FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROVISION OF
GLOBAL MARITIME SAR SERVICES

Mediterranean maritime search and rescue conference

Submitted by Italy

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides information on the Mediterranean maritime search and rescue conference, an international event organized within the activities of the Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Project (LMRCC Project).

Strategic direction, if applicable: Other work

Output: OW 28

Action to be taken: Paragraph 18

Related documents: NCSR 5/INF.17

Introduction

1 The Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communications and Search and Rescue (NCSR), at its fifth session, noted document NCSR 5/INF.17, which provided information on the Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Project (LMRCC Project), an initiative implemented by the Italian Coast Guard and funded by the European Commission, with the aim of conducting a feasibility study in order to establish a Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) to support the Libyan authorities in identifying and declaring their search and rescue region, in accordance with international maritime law and in cooperation with the neighbouring countries. In that occasion the Sub-Committee noted with appreciation the information provided.

2 The above mentioned document (NCSR 5/INF.17) noted that plans were being made to hold an international conference on the Mediterranean Sea, aimed at discussing SAR activities and facilitating cooperation among all concerned States on search and rescue matters.
At MSC 99, held last May at the IMO HQ, the Secretary-General expressed his sincere appreciation for the LMRCC Project that was supporting the Libyan authorities as they established a rescue coordination centre in Tripoli (Libya) and declared their search and rescue region (SRR).

Mediterranean Maritime Search and Rescue Conference

Within the activities of the LMRCC Project, on 11 October 2018 an international event entitled "Mediterranean Maritime Search and Rescue Conference" was held in Rome. Representatives of SAR organizations from Mediterranean States (Albania, Croatia, Egypt, France, Gibraltar,1 Greece, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey) and Portugal attended the conference as participants.2

Representatives from the EU family, including DG Home, DG Near, European External Action Service (EEAS), EU Delegation to Libya (EU DEL), EU Border Assistance Mission to Libya (EUBAM), Frontex-European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA), European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, from UN agencies and other international organizations such as UNHCR, IOM, IMO, World Food Programme (WFP), United Nation Office Drug and Crime (UNODC), from the Embassy of Germany, the Netherlands and France, as well as national authorities (relevant Italian ministries) attended the conference as observers.

The conference consisted of two main panel sessions:

- Panel 1: relevant instruments of search and rescue activities; and
- Panel 2: SAR agreements.

The morning session focused on relevant instruments of search and rescue activities (namely the SAR Convention, the SOLAS Convention, UNCLOS and the Salvage Convention). All these conventions establish the obligation to provide assistance to persons in distress at sea. However, none of these conventions was initiated or essentially drafted to cope with issues and situations currently being experienced in the central Mediterranean (namely mass rescue operations).

The afternoon discussion focused on SAR agreements and emphasized the importance of cooperation among SAR organizations to save lives at sea.

The SAR conference also offered an occasion to meet the Libyan Coast Guard Commandant and the Libyan Committee specifically appointed to support the LMRCC Project. The Libyan authorities outlined the importance of the declaration of their Search and Rescue Region (SRR), as per the letter sent to IMO on 14 December 2017,3 bearing in mind that SRRs need to be consistent with the real capabilities of coastal states in order to safely and effectively provide and coordinate SAR services. In this regard the EU and Italy support the establishment of Libyan Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre as well as tailored training for the Libyan Coast Guard personnel in order to enable Libya to operate in its SRR according to international law.

---

1 Representatives from the Maritime Coastguard Agency of the United Kingdom attended on behalf of Gibraltar.

2 Algeria, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon were invited but could not attend.

3 Information on Libyan search and rescue region and search and rescue services were published through the GISIS database in June 2018.
Outcome of SAR Conference

10 The discussions took place as planned. During the sessions most of participants (representatives of Mediterranean SAR organizations and observers) showed great interest in the topics of discussion. Numerous interventions and contributions were made.

11 In particular, the importance was highlighted for preference of defining the meaning of "distress case" and "place of safety", in accordance with current IMO guidelines.

12 It was also stressed that the Mediterranean SAR system has been recently put under serious strain and therefore international community needs to find better ways of protecting the sustainability of that system, taking into account that all SAR operations (specifically in the Mediterranean) must also be fully compliant with international and EU human rights law.

Conclusions (summary of the SAR Conference)

13 The conference was an opportunity to reflect on the current situation, bringing together representatives from all the Mediterranean coastal States in order to facilitate multilateral cooperation, seeking solutions to common problems by sharing expertise and best practices in a cooperative manner.

14 Moreover, the conference provided an excellent chance to call attention to local SAR agreements and further encourage regional SAR agreements that could, in the medium-to-long term, enhance the operational capability of the competent authorities in carrying out Search and Rescue services, aimed at increasing the safety of life at sea, as established by the SAR Convention.

15 The Mediterranean SAR authorities need to continue their efforts and ensure that no more lives will be lost at sea through the actions of smugglers who make a business out of people’s misery, and must continue to work together to find a sustainable solution to the ongoing tragedies in the Mediterranean.

16 The principles established in UNCLOS, SOLAS and SAR Conventions therefore need to be adequately integrated with human rights law, refugee law, international humanitarian law, maritime law and security issues, which results in greater protection of the maritime borders aimed at mitigating the risk of threat related to illegal migration flows and terrorism. Finally, it may be time for a new type of international convention aimed at guaranteeing a fair balance between these demands/needs.

17 The Italian Coast Guard and the EU will continue to support the Libyan Maritime Institutions in developing their SAR system in line with International Conventions.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

18 The Sub-Committee is invited to note the information provided.