Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe: U.S. Helsinki Commission

"Sea Rescues: Saving Refugees and Migrants on the Mediterranean"

Committee Staff Present:
Nathaniel Hurd, Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Participants:
Catherine Flumiani, Minister Counselor, Embassy of Italy to the U.S.;
Michalis Stamatis, First Secretary and Consul, Embassy of Greece to the U.S.;
Ludwig Blaurock, Political and Military Counsellor, European Union Delegation to the U.S.;
John Murray, Marine Director, International Chamber of Shipping (Via videoconference);
Laura Thompson, Deputy Director General, International Organization for Migration

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HURD: Good afternoon. On behalf of the chairman of the Helsinki Commission, Senator Roger Wicker, and the co-chairman, Congressman Chris Smith, welcome to this briefing on "Sea Rescues: Saving Refugees and Migrants on the Mediterranean." My name is Nathaniel Hurd, and I'm a policy advisor at the Helsinki Commission.

Since the refugee and migrants crisis started in Europe in 2015, there have been many stories about suffering, death, and debates about policy. Almost 12,000 of these people on the move have died or gone missing on the Mediterranean. Many of the debates within and between European countries and institutions remain unresolved. But there is another story that must be told more often and more clearly. It is the story of lives saved on the sea.

Our panelists today include representatives from the governments of Italy and Greece, and from the shipping industry. Together, they represent ship crews that have rescued more than 379,000 refugees and migrants. That is almost half the population of Washington, D.C., in which we are holding this briefing.

Too often, we focus on the villains. Today we will focus on the heroes. Like all heroes, they are imperfect because they are human. We will discuss struggles, challenges, mistakes, critiques, and recommendations for improvement. But we also commend those who have rescued strangers, sometimes at the risk of their own lives.

Before I introduce the panelists, just a few brief words about the format of this briefing. After introducing all the panelists one by one, I will ask each one of them a series of questions. They'll hold their answers until I've completed asking my questions of all the panelists. They will then answer. Then we'll open up the discussion to those of you in the audience and those of you that are watching online. Just a reminder to our Facebook viewers, you can post a question, and one of my colleagues will ask it on your behalf into the microphone.

Now to our panel. Catherine Flumiani is the minister counselor for consular and social affairs at the Embassy of Italy to the United States. She arrived in Washington, D.C. in August of 2016. Ms. Flumiani is a native of Varese in Italy, and graduated from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano with a degree of political science. Her areas of expertise include the Middle East and North Africa, the United Nations, and transatlantic relations. In 1997, she took her first overseas diplomatic post in Amman, Jordan. Later, Ms. Flumiani was posted to the Italian embassy in Berlin, and in Brussels to the Italian Permanent Mission to the North Atlantic Council of NATO. Her latest assignment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in Rome was as head of the United Nations Office. Welcome.

Michalis Stamatis is the first secretary and consul of the Embassy of Greece to the United States. Mr. Stamatis is a career diplomat, and joined the embassy in 2016. Prior to Washington, D.C. he also served as consul at the Consulate General of Greece in Ukraine, and as deputy head of mission and consul at the Embassy of Greece in Abu Dhabi. His previous postings at the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Athens also include the Office of the Spokesperson of the ministry, the Diplomatic Cabinet of the minster, and the Directorate of EU Integration and Economic and Monetary Union. Mr. Stamatis studied political science and political

administration at the National University of Athens. He continued with a Master's degree in international studies at the same university, while working at the Greek think tank EKEM, the Hellenic Centre for European Studies. He speaks Greek, English, and French. Mr. Stamatis has served as reserve officer in the 2nd Parachutist Battalion in Athens, and is now ranked as a reserve lieutenant of the Hellenic Army. Welcome.

Ludwig Blaurock, to my left, is the counselor for political and military affairs in the Political, Security, and Development Section at the Delegation of the European Union to the United States. Mr. Blaurock joined the EU Delegation to the U.S. in September 2015, after serving in various positions in the German foreign service. Most recently, he was consul at the German Embassy in Tel Aviv, where he led the consulate, and additionally was responsible for human rights and other issues in the Israeli-Palestinian context. From 2009 to mid-2012, Mr. Blaurock was political counselor in the Federal Chancellery in Germany, in Berlin, where he was assigned to the Security Policy and Disarmament Division that also included relations with the United States and Western European countries. From 2008 to 2009, he served as desk officer at the NATO and Security Division of the German Federal Foreign Office, where he was responsible for NATO enlargement and partnerships. Prior to joining the German Foreign Service, Mr. Blaurock worked as a management consultant at McKinsey and served his military service in the German Air Force. A native of Bonn in Germany, he completed his legal studies at the Universities of Mannheim, Sevilla, and Passau. As a McCloy Fellow, he earned a Master in public policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Welcome.

Laura Thompson is the deputy director general of the International Organization for Migration, more often known as IOM. She is responsible for assisting the director general in administering and managing the organization; conducing political dialogue; and building IOM relationships with governments, U.N. agencies, civil society, and the private sector; as well as defining policies, strategies, and prioritizing action. Prior to this position, Ms. Thompson was the ambassador and permanent representative of Costa Rica to the U.N. and other international organizations in Geneva. She also served at the Permanent Mission to the U.N. in Geneva in a prior occasion, and at the Delegation to UNESCO. In addition to her diplomatic experience, Ambassador Thompson has held posts as a legal officer in two U.N. organizations. Ambassador Thompson obtained a Master's degree in international relations with a specialization in international law from the Graduate Institute for International Studies of Geneva, and holds a degree in law from the University of Costa Rica. She has also completed executive education at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and INSEAD. In addition to Spanish, which is her mother tongue, Ambassador Thompson is fluent in English, French, and Greek, and has a basic knowledge of Italian and Portuguese.

Before introducing our final speaker, who is John Murray, the marine director of the International Chamber of Shipping, just a quick story of how Mr. Murray came to be on this panel. In December of 2015, I was in Rome for meetings. I met with a priest, Father Bruno Ciceri, who has been very involved in migration and in particular mariner issues for many decades, and it was he who told me that at the time the merchant shipping industry had rescued about as many people as some of the national navies. Now, that has since shifted as the navies have scaled up, but it was then that I first learned of the critical role that the merchant shipping industry has played in the response to this crisis.

