



**The Chairman of the European Union Military  
Committee**



**General Claudio GRAZIANO**

## **Operation IRINI – COC Ceremony**

Time: TBC    Duration: 10'

1/10/21 Rome, COI

\_\_\_\_\_ (highest authority/ies)

Admirals, Generals, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear guests, good morning.

It's really a great pleasure for me to be here in Rome with you, today, to attend this Change of Command Ceremony between Admiral Agostini, the last Commander of Operation SOPHIA and the first Operation Commander of IRINI, and Admiral Turchetto.

First of all, many thanks to Min XY..... / Gen WZ

Our presences here testify of the relevance and the value of this paramount operation in the wider context of the European Union Foreign Policy, but also the overall efforts that the EU is making towards international stability.

I must say that today's event brings back to me very vivid memory of the circumstances and the steep but fast road that lead to the launching of EUNAVFOR MED Operation IRINI, something that will always keep a special place in the history of my professional life.

Between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, we all remember, the overall security situation in many areas of the enlarged Mediterranean Sea degraded rapidly, particularly in Libya, what I've always called the bottleneck for the many crises affecting Africa, specifically in Sahel.

It was indeed something of major concern for the whole International Community and the European continent, with the arrival of the first wave of the pandemic, at the same time, complicating everything.

Recognizing the stability in Libya as a key requirement for the fate of the whole region, the EU answered the call of the United Nations, by achieving consensus in Berlin for a new operation to be launched in the Mediterranean Sea, terminating the previous Operation, Sophia.

Truth is that this was not achieved without some harsh debates, especially in relation to the so called "pull factor". In spite of that, the new Operation was launched within weeks, during the peak of the COVID 19 pandemic- an achievement per se!

It was truly a key moment for the EU, to consolidate its presence in the Mediterranean region, endorsing itself as a reliable Security Provider, in full neutrality for the parties involved in the Libyan crises, mitigating at the same time the assertiveness of third states or other malign actors trying to fill empty spaces...

But above all, IRINI represented the demonstration that when the EU Member States get together as one, they can really make the difference.

The Operation had as primary task to enforce the arms embargo, monitor illicit exports from Libya of oil products.

Not less relevant were the objectives of supporting Capacity Building and training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy, and contributing to the disruption of human smuggling and trafficking networks.

Challenging tasks, indeed, also in light of the shortfalls that Operation IRINI had to deal with, from the very start.

In fact, while considerable results have been achieved, the Operation Commander had to personally deal, with our support but often as a very first responder, with a series of shortages, in terms of assets and personnel.

And this in spite of the continuous requests to Member States, made at all levels, like from the Military Committee, where I personally conveyed, in any possible circumstance, the urgent call to fulfil the requirements of the Operation and support its credibility.

Nevertheless, Fabio, you, your staff and the crews on board, have been able to achieve truly remarkable results, ensuring the fulfilment of the mandate at its very best.

Almost 4000 hailings, 20 boardings and 180 friendly approaches are impressive numbers.

The “pull factor” that someone feared, never really happened.

And the effectiveness of the Operation is proven by the evidences that the smuggling of weapons and oil at sea has been disrupted.

On the side of this, a countless list of engagements to support or improve the Operations, with EU Member States, first, but also with EUBAM Libya, UNSMIL, DG NEAR, UNODC, FRONTEX, EUROPOL, SATCEN and the UN Panel of Experts, Universities and civil society associations.

Fabio, if I must recall one symbolic moment during this period, I would definitely mention Royal Diamond 7.

For those who may not know, Royal Diamond 7 is the name of a tanker which was involved in the first boarding and diversion of a vessel suspected of breaking the embargo on Libya.

Indeed, it was the first ever diversion activity run by the EU, in its history, demonstrating its commitment, along with the capacity expressed by our crews at sea.

I remember very clearly the endless phone calls and messages we exchanged during those days...

In the end this turned out to be a very successful event, but which brought to light few but very critical shortfalls, like not disposing immediately of a port of diversion, something that could have

dragged us into an unbearable failure (*and was eventually solved thanks to the offer of one MS*).

The event involving Royal Diamond 7, though, was paramount to demonstrate one key point: Europe has all the potential to successfully act for the security of its own citizens, territories and interests, even projecting security where it is most needed, like in the case of Libya, addressing the root causes of those problems that could eventually reverberate on us.

But we must be ready to exploit, our potential!

As the President of the EU Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen, said it clearly in her recent speech for the State of The Union: what is the reason to possess a strong capacity, if you are not ready or willing to use it?

In a world that demands more EU, with NATO and the US redefining their role, it is time for us, as Europeans, to meet our level of ambition, filling the gap between words and deeds, demonstrating with concrete actions that we are capable and ready to assume our responsibilities to contribute global security.

In partnership with our traditional allies, as a solid pillar of the Transatlantic Alliance.

But also in Strategic Autonomy, because time will come when the EU will need to act alone. And we shall not be caught by surprise, but have the capacity and the freedom to intervene

without the help of others, for defending our citizens and our interests.

This is why we look forward to the full support of MS to fulfil all the auspices expressed by EU top leadership, like the need – for instance – of a credible EU autonomous Force, made of land, air and maritime elements, and all strategic enablers, capable to support security decisions in crisis management with convincing and immediate reactions.

Once more, Fabio, grazie di tutto.

On behalf of the Military Committee, fair winds and following seas in your next endeavour.

Admiral Turchetto.

You engage today in at least two challenging tasks.

First, to replace Adm Agostini, maintaining high the standards your predecessor has set, in a journey that is far from being over, or smooth!

But the second is to keep up the great effort in fulfilling IRINI's mandate, for which we must indeed continue to increase our overall engagement.

First by ensuring that the Operation can count on all necessary assets, in particular ships and personnel.

Then, by further strengthening the Operation, enhancing our presence, in particular for what concerns Capacity Building and

the training of the Libyan Navy and Coast Guard, a fundamental step to allow the local government to deal in autonomy with many of its own security issues.

For the benefit of Libya, but also for the security of the Mediterranean region, it's absolutely no time to celebrate victory, or even lower the guard, now!

As IRINI remains a tangible demonstration that Europe can decide and act. With the full support of its Member States, obviously!

For these task, Stefano, you can fully count on us!

We will do our very best to put you in the optimal condition for accomplishing your mission.

To you also, fair winds and following seas!

Thank you all.