the EU’s Comprehensive Approach, tackling both current symptoms and root causes of the problem. Together, EU NAVFOR, EUCAP Nestor and the EU Training Mission Somalia (EUTM Somalia) form a coherent, integrated CSDP package supporting the EU’s Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, which guides the EU’s multi-faceted engagement in the Horn of Africa.

Judicial international cooperation to end impunity

Piracy has to be understood as organised criminal activity occurring at sea. It is organised on land, with kidnapping crews and ships for ransom as the business model. Prosecution of piracy suspects is a key component of the overall fight against piracy. The EU NAVFOR seeks, where possible, a legal finish. Transfers of suspect pirates for trial to competent authorities remain necessary to put an end to impunity in the Indian Ocean.

The EU is assisting the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in their work to establish sufficient conditions to allow fair and efficient piracy trials in Somalia. The EU is the largest contributor to the UNODC counter-piracy programme. In the short term, transfers for trial from EU NAVFOR ships remain necessary to put an end to impunity in the Indian Ocean.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Area of Operation: Southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean, This is an area approximately 1.5 times the size of mainland Europe.

Headquarters: Northwood (near London), United Kingdom

Starting date: December 2008

Operation Commander: Major General Martin Smith

Troop strength: The composition of EU NAVFOR changes constantly due to the frequent rotation of units and varies according to size of warships. However, it typically comprises of approximately 1200 personnel, 4 – 6 warships and 2 – 3 Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft. For currently deployed units, please see the EU Naval Force website.

Operation budget: Military assets and personnel are provided by the contributing states with the running costs and personnel costs being met on a national basis. In addition, there is a common budget of EUR 7.35 million for 2015 and 2016 agreed and monitored by the Athena Committee of Member States.

Contributing states: Participation in EU NAVFOR goes beyond EU Member States. Norway was the first non-EU country to contribute to the Operation, with a warship in 2009. Thereafter, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine have provided staff officers to the Operational Headquarters (OHQ) and Force Headquarters (FHQ). Ukraine contributed a warship early in 2014, and New Zealand contributed an MPRA asset later the same year.

The EU Naval Force has made a significant contribution to the reduction in piracy: In 2011, 174 merchant vessels were attacked and 25 ships pirated with 736 seafarers held hostage. In 2013, 7 ships have been attacked, none pirated. In 2014 two ships were attacked. Still, 30 crew members remain in captivity.

For more key facts and figures, please visit the EU NAVFOR website.

The European Union’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) includes the gradual framing of a common defence policy which might in time lead to a common defence. The CSDP allows the Union to develop its civilian and military capacities for crisis management and conflict prevention at international level, thus helping to maintain peace and international security, in accordance with the United Nations Charter. The CSDP includes a strong conflict prevention component.

Based in Brussels, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) is the permanent structure responsible for an autonomous operational conduct of civilian CSDP operations. Under the political control and strategic direction of the Political and Security Committee and the overall authority of the High Representative, the CPCC ensures the effective planning and conduct of civilian CSDP crisis management operations, as well as the proper implementation of all mission-related tasks.