



## **ECSC and ETF call for ambitious Gulf of Guinea Strategy to curb growing piracy threat**

On 11 of September 2013, President Barroso held his state of the union speech. He underlined the fact that the EU must be big on big issues and small on small issues. He stressed during his address that in his vision for the EU, one of the big issues is the EU's commitment to development and humanitarian aid and a strong security and defence policy. ECSC and ETF very much welcome this statement, particularly in light of the on-going efforts to curb maritime piracy and armed robbery at sea.

Operation ATALANTA and the EU's coordinated efforts in the Gulf of Aden is a prime example of what the EU can achieve. Over the last four years, the amount of successful attacks has been severely decreased and the amount of kidnapped seafarers reduced from 850 to 80. This is of course 80 too many, but nonetheless, it has proven that the EU truly possesses a unique toolbox for the fight against piracy. Indeed, combining the European Union's military, trade, development, diplomatic and legal instruments has made a difference. The shipowners' commitment to reporting attacks, registering upon arrival in the zone, use of BMPs and in some cases of armed guards provided the other side of the pliers. Whilst currently under control, the situation in Somalia is of course reversible and we must not become complacent. This is why ECSC and ETF strongly call on the EU and Member States to prolong operation ATALANTA until 2016 and continue capacity building efforts undertaken on-shore.

Unfortunately, other piracy hot spots are developing and the situation in the Gulf of Guinea is particularly worrying. Indeed, attacks are now taking place far outside territorial waters and extreme violence is used. The problem is acute, complex and reaches beyond the seafarers and shipowners. The poor security situation imposes additional, high costs on African imports and exports and thus jeopardises jobs and economic activity in African States.

Whilst the solution applied in the Gulf of Aden may not be suitable for the Gulf of Guinea, ECSC and ETF strongly believes that the European Union's toolbox will be key to solve this growing problem. Long-term solutions must be found on shore, however, the security situation is such that action must be taken today. ECSC and ETF call for:

### **International military presence outside territorial waters**

Whilst most of the attacks take place in territorial waters, increasingly attempts are made in international waters. The international community must protect the security of seafarers and vessels outside territorial waters in West Africa, limiting the scope of operation of pirates.

### **Proper protection from the local navy in territorial waters**

Inside territorial waters, ECSC and ETF are calling for protection from the national navies, coast guards or police and ask the EU to encourage the States to take up their responsibility. The EU should contribute by funding capacity building to provide high quality local naval capabilities. EU financial aid must be made available to local States to ensure regional cooperation, capacity building and governance issues. The EU's CRIMGO initiative (the Critical Maritime Routes in the Gulf of Guinea) should be a useful leverage in this context.



### **A well-functioning monitoring and reporting system**

Reporting is hardly taking place as there is no reliable and trustworthy system to report into. The lack of overview and information leads to an underestimation of the situation on the ground. Therefore, a reporting and monitoring system must be developed which guarantees shipowners that the provided information is kept confidential and protected, goes to the right persons and flows into appropriate action.

### **Investigating the use of Private Armed Guards on board vessels**

Armed guards may not necessarily be the solution in the Gulf of Guinea, but nonetheless, the reality forces shipowners to use a variety of self-protection measures, including the option to employ private armed guards on board their vessels. The EU and Member States should explore the possibility of bilateral discussions with the concerned African States to ensure that shipowners can use quality private armed guards on board their vessels when they decide it is necessary, and to clarify the legal framework applicable, in particular to officers and masters to avoid placing them in harm's way.

ECSA and ETF believe that the combination of these elements should be addressed in a comprehensive EU strategy for the Gulf of Guinea. Both organisations strongly urge all relevant Commission Directorate Generals and the European External Action Service to take the developments in West Africa very seriously and address this piracy hotspot before it has a chance to grow into such a high threat for seafarers and shipowners alike that trade patterns with West Africa are irremediably affected.

In parallel, ECSA and ETF will jointly work towards a set of best practices for navigating this region including guarantees that shipowners and seafarers are adequately prepared (psychologically, technically and in terms of necessary insurances as well as legally protected), that BMPs are applied and that reporting takes place.

For further information please contact:

The ETF: Philippe Alfonso (tel: +32 2 284 45 84 / e-mail: [p.alfonso@etf-europe.org](mailto:p.alfonso@etf-europe.org)) or the ECSA: Christophe Tytgat (tel: Phone +32 2 510 61 29 / e-mail: [christophe.tytgat@ecsa.eu](mailto:christophe.tytgat@ecsa.eu))