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HR/VP speeches

Speech by the HRVP Federica Mogherini at the visit to EUNAVFOR Operation Sophia

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Check against delivery!

First of all, you would allow me a few words in Italian. Perché è veramente per me un piacere essere di nuovo a bordo della San Giorgio, sentirmi a casa, insieme a Roberta [Pinotti, Ministro della Difesa della Repubblica Italiana] insieme a tanti colleghi e amici italiani, ma anche insieme al Primo Ministro Maltese [Joseph Muscat] che ha mostrato un inizio di Presidenza incentrato su il mostrare che l'Europa è un punto di riferimento capace di agire, capace di prendere decisioni: solo quattro giorni fa erano qui a Malta uniti per prendere decisioni insieme su come affrontare la rotta del Mediterraneo e oggi quattro giorni dopo credo a tradurre in atti molto concreti i primi passi di quello che Roberta ha giustamente chiamato una nuova fase. Vorrei ringraziare veramente entrambi il Primo Ministro e attraverso di lui tutto il governo maltese e la presidenza e il Ministro Pinotti e attraverso di lei il governo italiano per non soltanto il lavoro, il lavoro di squadra con piena identità e convinzione europea, ma anche per il messaggio politico che stiamo dando qui oggi, che le questioni dell'immigrazione possono essere gestite, possono essere gestite in modo efficace e insieme in modo umano con cooperazione, partnership, lavorando insieme ad i nostri partner.

Today we turn the page: my address is also to you. Today we turn the page marking the beginning of a new era beginning between the European Union and Libya. It is a small symbol but believe me: with this sun on the water, seeing our four flags together it is something that just a few months ago would have been quite impossible to believe in and this is thanks to your commitment; this is thanks to the politic support we managed to gather and to the determination of many Libyans, of many Europeans, and also of many international friends.

I would like, first of all, to thank our Libyan friends. Let me start by thanking Prime Minister [of the Government of National Accord and Chairman of the Presidency Council of Libya, Fayez Mustafa al-] Serraj who could not be with us today but with whom I discussed this day just less than one week ago

in Brussels. Let me also thank Commodore Alqeezani, Commodore Toumia and the Committee of Experts for their leadership but also I would say, first of all, you: the 89 trainees. I have been told, as Minister Pinotti mentioned, you showed great professionalism and passion. And I must say I am not particularly surprised knowing the determination and the strength and the resilience of the Libyan people. This will have to continue because the times ahead of us will be challenging still.

I would still like to thank Rear Admirals Enrico Credendino and Giuseppe Berutti Bergotto together with all the personnel of Operation Sophia, the senior officers' teams, the crews of San Giorgio and Rotterdam ships. The training teams come from several European Union Member States and not only; the training teams come from Italy, Germany, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece and in total we have 25 European Union Member States under the European Union flag operating in Sophia. But I would also like to thank Frontex, Guardia di Finanza, but also from the international institutions and I see that they are here with us, particularly the UNHCR, the IOM, the Order of Malta and the UN Support Mission in Libya.

This is the European way, gathering internal regional and international consensus on sustainable, human, effective, respectful solutions. This is the spirit of Operation Sophia and I think of Operation Sophia every time that I am looking for things in our European Union that we should be proud of. I think we are showing a great example.

We work from a clear mandate from the UN Security Council - voted almost unanimously, with only one abstention, another small miracle of our diplomacy - and in constant partnership with the Libyan authorities. This is the European way to do things: together, in full respect, with full cooperation, as a Union, and with our friends and partners.

And this is the spirit of our cooperation with Libya. First of all it is a cooperation that goes far beyond migration. We know that this is a delicate moment for the history of Libya. Libya does not need patrons telling Libyans what to do. Libyans need partners and friends, loyal and respectful who can accompany and support all Libyans to find the unity and build the capacities that your citizens need. And I believe this is the best example of a partnership that delivers for everyone: a true win-win partnership.

First and foremost, we say we share an interest to stop the tragedy in the Mediterranean, being it in international waters where Operation Sophia operates, being it in Libyan territorial waters where you will be operating after this training.

We all know that we need to work together - the international community, Europe, Libya and neighbours - to stop the smugglers, dismantle the criminal networks, save lives and stop this human tragedy. I particularly think of women and children and babies, one of them born on one of our vessels - this is why Operation Sophia is called like this.

Save and protect lives is a must, but not only for the European Union. It has to be a must also for Libyans, our African friends and I would like to mention the fact that we opened just a few hours ago a very important meeting here in Malta, following up the Valetta Summit with our African partners to save lives also in the desert and manage migration well before it gets to Libya.

But we also share an interest through this training to secure the Libyan waters. Safer waters also means safer mainland and the training you received is not only aimed at managing territorial waters with a view to smugglers or migration. You have been trained also to fight all kinds of illicit traffic, from drugs, to weapons and oil.

And together with security - I would like to mention this - comes also the economy. And this is why we

have another interest we share. You know very well, a safe sea, a sea free from smuggling and trafficking of every kind is also crucial to restart the Libyan fishing industry and this will provide Libyans with an economic activity that is safe, profitable, dignified and sustainable.

So this is just the first step in a new era of our partnership. Twenty one senior officers are now being trained in Crete as the first module of training package two start. Twelve trainees will soon be starting the training also here in Malta and this are just the first two modules of the second package.

More training facilities are being considered, for a larger audience. We will continue; we are ready to continue our support, our common work. When your initial trainings will be completed we can follow you during routine operations and understand from you what can be done better.

After the handing over of the diplomas, our cooperation will continue, our common work will continue; different roles but once you are friends, you continue to be friends and you continue to act together.

We should aim at a continuous training of new recruits but also to advise those that we have already trained and accompanying the Libyan coastguards in its difficult task. This is what we mean by partnership: we learn from each other, we do not only transfer knowledge and expertise but we build new ties and new forms of cooperation. As I said, this is the European way, this is the way of partnership we are proud of, we learnt our lessons from the past: respect, partnership, cooperation, is what is guiding us.

So let me once again thank all of you and particularly our women and men serving under Operation Sophia. Sometimes, us, Europeans do not tell enough how much we do under a common blue flag, something we can really be proud of. There is no better example of how our European military is serving our common security in Europe and in our shared sea: fighting crimes, saving lives, building capacities, strengthening authority and creating new partnerships. This will be even more indispensable in the months to come. Count on us as we count on you. We will continue to work together. Shukran.

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