As I noted, John Murray is the marine director of the International Chamber of Shipping. A master mariner, he joined ICS following previous careers at sea, including on oil and chemical tankers, and as a maritime college lecturer. Mr. Murray is responsible for the output of ICS on marine technical matters. The principal role of ICS is to represent the views of ship owners worldwide, including at the International Maritime Organization and in other international bodies. Mr. Murray has led ICS involvement in a number of initiatives, and is responsible for several of the industry best practice guidelines that ICS produces, either independently or in association with others. He led development of the industry-supported guidance "Large Scale Rescue Operations at Sea," which is widely acknowledged, in conjunction with other ICS-led publications, as the principal industry guidance on the approach to be taken and practical operational advice regarding large-scale rescue operations. Mr. Murray represents ICS at the EU Shared Awareness and Deconfliction in the Mediterranean – also known as SHADE MED – meetings, and has represented the ICS and industry position in numerous meetings, principally at IMO but also in other fora.

A very distinguished panel.

Minister Counselor, please.

FLUMIANI: Thank you, Nathaniel. I am particularly glad to participate in today's briefing organized by the U.S. Helsinki Commission on a topic in which Italy is at the forefront: to save human lives in the Mediterranean. Addressing the migration crisis in the region is a priority for the Italian government, which spares no effort to foster cooperation and synergies with its European partners and all international actors involved.

In such context, we are glad that migration flows are prominently moving up the agenda of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as Italy will chair the organization in 2018. It will therefore not come as a surprise that migration and the prevention and repression of illegal trafficking of human beings will be among the priorities of the 2018 Italian Presidency of the OSCE starting January 1st. This year's Mediterranean OSCE Conference, which took place in Palermo in October, already had as its focus the migration and refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. Although OSCE does not have any coast guard or naval operational goal, Italy's aim is to ensure that the wide array of OSCE programs in the different areas – political, security, economic – can fully contribute to addressing the root causes and consequences of migration flows through the Mediterranean.

2017 has been a turning point in terms of number of migrants and refugees reaching Italy. From January to November, over 117,000 persons arrived, a decrease of 36 percent compared to the same period in 2016. Though 90 percent of the totality came through Libya, the share of arrival via that country has steadily dropped in the last months, while illegal smugglers are increasingly exploring alternative routes.

Italian authorities cooperate closely with the relevant Libyan authorities, and particularly with the Libyan Coast Guard from the Ministry of Defense, to enhance their capacities in a vast array of operations: patrolling, search-and-rescue operation at sea, managing of immigration

flows in maritime and terrestrial borders. As Italy is one of the few countries with an operating embassy in Tripoli, we work closely with the Libyan Presidency Council and the Government of National Accord to help strengthen national institutions and encourage the gradual assumption of responsibility on the most pressing, challenging issues, such as managing the migration phenomenon and the fight against human trafficking.

Italy works to help reaffirm the principles of sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and national unity of Libya, as well as non-interference in domestic affairs. At Libya's behest, we also work to strengthen the institutional apparatus dedicated to fight criminal networks, both along the coast and in the south. At the same time, we give new importance to social aspects and development, and the full respect of human rights.

Our bilateral engagement nestled within the broader European dimension. In particular, training activities for the Libyan Coast Guard personnel has been carried out in coordination with the EU naval operation EUNAVFOR MED Sophia, under the command of an Italian officer, Admiral Enrico Credendino; and the EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya, EUBAM; as our capacity building is complementary to them. Moreover, the training we deliver has been aimed, and still indeed is aimed, at returning some patrol vessels to legitimate Libyan authorities, and ensuring that Libyans can make the best use of the device at their disposal for search-and-rescue operation at sea.

Italy's continuing to do its share in patrolling and rescue operations. In 2017, from January 1st to November 30, the Italian units conducted 1,400 search-and-rescue events related to migration, intercepting 1,240 units, both at sea and ashore. In total, 112,000 migrants were rescued while trying to reach Italian shores. Thirty-two percent were rescued by Italian naval units belonging to the Italian Coast Guard, the navy, the Guardia di Finanza – which is our financial police – and the Carabinieri. Merchant ships also participated in such efforts, and have rescued over 11,000 people, almost 10 percent of total rescues this year. The Italian Navy also participate to EUNAVFOR MED Sophia, currently with one frigate and one helicopter.

In conducting such operation, Italy strictly abides by the obligation of the law of the sea, including as provided by the International Convention of Safety of Life at Sea, London '74; the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, Hamburg '79; and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Montego Bay '82; all of which require commanding officer of ships at sea and state to, I quote, "render assistance to any person found at sea in danger of being lost." End of quote.

The Italian Coast Guard is one of the Italian Navy corps, and performs mainly civilian tasks, including utilizing to the safety of navigation and search-and-rescue operation. In this regard, Italy ratified the IMO Search and Rescue Convention of Hamburg '79. Accordingly, the Italian Coast Guard General Command was appointed as national authority in charge of coordinating sea rescue services.

Alerts from migrants in distress are received in various ways: incoming telephone calls from boats using a satellite mobile phone, or incoming calls from a person ashore in Africa or Europe reporting the presence of a unit in distress and its possible position, or reports by another

unit in the area. Coast Guard naval units are generally equipped with medic – paramedic personnel able to carry out the first medical screening of the rescued people. If a person needs urgent medical attention, a MEDEVAC is arranged to take him or her to the nearest medical structure able to respond to the emergency.

Rescued people undergo a first solo interview aimed at gathering their main data – name, age, nationality – as well as clues to the actual condition of the trafficking victim: clear evidence of torture, young females without family, children, youngster or both genders without family. People considered to be at risk undergo a second and deeper solo interview aimed at confirming the above, or if necessary gathering more data. The result of the interviews are transmitted to the police authorities ashore before arrival in port.

People rescued during a SAR operation coordinated by the Italian Coast Guard are disembarked in a place of safety, as defined by the IMO Safety of Life at Sea and SAR Convention, and by the Guidelines on the Treatment of Persons Rescued at Sea issued by the IMO in 1978. If the place of safety is on Italian territory, the decision is taken in accordance with the evaluation of the competent branch of the Ministry of Interior in charge of managing migrants after disembarkation at the end of SAR operation.

Thank you very much, and I am ready for your questions.

STAMATIS: Thank you, Nathaniel, and the Helsinki Commission, for organizing this briefing. I think it's important to raise awareness for this important issue.

