

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Venizelos' intervention at the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) regarding Maritime Security (Strasbourg, 14 April 2014)

The Greek Presidency has highlighted Maritime Policies as an horizontal thematic priority. Allow me to present to you in detail our aspirations, as well as developments in the process of drafting an EU Maritime Security Strategy, which constitutes a key issue of the whole effort.

For a traditionally maritime nation with many islands and a long coastline, like Greece, sea and maritime activities are an inexhaustible source of growth and prosperity. This is true not only for Greece, but for the whole of the European Union and its citizens.

From this perspective, maritime security is a broader issue, which inevitably includes unhindered conduct of sea-borne trade, maritime transport, the exploitation of natural and marine and submarine resources, addressing potential threats from criminal activities at sea, such as piracy, terrorism, organized crime, illegal migration. Maritime security also includes safety of ports, energy supply, tourism, protection against illegal fishing, protection of the environment and of the sea and coastal ecosystems.

Our aim is for the EU Maritime Security Strategy to broaden the so far one-dimensional perspective of maritime security, which is now somehow military and police oriented, by including the following:

1. enhancing the economic growth and competitiveness of the European economies,
2. unhindered conduct of trade and transport by sea,
3. energy security,
4. port security,
5. security of the EU external borders,
6. securing biodiversity
7. a very crucial element, also according to the relevant Commission/EEAS Communication, into which the competent Commissioner, Maria Damanaki, has put enormous effort, is the promotion of the importance of full compliance with UNCLOS and of the potential for growth that maritime zones – such as the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone in the European Union and especially in the Mediterranean – hold.

The publication of the Common Commission/EEAS Communication on European Security Strategy was a critical juncture, as it clearly defined strategic interest and threats to maritime security and proposed ways to enhance synergies among EU member states and with international and regional organizations.

The text of the Communication was used by the Greek Presidency when drafting the first text of the EU Maritime Security Strategy. The Group of Friends of the Presidency

will work on this first draft with a view to the adoption by the Council of the final Strategy in June.

The two successive Mediterranean Presidencies of the Council of the EU, Greece and Italy, was a happy coincidence. Italy and Greece have decided to introduce 2014 as the Year of the Mediterranean for the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This decision lends impetus to the whole effort to draft a Maritime Security Strategy, as both countries attach great importance to maritime policies. The Italian Presidency that follows ours will work on drafting action plans for implementing the EU Maritime Security Strategy.

By the way, I wish to inform you that when Greece assumed the Presidency, we decided together with Spain and Italy to form a group of Mediterranean countries. Portugal, Malta, France and of course Cyprus also participate in this Group. In this context the first meeting of Foreign Ministers of the member states of this Group will take place on Wednesday, April 16, in Alicante, Spain. At this meeting, we will have the opportunity to discuss, with the participation of the Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, issues such as illegal migration and the effective use of funds available through the various financial tools, European and international, for the Mediterranean basin.

Going back to the European Maritime Security Strategy, we do not wish to create new structures or legislative tools; neither do we wish to create new funds.

The EU has already developed a series of policies and means in this field. Our aim is, through the already mentioned broader approach of maritime security, to adopt a well structured, integrated, cross-sectoral approach to the whole issue, implementing lessons learned from policies already applied, for example, in the field of Integrated Maritime Policy and CSDP.

Our goal is thus to take full advantage of and further enhance structures and policies already in place, and not to create new ones, in the context of a cost-efficient approach to the whole issue.

Enhancing solidarity among member states is a major quest of our Strategy, as it will allow us to address security threats more effectively at sea, and it will in turn lead to making full use of the inexhaustible potential that the sea and sea activities hold for growth and employment in Europe today.