



Doc. 11803

27 January 2009

Piracy and hostage-taking on the high seas

Motion for a recommendation

tabled by Ms Birgen KELEŞ and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

In the past year, more than 100 ships, including large cargo ships, oil tankers and even passenger liners were attacked by sea pirates off the Somali coast in the Indian Ocean. In most of these attacks, ships were taken hostage, sometimes with violence, and very high sums of money were requested for letting them go free.

This new phenomenon is a serious threat to security and to free trade. Human life is also often in jeopardy. If casualties have remained relatively low until now, this is due to the caution and responsible attitude of the captains and crews of both the merchant and military vessels.

Sea pirates cannot be treated as ordinary criminals. They are not freedom fighters, they are not enemy troops either. They fall into the category of “terrorists” in the same way as in plane high-jackings or similar other attacks. Sea piracy is an act of terrorism and should be dealt with as such.

There are serious loopholes in the international law for dealing with this situation. At the moment the public opinion is confused about how to tackle the question and political determination is lacking. Military vessels now patrolling the area do not have very clear instructions on what to do in the case of confrontation.

A recent decision of the UN to authorise “hot pursuit” on Somalian soil has no doubt a deterrent effect, but has not materialised yet and its modalities remain vague.

It can reasonably be expected that shipping companies might seek the help of private military and security firms (PMSCs) with some of the inconveniences this might involve, as highlighted in a report on PMSCs currently under preparation in the Assembly.

The Assembly therefore invites the Committee of Ministers to seek a common position on this matter and to contribute to international efforts to stop piracy at sea and its consequences.

Signed (see overleaf)



Signed¹:

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1. EDG: European Democrat Group
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