Greece, situated at the external borders of the EU and the Schengen area, has found itself at the frontline of an unprecedented migrant and refugee crisis. Migratory flows have been increasing exponentially since 2012, and the situation became even more critical in 2015. On that year, the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Greece, as you can see in the maps that have been distributed to you. As you can see on map number one, the number of refugees and migrants in Greece exceed 800,000 people, which was a twentyfold increase compared to 2014. Overall, about 1 million people – almost 10 percent of Greece's population – transited through Greece in 2015 and 2016, mainly coming from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and heading mainly towards the countries of Northern Europe.

Due to the closure of the Balkan route on February 2016, more than 62,000 people are now stranded in Greece. At the same time, arrivals seem to be picking up again, with a considerable increase of 40 percent over the last six months despite the implementation of the EU-Turkey statement. Therefore, the problem continues to exist, creating extreme pressure on the islands of the eastern Aegean and the five registration and identification centers, or hotspots as we say, operating there, in most cases beyond their capacity.

Now, as you can see on map number two geography is crucial to understand the difficulties in managing the migrant or refugee flows in this part of Europe. Greece's borders with Turkey are mainly at the sea, and this complicates every effort to control the flows. Fences cannot be built on maritime borders, while according to international law refoulement – also

known as pushback – is prohibited. At the same time, there is an obligation by international law to rescue people in distress at sea.

In reality, smugglers rely heavily on the provisions of international law and search-and-rescue operations, turning them into a distinct tactical advantage. These dangerous crossings on unseaworthy and overloaded vessels have the main purpose of being detected and then rescued.

In their efforts to reach the Greek coastline, passengers sometimes deliberately sink their boats upon sight of a Hellenic Coast Guard patrol vessel in order to force its crewmembers to recover them and bring them ashore. This practice endangers the lives of all persons onboard, even the Hellenic Coast Guard's officers, as they must recover a large number of people in literally no time and often in adverse weather condition prevailing at sea.

Geographic proximity is another facilitating factor for illegal crossings. The distance from the Turkish shores to the Greek islands on the eastern Aegean Sea can be as close as five miles, and can be crossed in just a few minutes. Just to give you an idea of it, this is the exact distance between Staten Island and Lower Manhattan. When the Hellenic Coast Guard detect suspicious movements inside the Turkish territorial waters, it immediately transmits early warning information to the Turkish Coast Guard authorities to assume control and rescue responsibility in their area of jurisdiction. In practice, however, once refugees and migrants have set sail from the Turkish shores, it is almost certain that they will manage to enter Europe.

Another crucial element is that the number of daily sea crossings fluctuates significantly throughout the year. Even when the situation seems to be under control, it can always change rapidly and drastically. Continuous vigilance is needed, placing additional strain to the search-and-rescue resources.

The Hellenic Coast Guard has to operate under extremely dense time frames and adverse conditions. In order to address the migratory pressure, the Hellenic Coast Guard has redeployed its resources, engaging a larger number of its operational means on the region. Operations are coordinated by the Joint Rescue Coordination Center, based in Piraeus. This is the single national operations center for the coordination of such incidents within the Hellenic Search and Rescue Region, which is the ATHINAI FIR. Upon detection, the Hellenic Coast Guard immediately renders assistance on a nondiscriminatory basis, in accordance with national and international maritime law, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and in the spirit, of course, of the century-old Greek seamanship tradition.

One of the core objectives of the search-and-rescue operations of the Hellenic Coast Guard is to save lives at sea. Since 2015, the Hellenic Coast Guard has rescued more than 200,000 people in more than 5,000 incidents in the eastern Aegean Sea alone. After the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016, the number of incidents has been considerably reduced. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard still continues facing disproportionate migratory flows in the eastern Aegean. In 2017 only, approximately 30,000 people were rescued in more than 500 incidents. The number of dead and missing persons at the Aegean Sea exceeded 1,000 in the year between March 2015 and March 2016, but has been dropped significantly, to 129 people, since then.

Breaking the business model of smugglers and traffickers is also a high priority for the Hellenic Coast Guard. Over the last few years, the Coast Guard has carried out extended operations, resulting to the arrest of a significant number of traffickers, in total 3,600 for the period between 2015 and 2017.

It is important to understand, as you can also see on map number three in front of you, that in order to effectively perform these tasks, the Coast Guard must maintain increased surveillance activities along an extended line of Europe's southeastern external maritime borders. In this regard, additional assets and personnel are deployed on a – on a rotating basis, while measures are also taken to increase the search-and-rescue capabilities in terms of human resources and operational assets. Undoubtedly, though, this situation has put immense strain on the human resources of the Hellenic Coast Guard and has stretched the operational fleet to its limits.

Other players contributing to these efforts are the Hellenic Armed Forces, the NATO activity at the north of the island of Lesvos, the United Nations High Commissioner for the Refugees, the International Maritime Organization, the Europol, and of course the EU Border and Coast Guard. The Joint EU Operation Poseidon has provided additional assistance in terms of human resources, operational assets, as well as technical equipment for the participating – from the participating member states, under the coordination of FRONTEX.

Turkey is undoubtedly another key player. It should be acknowledged that Turkey has made great efforts to manage the flows, while hosting a large number of refugees itself. It is, however, imperative to step up its cooperation in the fight against smugglers and increase its efforts to control the flows, with the ultimate goal of bringing them to a halt.

If there is one lesson deriving from the experience so far for the refugee crisis, on how to deal with it, it is that no country or organization alone can deal with such a reality. The only way forward is through cooperation and coordination among various countries and organizations and institutions in the spirit of solidarity and burden-sharing, and with the understanding that this is a global issue that requires a global solution. If we fail to acknowledge this, we are basically doing nothing more than ignoring the realities on the ground, while choosing to disregard the magnitude and the complexity of the refugees and migrant crisis itself.

Thank you.

BLAUROCK: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Helsinki Commission for hosting us and inviting us today to this important topic. Thanks to the colleagues.

As we've heard, the migration challenge that we've faced in Europe over the past couple of years has really been unprecedented, and we're quite proud of the efforts that we've been doing together with our member states to confront this challenge.

At the center of that effort has always been to honor our values and our commitments under international law to save lives and to provide dignified treatment to human beings that are

at peril and at risk. In the Mediterranean, the European Union efforts, together with our member states and other international partners, have allowed the rescue of more than 230,000 people in 2016 alone, and over 70,000 in 2017. However, we need to be clear that this effort is much wider and more comprehensive, and that we cannot only look at the Mediterranean alone.

In Libya and Niger, high numbers of people are stranded, and the European Union is trying to assist together with such organizations as UNHCR and IOM to return voluntarily these people to their countries of origin. So far this year we are counting about 12,000 of these returns, and we're trying to double that number in the months to come.

