

## **SHADE MED Meeting (1-2016)**

### **Welcome Remarks**

Rome 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Dear Friends, good morning.

On behalf of the Chief of the Italian Navy, Admiral Giuseppe De Giorgi, I welcome you to Rome, at the Italian Navy Fleet Command Headquarters, CINCNAV.

The Italian Navy is pleased to host and chair the second Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean Sea (SHADE-MED) meeting.

The first SHADE-MED, held in Rome by EUNAVFOR MED last November, was attended by 80 representatives from 36 different organizations and bodies, thus confirming the interest for this initiative. This meeting ended with the intention “*to become a regular rendez-vous for the acting community to explain their actions and coordinate efforts in the Mediterranean*”.

Today, the presence of representatives from many different organizations – Governments and Armed Forces of the coastal States of the Mediterranean, International Organisations, such as the UN and the EU, NATO, Shipping Companies, NGOs – proves a common sensitivity and shared willingness to move forward in this initiative.

The Mediterranean region is marked by significant sociopolitical transformations, deep religious divisions, and growing uncertainties and instabilities. The Syrian enduring crisis, the uncertain future of Libya, the evolution of terrorism, are just a few of the main factors - of which we are all aware - impacting stability in the Mediterranean.

One of the consequences of the above-mentioned aspects is represented by the enormous and unprecedented migration flow. The latter does not represent a new phenomenon: the search for safety or economic security has pushed migrants to

Europe for decades. However, the EU is now facing the biggest migratory pressure since post-WWII.

In 2015 the flow of migrants has increased dramatically with more than one million (1.015.078) arrivals by sea, and an estimated 4.000 between dead/missing persons. In 2016, we have counted almost 200.000 (184.162)<sup>1</sup> arrivals by sea. Figures announce, therefore, that the irregular migration across the Mediterranean Sea will continue at a significant rate, taking into consideration that the overall situation in the EU immediate neighbourhood is unlikely to improve anytime soon.

Currently, the Eastern Mediterranean route is under pressure with the vast majority of migrants arriving on several Greek islands, mainly on Lesbos (in 2015 we counted more than 850.000 arrival by sea, 17 times the numbers in 2014).

To mitigate such a problem, expected to become even more serious and complex, the EU and Turkey have recently agreed upon a comprehensive plan, which opens a safe and legal route to the EU for Syrian refugees, while substantially reducing the Aegean smuggling route.

One of the consequences could, however, be an increase in migration flows to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route, which is still used by the well-established Libyan smuggling networks (in 2015 we counted more than 150.000 arrival by sea to Italy). The latter keep exploiting Libya's political instability and inability to control its territory and borders.

The Mediterranean Sea continues to provide fertile ground for criminal networks and human traffickers. In addition to that, there is also the risk that the Islamic State (IS) could smuggle terrorists into Europe, hidden among migrants crossing the Mediterranean. Also for the foreign fighters, the idea of concealing among large groups of migrants might seem to have some appeal.

To face such complex challenges, many players are shouldering responsibilities in the implementation of different operations in the Central Mediterranean:

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<sup>1</sup> Fonte: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>

- EUNAVFORMED Sophia operation, aiming at tackling the root causes of illegal migration, by disrupting the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks;
- FRONTEX border control Operation TRITON;
- the Italian Navy Operation MARE SICURO, with the aim to increase the Maritime Security in the area.

14 ships are continuously operating in the above mentioned operations. This gives us the idea of the efforts provided.

In addition to that:

- NATO is supporting the International Community to stem illegal trafficking and illegal migration in the Aegean Sea, through intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance;
- merchant ships continues their significant involvement in rescue operations;
- civilian organizations continues their engagement to provide assistance to alleviate suffering of migrants.

There is, therefore, the need to foster better understanding between civilian and military organizations involved in responding to these complex challenges and to look for tangible options to de-conflict and, where possible, coordinate efforts.

Hence, capitalizing on the efficient use of all available resources, and the development of synergies in the overall framework of outreach activities and operations in the Mediterranean are key factors.

I therefore believe that if we increasingly invest in the SHADE-MED Initiative, we will eventually improve the overall effectiveness of our operations and struggles in the Mediterranean Sea.

The SHADE-MED meeting, is scheduled over the next two working days. The morning plenary session will feature some presentations aimed at gaining a better understanding of the different actors' perspectives, missions, and activities.

In the afternoon and tomorrow morning, there will be eight Thematic Working Groups, which I believe can be considered the meeting's driving factors to discuss issues requiring specific attention, such as Communications, Legal, Operations, to name a few.

Once again, welcome to Rome. I hope that this meeting will be driven by frank, robust and constructive discussions, in order to make the SHADE-MED Initiative more effective and successful.

I wish you a pleasant stay and fruitful meeting.

Thank you for your attention.