

OPCDR

HOTO Ceremony

Rome, 1 October 2021

Generale Graziano, Generale Vecciarelli, Generale Portolano, distinguished guests, dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

this is a very special moment in time for EUNAVFOR MED IRINI and also for me personally. I am honoured but also very emotional to hand-over the helm of IRINI to the new Operation Commander, the Rear Admiral Stefano TURCHETTO.

At the end of my mandate as Operation Commander I want to share some personal impressions and feelings and look back at what we have achieved so far.

From a military-political perspective, Operation IRINI is undoubtedly recognised as one of the most complex and sensitive Common Security and Defence Policy military operation of the European Union at the international level.

At the launching of Operation, the High Representative, Mr BORREL, clearly stated that IRINI is not THE solution of the Libyan crisis, but a part of it. It reflects the holistic approach agreed at the First Berlin Conference and confirms the EU's comprehensive approach. IRINI is a part of a process involving political, military, economic and humanitarian tracks. IRINI is an important tool in order to set the conditions for diplomacy to work towards a permanent solution in Libya.

The EU Member States and the entire international community had a lot of expectations about this Operation. Everything we did, and did

not, has had consequences at the higher political level, not only within the European Union, but also among the entire International Community.

In this context, it is important to recall that at the launch of the Operation, at the end of March last year, we were in the most difficult period of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Operation started with a very limited number of available assets.

Furthermore, the Area of Operations in the central Mediterranean Sea demonstrated to have become an increasingly complex space in which the main contemporary threats and challenges intersect. The Mediterranean basin is now, more than before, an area of persistent instability and of confrontation among different players.

In Libya, the long-lasting lack of fully effective State institutions has implied the enduring proliferation of illicit activity, including human and arms trafficking, oil smuggling and terrorism. The political and military situation in the country remains deeply influenced by the different interests of regional and global actors.

In this situation, migration flow is still a factor of concern and an issue to consider and monitor that influences IRINI's activities.

Despite this extremely complex, variegated and difficult environment, Operation IRINI has produced clear and indisputable results both with regard to the arms embargo and oil smuggling demonstrating to be effective, impartial and balanced.

Both before and soon after the launch of Operation Irini, we recorded a significant presence of illicit trafficking, especially with regard to the transfer of arms, including heavy weaponry, aircrafts, anti-aircraft systems, militias, mercenaries and private contractors both towards Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.

Day after day, Operation Irini grew up and established an evident and strong presence in the central Mediterranean Sea, generating a clear deterrent effect towards illegal activities committing itself to the security of the and to contribute to the peace process in Libya. All the actors involved, have realized that their illicit trafficking, would no longer be immune from our action in one way or another.

Irini results are testified by the data of the activities carried out so far. The operation investigated some 4000 vessels, monitored 16 ports and oil terminals, carried out more than 180 visits on board merchant vessels with the permission of the Master and 20 full inspections of suspect vessels with the consent of the flag state. In one of the inspections, an illicit cargo of military aviation fuel, prohibited by UN resolutions and European rules, was found and the merchant ship was diverted to a port in Greece.

This was the first diversion operation ever carried out by the European Union.

But Irini's activities were not limited to the prevention and monitoring of trafficking at sea. EUNAVFOR MED IRINI investigated some 600 suspicious flights, monitored 25 airports, and analysed thousands of satellite images from the European Satellite Centre in Torreón close to Madrid.

The results of this activity were reported in 20 inspection reports and some 31 special reports to the UN Panel of Experts most of them with evidences gathered for both arms trafficking and oil smuggling.

Despite the pandemic, we also conducted an extensive outreach activity and intensive key leader engagements. IRINI is finally recognized as a relevant actor and as a security provider in the area and the cooperation with regional stakeholders has steadily

improved. The International Community now is more aware of the European Union's and Irini's presence and assertiveness in the Mediterranean Sea in supporting the peace process in Libya.

How all these results have influenced the situation in Libya is impossible to assess or to measure, however it is worth noting that since the launch of Operation Irini, there has been a ceasefire between the warring parties in Libya, a new government of national unity has been established, and oil production has resumed after more than 10 years of crisis. Nevertheless, this was precisely the European Union's member states objectives when they agreed to launch this Operation and to renew the mandate for two further years acknowledging the significant results obtained.