In a January partnership effort with other countries – mainly host countries, countries of origin, and countries of transit – we've developed a partnership framework to work with these countries to really fight the root causes of migration, because that's where the effort has to be focused on. But it's also in the Mediterranean to save lives and to fight the business model of human smugglers and human traffickers.

When it comes to the root causes, I just would like to recall, and without going into too much detail, that the European Union, together with its member states, is the main donor and provider of humanitarian and development assistance worldwide – in fact, the biggest worldwide. Out of the Valletta Summit in December 2015, only of that effort, since then about 2 billion euros have been provided in projects to transit and host countries, and countries of origin, to fight that, and another 4 billion have been made available by the European Commission in the External Investment Plan. We hope to leverage that sum by tenfold until 2020 by further partner investments and private-sector investments.

As I said, the fight has to be comprehensive and looking at the whole picture, not only in the Mediterranean. So, along the transit routes and the countries of origin, the European Union has been strongly engaged. We have a strong and comprehensive effort through the Sahel, which is one of our key focus areas. Niger is one of the key countries there, where we have a civilian mission supporting Nigerien capacity-building, EUCAP Sahel, with an important element in Agadez, which is one of the main transit points to cross through the very perilous crossings through the Sahel desert.

We're engaged as European Union, together with member states, in Mali with a civilian mission that parallels EUCAP Sahel in Niger, which is EUCAP Sahel in Mali. We have a European military training mission to capacitate the Malian armed forces to stabilize the country.

I could keep enunciating and listing other efforts that we have just to give an idea that it is really a comprehensive effort of what we need to do and the long-lasting effort that we need to be engaged in.

More precisely, on the topic that we are dealing here today – and it was mentioned before by my colleagues from Italy and Greece – the European Union has a couple of important operations in the Mediterranean to face the migratory pressure and save lives at sea. I will not repeat the numbers that have been cited and the migratory picture that we see. Although in 2017 the trend seems to be lowering, we're still at extraordinary levels of flows into Europe.

The Central Mediterranean route coming out of Libya is the main transit route. This year we've seen about 117,000 people crossing from Libya into Italy, basically. In that area, we have the European Naval Mission EUNAVFOR MED Sophia that is operating in international waters outside and off the coast of Libya since 2015. It is a mission that is not primarily designed to save lives at sea, although in practice that's one of the main tasks that they fulfill. The main mission of that operation is to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and human trafficking. It has additional tasks that have been very prominent, very important, mainly training the Libyan national Coast Guard to provide support.

In that capacity, we are quite content to see that some first efforts have been made. We have trained about 200 Libyan Coast Guard members. They have been on ships and started to patrol their own territorial waters, which are indeed the most dangerous waters because that's where most people actually died in the crossing. They're on patrol boats that have been provided, vitally, for that purpose, so it's a hand-in-hand effort here. We're proud to say that they have actually rescued 18,000 people this year only from basically nothing in the years before.

Other parts of the mission of EUNAVFOR Sophia also to help implement the United Nations Security Council weapons embargo against Libya, and to gather and collect data on illegal export of oil from Libya. So it's a kind of comprehensive mission that EUNAVFOR Sophia is engaged on, and we've seen some efforts and some success in what they've been doing. But clearly, it's an effort that needs to be sustained for a longer period.

Regionally, behind that, we have the efforts that the European Union is stepping up to support our member states, Italy and Greece, mainly through the European Coast Guard and Border Agency, or FRONTEX as it's better known. Two missions are there, two important national authorities. One in Italy is Triton, and one in Greece which is Poseidon. Both of them supporting member states, national authorities, and working under their authority to support those navies and coast guards, saving lives but also doing other important work such as cross-border crime, and other coast guard activities such as looking at illegal fishing and pollution of maritime waters in a comprehensive manner as well.

To give you some data points on those, maybe to give you some interest for – currently for Operation Triton in Italy, there's about 300 European officials supporting Italian authorities with seven vessels and aircraft, two helicopters, and mobile offices. The main effort is at sea, but also some land-based support. To give you some data points, they have been participating in 2017 only, from February to November, participating in – participating in helping saving 21,000 people out of the seas. They seized 25 tons of drugs, detected seven incidents of pollution, arrested 253 suspected smugglers, and seized about a million of illegally smuggled cigarettes, to give you some data points there.

For the operation that FRONTEX is supporting in Greece, which is called Poseidon, in this year alone or at this current state there is about 800 guest officers that are working under FRONTEX to support the Greek national authorities. They have been participating in saving more than 11,000 people in the Aegean. In terms of the assets deployed, there's 13 vessels, two

helicopters, and 60 patrol cars, with about 800 personnel that have been participating in seizing 5.5 tons of drugs, arresting more than 290 smugglers or suspected smugglers, seizing 42 million cigarettes illegally passing, and falsified documents. So really a comprehensive mission.

Also to mention, and that's the third route after the Central Mediterranean route, which is the main transit route that we've been seeing, the Eastern Med route, we should not forget there's also the Western Mediterranean route – people crossing over into Spain and the Spanish enclaves on – or exclaves on the African continent, where FRONTEX also has support missions to the Spanish national authorities with the names at sea for Hera, Indalo, and Minerva. Those have been operating also for several years. Currently, about a hundred FRONTEX officers supporting that.

To give you some data points on that, for only the period of May until end of November – so fairly short period – they've arrested about 100 suspected smugglers, seized 68.5 tons of drugs – so a very high number of drugs, because the Western Mediterranean route has also traditionally been sort of a high drug-trafficking route as well – detected four illegal fishing incidents, and equally seized a high number of illegal cigarettes and other tobacco products, about 60 million pieces alone.

It is a comprehensive security effort, but in the core of it is really saving lives at sea. We will not see that decrease, really, although we have sort of a positive tendency, unless we keep working on transit routes, on the root causes, on countries of origin, because that's really where the effort has to lie. We are very proud – as I said earlier, very proud of the efforts of the officers and marine men and women who are working at sea, saving lives. It's something we can be proud of. But we need to be conscious that this has a palliating effect on what's happening. It's really addressing the symptoms, but not the root causes. It's a fight that we need to keep working together and jointly. As my Greek colleague said earlier, it is something that we need to do in full solidarity and in full vision of the complexity of the task as a global challenge that we all face, and not something to be left to individual member states that are the most effected by the state of geography.

Thank you.

HURD: Thank you.

