



European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz Operation AGENOR

JOINT STATEMENT 01/2024

18 April 2024

Statement by EMASoH on the unlawful boarding of the merchant vessel *MSC Aries* in the Gulf of Oman.

Saturday, 13 April 2024, the Portuguese flagged merchant vessel *MSC Aries* was boarded near the Strait of Hormuz. Armed personnel boarded the vessel by helicopter.

The boarding, in breach of international law, happened while the merchant vessel was sailing in international waters in the Gulf of Oman. The *MSC Aries* was at the time heading to India according to the destination transmitted by her Automatic Identification System (AIS).

EMASoH aims at ensuring safe passage, security, and freedom of navigation in order to reassure merchant shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf region by a de-escalatory approach. One of the key mission objectives of EMASoH is to document any illegal activity in the Gulf region and Strait of Hormuz, which this case clearly is. EMASoH Operation AGENOR continues to closely monitor the situation.

The countries participating in EMASoH Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway and Portugal, condemn the seizure of the *MSC Aries*. We call for the immediate release of the vessel, its crews and cargo, while ensuring the good treatment of the crew members, their access to consular assistance, supplies, and their free communication.

We also express our concern regarding the seizure of the merchant vessel *Advantage Sweet* by the Iranian Navy on 27 April 2023 the subsequent seizure of the merchant vessel *Niovi* by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy on 3 May 2023, and the seizure of the *St Nikolas* by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy on 11 January 2024 as the oil tankers continue to be held in Iranian custody. Our thoughts are with the crews on board all four vessels, as well as their families.

There are thousands of ships sailing in the Gulf region and through the Strait of Hormuz on a daily basis. These are monitored, informed and reassured by EMASoH. Vessels are advised to transit with caution and report movements through the Voluntary Reporting Scheme (emasoh-agenor.org). They may inform of any suspicious activity or concerns to EMASoH (+971 26574278 or ctf474-emasoh.bwc.fct@def.gouv.fr).

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