This also confirms the need for the international community to be able to count on the role of IRINI, which is the only international actor that is implementing the United Nations' arms embargo on Libya.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this particular moment, I feel the need to express my sincere thanks for the outstanding daily work carried out 24 hours a day for 365 days a year, by men and women who have been assigned to me by 24 European countries.

To these women and men, goes my deepest and most heartfelt applause for the significant achievements. And I am extremely grateful to the Member States that contribute with assets and personnel to the Operation.

I would like to mention all of them but, for obvious reasons, I hereby recall only the fundamental contribution provided by the three Force Commanders that have served under my direction: Rear Admirals

Ettore SOCCI and Stefano FRUMENTO of the Italian Navy and Commodore Theodoros MIKROPOULOS of the Hellenic Navy.

Women and men of Irini,

I want you to know that I am fully aware that your daily job is particularly challenging for several reasons.

I think you must be very proud of the work you have done in this year and half. You have always given substantial proof of effectiveness, professionalism and utmost devotion to the operation and to the European Union values and principles.

My role here and the results achieved would have not been possible without your extraordinary professional and fair commitment.

One of the most meaningful European motto is “United in Diversity”. I like this motto very much, also because I could feel it every day, while working in this fantastic international environment.

I joined the Navy with the idea of putting myself at the service of my country. Over the years, I have realized how much the well-being of my country is interconnected with the well-being of the international community and in particular that of the EUROPEAN UNION.

When I assumed the duty at Eunaformed IRINI, I took off the hat of Italian Officer to put on the one of the Commander of an EU Operation. Of course, nobody – including myself - forgets their country of origin, but at the same time the European spirit is strong and represents the common denominator that gives us hope for the future of Europe, even for the future of the European Defence.

Now I feel to be absolutely a lucky commander to have had the opportunity to guide such a competent, professional and multicultural staff.

During my command I also had the opportunity to meet and cooperate with numerous European and international authorities, institutions and organizations, establishing human and working relationships that have enriched me on a personal and professional level. Having met and cooperated with such partners, has greatly facilitated my job and has allowed me to act more effectively.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in the last 18 months We did a lot, but it is possible to do even more.

Operation IRINI has demonstrated its effectiveness in implementing the arms embargo, but it could fulfil its tasks even better and more impartially if more assets, personnel and intelligence are provided.

Diplomatic efforts from all Member States are necessary to overcome the current political stalemate in place regarding the cooperation with some international actors including the Libyan authorities in order to be even more balanced and impartial and start the Capacity Building and Training activities of the Libyan Coast guard and Navy.

This is very important in order to create a fully capable maritime force that is a necessary pre-condition for a safer maritime space off Libya. The provision of the necessary equipment to the Libyan coast guard and Navy cannot be discharged in order to be able to implement a fully effective integrated approach in support of the Libya peace process.

With Operation IRINI, the EU Member States unanimously and promptly decided to launch and renew an operation that is very complex and articulated both politically and operationally. This overcame one of the main difficulties that have always stood in the way of genuine European defence: the lack of unanimity in decision-

making when it comes to the Common Security and Defence Policy. This was possible because the operation had a clear objective, unambiguous tasks and a well-defined end state. IRINI is therefore a demonstration that agreement can be reached by mediating between the national interests of Member States and those of the Union as a whole when it comes to acting to safeguard the main European security interests.

I therefore believe that the European Union can build on the IRINI experience which, if properly analysed and developed, could represent the true embryo of future European defence.

I cannot conclude without thanking the Italian Defence, here represented by the Chief of Defence, General Vecciarelli, and the Chief of the Italian Joint Operations Headquarters, General Portolano, for having always provided the necessary support to IRINI and for being always extremely helpful in solving plenty of critical issues, including all those related to the COVID 19.

I want also to express my deepest and heartfelt gratitude to the Chairman of the Military Committee, General Graziano that was always by my side in all the extremely complex political dynamics that we faced in the last one year and half.

Finally, I thank my family: my mother and my father, my wife and my children for the understanding and support they have given me over the years together. Without them I would not be the person and the Navy officer that I am today.

Ammiraglio Turchetto, dear Stefano, I am sure you will undertake this exciting job with the passion and the very high competence and skill that have always accompanied you in your career and I wish you all the best with this amazing crew of Europeans!

Viva the European Union, Viva EUNAVFOR MED, lunga vita ad IRINI!!!

Thank you all for your attention.