Ambassador Thompson.

THOMPSON: Thank you very much for inviting us to participate in this. The colleagues before have made my life a little bit easier because you have provided already a lot of the information that I was also going to provide.

I would like to start by saying that, indeed, the movements in the Mediterranean continue to be extremely important, but are much less than it was before. I think that's an important element. We have accounted for 163,979 arrivals in Europe by sea during 2017, as of 26 November. Certainly, Italy remains to be the main entry point at this point, somewhere around 116(,000) migrants. Greece second has gone down and it comes up again. Interesting, Spain is

going up substantially. Cyprus, also, in the last years – in the last year has become a little bit more important.

So we are about 30 percent less than the year before, in comparison. However, the number of dead remain quite important, and we're talking about 3,033 that we have accounted for. So there is – we realize that there is a clear pattern that exists, that is the percentage in the Central Mediterranean, basically; that is, the percentage of dead remains the same, despite the differences in the numbers in the last two years. It has stabilized at approximately 2.4 (percent) of the total of arrivals, and this is the amount of people that we find and that we count and that the newspapers and the different entities know about. So, obviously, these numbers might be much bigger, but we don't learn.

We continue to promote the idea of and the premise of the most immediate action by all stakeholders that are around and that should help to reduce the loss of lives as much as possible in these mixed flows of migrants – economic migrants, asylum-seekers, people that are searching for different reasons to come to Europe – and, obviously, regardless of their status.

We have been very happy with a lot of the actions that have been taken, and the colleagues before just mentioned different operations that are taking place in the Mediterranean. I think the real heroes there are the different coast guards of the different countries, including Turkey as you mentioned, because they have done also very important work.

The other countries in the south of the Mediterranean have also taken actions, and they are not as prominent as the one arriving. The coast guard in Libya have made also a big effort in trying to enhance their own capacity, but at the same time I think we all have made a big effort to enhance their capacity by equipping them better, but also training them in a way that they do better rescue operations, but also more humane ways of dealing with people immediately after.

NGOs have been an extremely important element in complex operations, I would say, but they have rescued a lot of people and provided a lot of the support to the vulnerable cases.

Certainly, the commercial vessels have played a very important role. I know that it's not an easy task, particularly in the Mediterranean, it's a very busy route all the time, but they have played a very important role. I have some figures here, but I will leave the gentleman that is in the screen to provide that to you because I think he's going probably to focus on that. We know, also, that for commercial vessels, it is a little bit more difficult because of the economic cost they have, the fact that they are not equipped in order to do it, and certainly their reliability that they not necessarily are always ready to assist. But they have been a very important actor in this process.

We still consider that mainstream human rights and protecting vulnerable migrants at all the stages of these search-and-rescue operations is extremely important, regardless of the legal status of the migrants and/or the conditions that have brought them. It's certainly an obligation of all governments, and I think that the majority of the efforts that have been done through these years have that as a very important basis.

Post-embarkation and reception assistance is one of the most difficult part, and I think is where we find certainly a lot of problems in Libya. We are at a point in Libya where we – and when I say we, I'm talking about the common efforts that the European Union, IOM, and other institutions also have done in order to build their capacity with this in a certain way contradiction, that we save people or they save people at the sea, and then bring them back to the shore and put them very often in detention centers that have terrible conditions, and where people can even die at land instead of having died at sea. So there are some contradictions in the whole effort, but I think we are very clear that this needs to continue, and what we need to do is to try to enhance the capacity of Libyan authorities to deal with the people at land as well as other countries are trying to do. Certainly, it's one of the issues that remains, I would say, one of the present important challenges.

What we see as very important in this post-embarkation, or disembarkation, and reception assistance is basically to have an approach that is right base, but also vulnerability sensitive. We know perfectly well that there are a lot of different vulnerabilities among the people that are in those boats. We have children. We have victims of trafficking, victims of torture, people with specific needs or protection needs or specific vulnerabilities. It's certainly not easy to create a system that addresses all those things. Mainstreaming human rights into those strategies and operations must be, obviously, foreseen by everybody. The cooperation between countries of origin, transit, and destination are extremely important and not always present. So that's another element.

Capacity building, coordination, and partnerships continue to be a large part of our focus there, not only with the member states and with Libya. We are doing this work with UNHCR. As I said, the Libyan Coast Guard plays a very important role in this. Basically, we try to work also with NGOs to build their own capacity as well.

Just to conclude, I think there are two elements. The colleague from the European Union mentioned this. It is, by doing all this, we are dealing with the consequences. We have to be very clear that, despite the fact that we are putting a lot of efforts – and each one of the actors in this table and others that are not represented here have made big efforts, invested a lot of capacity, resources, and people and time in doing this – we are still only dealing with the consequences, and not totally successfully dealing with them. So, basically, we have to remember that a large number of the people that are crossing the Mediterranean today are crossing because of the instability in Libya.

Libya used to be one of the major destination countries for migrant workers, and still a lot of the people that cross the Mediterranean, according to what we have found, they cross the Mediterranean after spending some time in Libya and not being able to find the jobs that they thought that they were going to find and the possibility that they thought that they were going to achieve. So stability in Libya is a key factor in trying to respond to a lot of this.

A lot of the efforts that we are doing with the support of the European Union, and different member states of the European Union, are to try to work on preventing irregular immigration in the Sahel region. We are hoping that this is going to provide some results in the mid-term and long run.

As long as the situation in Syria continues to be the same, Greece will continue to be at risk of another flow. We need to continue investing in trying to support the governments that are around Syria because they are the ones that are keeping or having the biggest burden into all this.

So I think there are two main questions that we need to reflect upon, to conclude. First of all, how can we enhance comprehensive regional or state-led responses to rescue? That is a big question. How we can strengthen the NGO support to SAR operations to ensure that the NGOs can deliver their lifesaving services, but in full accordance with international, EU, and applicable national laws?

These two questions are linked to our short- and long-term ambitions with regard to eliminating this perilous Mediterranean crossing. That is, in the short run, how can we create safe and secure maritime space grounded in a rights-based approach and strong, multi-stakeholder cooperation SAR operations?

In the long run, it is clear for us that the most effective way to reduce this is to set up regular and safe avenues for immigration. Therefore, which regular avenues can be made available to workers at all skill levels, students, family members, entrepreneurs? Which kind of transparent, time-bound, and effective migration policies need to be in place? Because there continue to be a lot of irregular immigration because there are still jobs that exist, for which people don't have regular ways to get there. We need not only to optimize the status-determination procedures, but also to really design pathways that allow European societies to make the most of migrant contributions to their own welfare.

