

Brussels, 11 March 2010

The Commission urges the Member States to ensure measures to prevent maritime piracy are applied

The European Commission today adopted a recommendation addressed to the Member States to ensure the effective application of measures for self-protection and for preventing acts of piracy and armed attacks against ships. These measures – known as 'Best Management Practices' (BMP) – have been adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Siim Kallas, Commission Vice-President responsible for transport said: 'Piracy poses a terrible threat to the men and women on board vessels and is a real danger for the maritime sector and for world trade. Crews should be fully protected against acts of piracy and their employers must ensure that they are able to work with optimum safety when they are in areas with a high risk of piracy. The implementation of prevention and self-protection measures developed by the industry and by the IMO are useful tools for avoiding or to help counter pirate attacks.'

Given the increase in piracy off the coast of Somalia, the IMO has adopted a set of measures in the form of circulars which lay down specific measures for dealing with pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. These measures have been drawn up on the basis of the BMP which were developed by shipping operators¹ themselves.

The situation off the coast of Somalia is particularly worrying. At the moment (9 March 2010), 11 ships and 183 seamen are being held captive by pirates. The EU NAVFOR-ATALANTA military operation – the first naval operation conducted under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) – is helping to deter, prevent and suppress acts of piracy and armed robbery off the coast of Somalia. As part of this operation, the Maritime Security Centre of the Horn of Africa (MSC-HOA) enables shipping companies and ships to register with the MSC-HOA before sailing through the Gulf of Aden so that they can be given information about the area and be tracked by ATALANTA forces.

¹ International Association of Independent Tanker Owners (INTERTANKO); International Chamber of Shipping (ICS); Oil Companies International Marine Forum (OCIMF) Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO) Society of International Gas Tanker and Terminal Operators (SIGTTO); International Association of Dry Cargo Ship Owners (INTERCARGO); International Group of Protection and Indemnity Clubs (IGP&I) Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA); International Union of Marine Insurers (IUMI); Joint War Committee (JWC) & Joint Hull Committee (JHC) International Maritime Bureau (IMB); International Transport Workers Federation (ITF).

Unfortunately, about a quarter of the vessels of all states passing through the area are still failing to register with the Maritime Security Centre of the Horn of Africa. Such vessels are therefore not covered by the measures implemented to ensure their passage through that area.

For that reason, and in order to facilitate the effective and harmonised application of the preventive measures, which have been warmly welcomed in international circles, the Commission is now calling on Member States to ensure that their maritime operators are aware of all these measures for self-protection and prevention of acts of piracy.

Prominent among these measures is a reminder to register on the MSC-HOA's website (<http://www.mschoa.org>) before transiting the Gulf of Aden. Member States are also asked to check that ships sailing in dangerous areas have enough able-bodied crew members on board.

The Commission will ensure the follow-up of this recommendation with the Member States during the meetings of its Maritime Safety Committee (MARSEC) which are held every two months.

In view of the threat and the serious consequences which piracy poses for seamen, the Commission organised on 3 March 2010 a seminar bringing together leading personalities from the shipping industry, including seafarers' representatives, politicians, international organisations and seafarers' associations. http://ec.europa.eu/transport/maritime/events/2010_03_03_piracy_en.htm. The seminar made it possible to raise the extreme importance of careful preparation of crews, of greater exchange of information and of cooperation in the waters at risk as well as the need to provide social support for seafarers and their families during and after any period of captivity.