

Opening address ASEM Seminar on Piracy at Sea

by Mr. Koen Van den Borre on behalf of

the Belgian Secretary of State for Mobility

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Ambassadors,

Commanders,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you a warm welcome here in Brussels at the ASEM Seminar on Piracy at Sea. I wish a special welcome to those delegations that have travelled a long way to get here.

As you all know, prosperity is dependent upon the expansion of economic activities and trade. And for this to happen, commodities, energy goods, intermediate products and finished consumables have to be moved around the world.

The fact of life is that 80 % of the products consumed nowadays travels by sea at one point or another of their cycle. Another fact of life is that the trade between Asia and Europe consists for a large part of merchandise trade. This is to emphasize the crucial importance of seaborne mobility to both our regions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you also all know, seaborne mobility today is seriously threatened by piracy at sea. This age-old phenomenon has taken on dramatic proportions while the globalized economy is more than before dependent upon reliable and predictable maritime communications. Yet, an even more disturbing aspect of this is the danger incurred by the human beings who ensure their operation. The suffering of crews taken hostage and the ordeal of families at home during acts of piracy is not tolerable. In the world of today, piracy at sea should have no place.

To be fair, the international community has acted in the last decade to confront the upsurge of maritime piracy and of unlawful acts. It has faced the phenomenon with the means and the tools at its immediate disposal. To urgently compensate for the vulnerability of commercial shipping it has mobilized military forces. To fill the gaps in the international legal framework, the United Nations Security Council has adopted region specific Resolutions. Specialized Agencies such as the IMO have launched the development of additional understandings, encouraged regional cooperation and promoted partnerships with private ship owners and maritime transport agencies. A patchwork of sometimes very innovating

and rather complex cooperation structures have emerged. They address the issues as they appear.

Some results have been registered. Though the number of attacks is not abating, successful seizures of vessels have gone down thanks to a combination of preventive and deterrent measures in place. The record of action by specifically European and Asian partners in relation to the maritime routes linking the two regions is a good one.

Still, the impression remains that the policies of the international community could be better structured and made more efficient. There is a sense that the fight against piracy “kind of” feels its way through and that it may still be in some kind of experimental phase. The cost of the present approach also appears not to be sustainable over the long term. There does not seem to be an end in sight in the attacks and violence committed by pirates. In order to be plainly successful, the prevention of maritime piracy and of violence at sea as well as the efficient repression of these phenomena will have to be based on firmer international agreements and on more long-term viable mechanisms.

Both Europeans and Asians have first hand experience in addressing the present scourge. Also, though the focus has

been on the Gulf of Aden and on the Straits of Malacca of urgent concern for interregional trade and for national crews, other hotspots, existing or in the making, should not be neglected. The challenge is to rid the whole globe of violent attacks on ships.

It therefore is no surprise that the fight against piracy at sea has emerged on the proposed agenda of the Eight ASEM Summit to take place in Brussels on October 4 and 5, 2010. It is a natural subject to tackle for ASEM partners who share similar views on the virtues of long-term and structured action and who are upholding international law as the basis for organized and efficient multilateral action.

The present Seminar is a first step in the preparation of the messages which the Heads of State and of Government could address in order to move the fight against piracy forward. The point is that the ASEM community representing around 50 % of world GDP, 58 % of world population and almost 60 % of world trade can exercise useful influence in defining the policies of the future.

We expect that the expertise assembled in this room will help identify in which direction the ASEM partners would like the fight against piracy to go. How can the existing international

cooperation be upgraded to a structured, closing system where there would be no room left for pirates ? Which military and law enforcement outlays and mechanisms would be needed in the longer term ? Which legal tools, instruments or forms of judicial cooperation are missing today or how can the existing ones be complemented or perfected ? Has the partnership with the private sector gone far enough or is there a need for more agreed norms and disciplines ? Are there additional ways to promote cost-effective investments that would help prevent piracy attacks ?

These and other questions are those that we hope this seminar will help find answers to. Your findings are of interest to us as they are to the wider ASEM community. They will be carefully recorded and put to good use. Remember, this meeting constitutes one of the steps in the preparations of the ASEM 8 Summit.

I now declare this seminar for open and wish ourselves a very successful outcome for this event.

Thank you.