Thank you.

HURD: Thank you, Ambassador Thompson.

Director Murray, thank you again for joining us long distance and late at night. Please.

MURRAY: Thank you very much. Good afternoon to you.

Particularly at sea, we live in a world defined by regulation, convention, and codes. Notwithstanding formalized regulation, it's long been a tradition with shipping and seafarers that every effort is made to rescue anyone who is distress at sea. This mutual self-help principle has been in place for centuries, and underpins the humanitarian approach of seafarers to their fellow man.

The natural humanity of seafarers to provide assistance has, however, been formalized in two maritime conventions: firstly, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS; and also, the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea. So both of these instruments require that the master of a ship which is in a position to do so, on receiving information from any source that people are in distress at sea, responds to obligations that include proceeding promptly to assistance, and to offer assistance regardless of the nationality or

status of such persons, or the circumstances in which they are found. It may be noted from these rulesthat the ship rendering assistance does so without consideration of race, color, or other characteristics of the people in distress. Furthermore, onboard, other than the most basic checks on immediate health of welfare considerations, no assessment of those rescued should take place or be asked for by any authority. Assessment or categorization of people rescued may only proceed when rescued personnel have been disembarked to a place of safety.

During the first half of 2016, IOM recorded over 205,000 migrants reaching Europe via the Mediterranean, with over 2 ½ thousand recorded deaths. Up to June of this year, a far smaller number crossed the Med, yet the number of recorded deaths was over 1,600. It's clear, therefore, that throughout 2017, migration across the Mediterranean has continued to be a tragic reality.

The number of people actually rescued by merchant ships over the past few years: in 2015, over 16,000; 2016, nearly 14,000; and in 2017, to the middle of November, 11,000. The actual percentage of those rescued by merchant ships is slowly increasing, which is perhaps a story of concern.

Rescue has been carried out by most types of internationally trading ships, including tankers – oil, chemical, and even gas – as well as by container ships and bulk carriers. On all of these ships types, matters of particular concern with safety concerns on tankers particularly being paramount. However, issues on container ships and bulk carriers are also significant, and the design and construction of many ships frequently render them not suitable to both conduct large-scale rescues and support large numbers of rescued people. This unsuitable nature has several aspects such as: the recovery from water facilities is generic and not intended for large-scale rescue operations. Many ships have a high freeboard, which is the distance from the waterline to the deck. Many ships have little maneuverability and a lack of safe space of survivors. Also, there will be a lack of resources – food, medical, and accomodation. The ship's personnel are sufficient to operate a ship, but it's not specified specifically trained to handle a large number of survivors. Safety concerns, rescued person may be exposed to risks or may themselves pose a risk for the safety of the ship. One of the concerns of the industry is the ongoing psychological burden on ordinary seafarers who may be called upon to carry out rescues, and so experience the trauma that comes with that process.

Ships associated with the offshore exploration industry also have participated in rescuing distressed people, as have passenger ships, which are also bound by the same moral code and legal responsibilities that apply to all ships. In this case, however, coordinators generally do not call on passenger ships unless other alternatives are not available.

The required crew compliment on merchant ships – I seem to be losing you.

(Pause.)

The crew ships will operate perhaps with less than 20 crew members, while others will have a requirement for considerably more. In general available accommodation will be limited to reflect the compliment required the flag State manning certitficate. Also consequently, there

is usually very limited additional accommodation or other facilities available for use by rescued personnel, who may frequently significantly outnumber the ship's own compliment. The difference in numbers between the ship's crew and the rescued personnel can lead to security concerns.

ICS has produced guidelines for large-scale rescue operations at sea, copies of which, I understand, are available in your room today, and may also be freely downloaded from the ICS website. The guidelines are widely supported by the industry, and have been particularly welcomed by those administrations significantly involved with migration across the Mediterranean. If anybody wants later to ask any questions in detail about these guidelines, I can answer those as a separate point.

The commitments on ships to carry out rescue at sea place a corresponding obligation on administrations to arrange the prompt disembarkation of those rescued to a place of safety. No matter how well-intentioned the ship is, it is not considered to be a place of safety, which, as we've already heard this evening, is defined itself in international law. Such law also can preclude a ship from returning those rescued to a place where they believe them to be in danger. It might also be noted that a very real danger can exist for a ship's master and crew dealing with overwhelming numbers of rescued persons if the ship is ordered to return to a port where they do not want to go.

Fortunately, the authorities in the Mediterranean have acted in an exemplary manner. Italy in particular is to be applauded for its commitment to disembarking rescued people in a place of safety where medical and other support services can work alongside those who categorize disembarking persons.

It's important to recognize that merchant ships do not rescue migrants, refugees, smugglers, or traffickers. When called upon, ships rescue people who are in distress and transport them to a place of safety. Ships should not be asked or expected to categorize rescued people, and cannot do this other than in the most rudimentary way consistent with the limited capacity on these ships. This process will seek to keep family groups together but separate obviously vulnerable individuals, including women and children, from inappropriate contact where this can be achieved.

In the event that individuals are identified as posing a current threat to the ship, its master and crew, this will be communicated to outside agencies, with guidance and assistance being sought wherever possible. On disembarkation, any possessions that have given rise to concern will be handed to the authorities. Once again whenever possible the owner of property that is giving cause for concern will be identified.

The industry, and ICS in particular, has both instigated and participated in a range of activities and interaction with governments and international agencies. This arrangement – these engagements include at the U.N., IOM, UNHCR, and various NGOs involved in rescue operations, as well as governments of countries affected by the migration crisis. ICS participates in a variety of processes coordinated particularly by the EU and 'Operation Sophia', which utilizes various resources, including military assets, in support of its broader protection remit.

ICS also participates in the SHADE MED process, an interagency coordinated under Operation Sophia that you already heard about, coordinating also the efforts of the Allied Maritime Command, MARCOM, which separately operates Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean. The Shade Med process seeks to de-conflict different operations in the Mediterranean, has developed proposals and an outline mechanism to both gather useful information from the industry, and in turn provide relevant information to shipping when and where this is required. Providing the prompt disembarkation of rescued people, there is frequently little outside assistance that the ship will require, and will always do so when the transfer of survivors to a more suitable vessel or other assistance may be seen to be appropriate following contact with the relevant authorities.

