



OPERATION EUNAVFOR MED IRINI

Rome – 26 November 2020

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege this morning to welcome you all to the ninth edition of the Shared Awareness and De-confliction in the Mediterranean Conference.

This event allows all the people connected to reflect about the challenges of the Region and possible future perspectives.

This year's most remarkable phenomenon has undoubtedly been the Covid-19 pandemic that has caused so many victims around the world, at the same time deeply affecting the people's life as well as economies of the whole world.

So the theme of this year's SHADE MED - "Challenges for cooperation in the Mediterranean after the global pandemic" – will help shed light on different possible scenarios and, through high-level speakers, will pave the way for possible new initiatives in common for the benefit of all actors that have interests and share objectives related to this strategic sea.

I really care about this international seminar which, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, will take place online.

For two intense days, a virtual arena with more than 250 participants from 30 countries, 50 organizations and 25 international journalists, all interested in the Mediterranean area, will be connected with the headquarters of the European Union Operation IRINI that I have the honour to command.

Hopefully, the technology will assist us to follow the event without problems.

The effects of the pandemic are likely to continue for a while, as its impact has already changed the way we live and interact with each other.

This is visible also in the Mediterranean basin, which represents a fundamental global cross-road in the world.

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The Mare Nostrum is a liquid bridge with commercial connections ranging from the Atlantic to the Indo-pacific.

We are talking about an area with a very complex web of interrelations and a very high rate of economic and cultural exchanges among historical and new players.

The Mediterranean is a fulcrum between three continents, each one with own peculiarities. It is a wide meeting point for different cultures, beliefs and societies: a setting for unending migrations since the very beginning of Civilization, as well as a theatre for conflicts.

A universe of differences that, rather than being appreciated for their wealth, ends up too often being a pretext for political, economic and religious clashes.

The stability of the area is an essential element for the Global security.

It is a fact that a great number of the world's crises originate in the Mediterranean basin — the spread of Da'esh, Libya's instability, the Syrian war, tension in Lebanon, terrorist fighters, militias and contractors, the migration crisis and regional contentions.

The “Sea amongst Lands”, as its name implies, includes developments in surrounding regions as the Gulf of Guinea, the Sahel, the Mashrek, the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean.

The basin provides, then, multiple strategic challenges, significantly aggravated by the ongoing pandemic.

It is a space where we are witnessing humanitarian crisis and migration flows, contraction of key sectors as Tourism and Transports, challenges to the Shipping community, rethinking of energy choices, but also considerable changes in information spreading and press freedom.

Therefore, we deem it necessary to think, understand and share ideas on how to deal with the current period and what will follow the pandemic at an economic, social and structural level in the Mediterranean area.

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EUNAVFORMED IRINI is operating right at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea in order to ensure the respect of United Nations' Arms Embargo regarding Libya, but also to stem the illegal flows of oil smuggling, human trafficking and, hopefully soon, train the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy.

IRINI is a part of a process involving political, military, economic and humanitarian tracks agreed last February at the Berlin's Conference. This represents the European Union truly holistic approach to the solution of the long lasting conflict in Libya.

Operation IRINI is not the only player dealing with the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, cooperation should be enhanced with others actors and countries even outside the European Union.

Together we can do much better, not just to address illicit trafficking, but also to preserve the regional economy affected by insecurity of the area.

In the context of Operation IRINI, we have tried to address these issues by adopting several measures, always keeping an impartial, balanced and positive attitude.

However we are aware that there is a lot more to do, at various levels (not only operational) in order to reasonably manage all the historical Mediterranean challenges and those added by Covid-19 pandemic.

IRINI, through the Shade Med Conference, has the ambition to provide a proactive contribution. Remaining equidistant from the parties, we work day by day to guarantee stability and security in the central Mediterranean.

Our future is written in this sea, the cradle of civilization, a blue road for the future, a scenario of challenges and great opportunities that the Covid-19 pandemic obliges us to seize.

It is our job to be effective, proactive and vigilant for the common welfare.

In conclusion, I hope you will enjoy the event and I wish you all fruitful and enriching exchanges during these two days.



OPERATION EUNAVFOR MED IRINI

Now it is a great honour for me to introduce Mr. Josep BORRELL, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy since December 2019.

During his career he was in charge of high-level political positions in Spain and in the European Union.

Josep Borrell was President of the European Parliament from 20 July 2004 until 16 January 2007.

Due to concomitant commitments he cannot be in live connection with us but he sent us the following video-message which was recorded a few days ago but, as you know, operation unfold fast and more events happened.

Thanks to the High Representative, Mr. BORRELL for this significant intervention.

I have the privilege to introduce now General Claudio GRAZIANO, Chairman of the EU Military Committee since 2018.

In his career, he took part in many international operations and was in charge at the highest positions in Italian Army and Defence.

Among others, he was Head of Mission in UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from 2007 to 2010.

General GRAZIANO, Comandante, the floor is yours.

Thanks to the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Graziano for this relevant testimony.

Rear Admiral Fabio Agostini

Operation Commander of

Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI



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