My final point deals with the fact that there is a cost associated with carrying out rescue, financial cost, and that is considerable. It affects part of the industry disproportionately. However, the shipping industry has resisted the suggestion that it should be compensated for participating in rescue operations. To do so would risk institutionalizing or formalizing the role of ships and the shipping industry in a matter that does remain the responsibility of governments.

Thank you for now.

HURD: Thank you.

I'll ask a series of questions. Again, if you could just wait to answer until I've asked the questions of all the speakers.

I'll start with Minister Counselor Flumiani. You mentioned the collaboration and cooperation between the Italian authorities and the Libyan Coast Guard. I'm wondering, in the view of the Italian government, what are the current strengths and weaknesses of the Libyan Coast Guard, as it stands right now? Secondly, how is Italy monitoring the compliance of the Libyan Coast Guard with international human rights law and humanitarian law, specifically as it regards to sea rescue? So that's one basket of questions.

Another issue that has been somewhat contentious has been the NGO code of conduct. I'll give a little bit of background on that, and then – and ask a series of questions.

Our colleagues from IOM have reported that of the 117,000 refugees and migrants rescued on the Mediterranean so far in 2017, ships from nongovernmental organizations, or NGOs, have rescued about 38 percent of them, a fairly large percentage. In early August of this year, the Italian government issued a code of conduct for these NGOs that are conducting sea rescues. Some of the NGOs agreed to it and others rejected it. Since the code of conduct was instituted, there has reportedly been a significant decrease in the number of NGO boat patrols in the Central Mediterranean. At the same time, the number of refugee and migrant boats arriving in Italy has also reportedly increased, from about 4,000 in August to 6,000 in September.

So just two basic questions. In the view of the Italian government, what was missing from international maritime law that made the code of conduct for NGOs necessary? What

precipitated it? The second question is: Did the Italian government consider extending the code of conduct to commercial ships, fishermen, or other vessels in the – in the Central Mediterranean?

Two other very quick baskets of questions, the first focusing on human trafficking. Are Italian Coast Guard, naval, and other official personnel who participate in the – in the kind of search-and-rescue operations we've been discussing trained to detect human smugglers and traffickers aboard ships? In the event that they actually suspect that someone aboard one of these ships is a human smuggler or trafficker, what are they supposed to do? What is the protocol?

The last questions have to do with the commercial shipping industry. What is the Italian government's evaluation of its engagement and cooperation with the shipping industry, specifically on search and rescues? Are there ways in which you think this can and should be strengthened?

On to my Greek colleague, starting with the area of human smuggling and trafficking, a similar line of questions. Are Hellenic Coast Guard personnel trained to detect human smugglers and traffickers aboard ships?

You noted that more than 3,600 human smugglers and traffickers have been arrested by the Hellenic Coast Guard since 2015. What's happened to them? Where are they? Have they been prosecuted? What's the status of the prosecutions?

Then, also, you made I think a very critical point that sometimes passengers on boats will intentionally sink boats in order to prompt rescue. When this has been done by people who are engaged in criminal activity, like human smugglers or traffickers, are there additional legal penalties for the intentional sinking of boats? Because, of course, the sinking of a boat endangers the lives of everybody aboard.

Shifting to your neighbor, I was very struck by your words about the cooperation between Turkey and Greece, especially against a long history of frequent conflict and challenge. That was very striking. I'm wondering, are there ways in which the Greek-Turkish cooperation on detection, search and rescues, and flows of boats can be strengthened?

On the shipping industry, shipping has been at the heart of Greece since antiquity. The Greek shipping industry is one of the foremost in the world, and you even have a ministry dedicated specifically to shipping. What is your government's evaluation of its engagement and cooperation with the shipping industry, specifically regarding search and rescues in the Mediterranean? Are there ways that this engagement and cooperation should be strengthened?

Shifting to my EU colleague – yes – Italy and Greece have obviously borne an incredibly heavy load as frontline states. The vast majority of refugees and migrants have arrived on their shores. So I wonder, to what extent are the EU and its member states discussing the possibility of having boats carrying refugees and migrants disembark at other EU ports to help lessen the burden on frontline countries, particularly Italy and Greece? What would be needed in order to make this happen? Have any member states – specific member states – you can name them if

you want; if you can't, understood – but have any member states shown a willingness to open their ports?

On the topic of restrictions on inflatable boats, in July the EU foreign ministers approved restrictions on the supply of inflatable boats and outboard motors to Libya. What effect has this had on refugee and migrant flows from Libya? Have the kind of vessels refugees and migrants are using changed? What's been the humanitarian impact? Other than destroying the boats themselves, have the EU and its member states considered pursuing legal action against companies responsible for exporting these boats?

To piggyback on your comments about EU engagement with the Libyan Coast Guard, similar line of questions. What are the current strengths and weaknesses of the Libyan Coast Guard? How is the EU monitoring their compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law?

On the topic of human smuggling and trafficking, when suspected human smugglers and traffickers are detected and arrested during the conduct of an EU operation, what's done with them? Similarly, where do they go? Criminal prosecution? Et cetera.

Ambassador Thompson, in October your colleague who's with us here today, Chief of Mission Dall'Oglio, made a brief reference to the resources and training available to navies, coast guards, et cetera to conduct these kind of search-and-rescue operations. In the view of IOM, are the national and multinational search-and-rescue operations adequately trained and resourced? If not, what can and should be done to ensure they are adequately trained and resourced?

Secondly, what is IOM's assessment of the Italian code of conduct for NGOs involved in sea rescues that I alluded to earlier? Does IOM have any recommendations related to this code of conduct?

You also alluded to Libya. Same question: In the view of IOM, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the Libyan Coast Guard? What are they doing to ensure compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law related to sea rescues?

F Institutionally, does IOM have recommendations on how national, multinational, and commercial entities participating in sea rescues can improve their response, specifically to human smuggling and human trafficking?

Finally, Director Murray, I'm going to start with a scenario and ask two questions related to that, and then move on to several other sets of questions. Suppose a merchant ship has rescued refugees and migrants at sea. Human smugglers, traffickers, and perhaps other criminals are among the rescued. They fear the refugees and migrants will reveal their identity, and are willing to threaten, attack, and even kill refugees and migrants to prevent this identification. In a scenario like that, what is the protocol for the master and crew of the merchant ship if they conclude these individuals are an immediate threat to the refugees and the migrants? You spoke earlier about measures they're supposed to take if there's a perceived threat to the crew of the

ship, but I'm wondering if there's a perception of threat to the refugees and migrants themselves. At what point and how do merchant ships communicate to the relevant authorities that there may be human smugglers, traffickers, or other criminals aboard a rescue ship?

Moving on to just an assessment of the performance of merchant ships, I think it's unquestionable that merchant ships have responded in quite an extraordinary way. But, as IOM and others have noted, merchant ships do not always respond positively when called on to collaborate in rescue operations. They've also noted that commercial vessels are often not equipped – and I think you alluded to this as well – often not equipped for search-and-rescue operations. What are reasons a merchant ship might not adequately respond to a call to participate in a search-and-rescue operation?

Another line of questions. It is inevitable that merchant ships will continue to be called on to rescue people in distress and transport them to a place of safety. The shipping industry has resisted compensation for doing so, as you've noted. What kind of support can and should governments and multinational entities like the European Union provide to the shipping industry to strengthen their search-and-rescue operations of merchant ships – that is, support that does not drift into the realm of compensation?

Before, during, and after search-and-rescue operations, how would you evaluate the engagement and cooperation between the shipping industry and frontline states like Italy and Greece, and entities like the EU? Finally, how can this engagement and cooperation be strengthened?

So we'll start with Minister Counselor Flumiani.

FLUMIANI: Thank you, Nathaniel, for this very extensive round of questions. (Laughs.) I will try to do my best, and some of them I will group them because they are quite similar.

So, as I mentioned, supporting the Libyan institutions and their capacity building is our priority. We have been working very hard on this for quite a long time now, and this is key in order to enable the Libyan authorities to handle what is happening in their country and in their area of responsibilities at sea.

So what we are doing is, both bilaterally and with the EU, is upgrading their technical training, their technical ability to handle search and rescue, to handle patrolling at sea. We are training the personnel. In this training, human rights respect component is included, because this is important. They are people at sea. They have not been doing this a long time. So when we train them, we include this kind of element, which is essential, in our view. Of course, how can you do your work if you don't have the necessary assets? So we are helping with the repairing basically and the keeping running their naval units. We will do more in the next months to come.

You mentioned also the code of conduct for the NGOs. This was, indeed, a very important piece of work which was done by our ministry of interior, together with the colleagues

of the EU and the Commission especially, in order to give a framework of agreed procedure to NGOs, which are not subject to the Italian law, because they are international NGOs. As merchant ships, for instance, which are Italian flagged, they are subject to the law and to the international convention, which Italy has adhered to. So it is covered, if I could say. But different is the situation of international NGOs, which were operating at the time. Sometimes I understand also within the Libyan maritime borders. So this was a big issue of discussion. You will have seen a lot of debate on the media concerning their intervention.

So we agreed with them, and actually a large number of them, to have a set of agreed rules. The agreed rules, I will just point to a couple of them which are important, are all in the frame of the conventions I mentioned before. But the first rule is that they will not operate in the Libyan international waters, thank you. Also, that in case that the Italian authorities, they would want to inspect or go on board, they would be able to do so. I want to say something about the coordination that our Maritime Center of Coordination is doing with all the operations. So they would also agree to have a very constant communication with our coordination center, and to inform whether they have a sense that there is some illicit trafficking or maybe smugglers on board of their ship.

So better communication, clear procedures, and the result is that the code of conduct was accepted by a large number of them. Actually, it coincided, their acceptance, with the diminishing of the flow from Libya. So our data is that in the summer, the flow of arrivals from Libya started to decrease and so, also, the burden on NGOs as well. I want to – just to conclude my short answer by saying that our personnel on board of our naval units – especially the coast guard – they are very sensitive about the need to establish whether they are victims of human trafficking and persons responsible of such traffics. That this is why there is this system of interview, and the second interview, really to identify persons at risk and criminals on board before reaching the port of disembarkation. So that the authorities at the port of disembarkation can be informed and they can act accordingly.

HURD: Just on the engagement, and cooperation with the shipping industry, I'm wondering the view of the Italian government. How has that been going?

FLUMIANI: Yes. My knowledge is, as I mentioned, that they are playing a very important role, but that they are part of our daily coordination to our Maritime Coordination Center.

STAMATIS: Thank you, Nathanial. So a couple of hard questions from you. So let's start with the first one, which is the traffickers and how the whole procedure goes with them. I've been speaking with offices from the maritime ministry in Athens. They were actually explaining to me what the procedure is. It's quite easy, actually, for them to understand who the trafficker is on the boat, because it's usually the one who is driving the boat. It's usually a guy who is quite separated from the rest, refugees and migrants. It's easy to distinct them. That's why I actually want to say.

So as soon as they rescue the whole people from the boat, which is on sea, they take them on shore. The trafficker is immediately arrested and then prosecuted. There is a minimum

penalty of 10 years in jail. So this is how it proceeds. In cases also that there is a more specific danger for the life of people on the boat – in example, in adverse weather conditions or when they sink the boat or when they are trying to do maneuvers and they avoid the coast guard patrol vessels, this punishment of 10 years in jail can be actually increased even more, because of the danger they are putting on other people's lives.

But it's important, I think, to say that apart from arresting the smugglers and the traffickers, we are also putting a lot of effort in trying to prevent the consequences of the victims of human trafficking. So what we are doing now in Greece and the islands mainly, of the Eastern Aegean, is that we're trying to create a network where other officers will participate, specialists for the labor market and so on. So when they see a case that's suspicious of being a victim of trafficking, they immediately report it that center so action is being taken for the protection of the victims. So I would say that there's quite a lot of job being done in that specific area.

On the second question, about the Turkey and Greece cooperation and the coast guard's cooperation in practical terms, I would say that actually this was one of the main challenges, especially at the beginning of the crisis in 2015. We all know actually that Turkey has sometimes publicly contested the search and rescue area of its country. So this has created some tensions. The situation has been much better, actually, after the NATO involvement, the NATO activity on the north of Lesvos, which is actually facilitating through surveillance and information sharing with both coast guards. It's also getting better after the EU-Turkey statement, because it actually has made it more important for us to cooperate.

In general terms, though, the cooperation is going very well, in practical terms. There is an exchange of information of people who are crossing the borders. There is also a regular exchange of visit between the commandants of the two coast guards. There is also actually now an everyday communication. Each side is trying to communicate data and information and then – on crossings and so on. So we just try to share more information and try to upgrade our cooperation on that field. Recently, also Greece has hosted an attaché at the embassy of Greece in Ankara, which is actually specialized for this cooperation between the two coast guards.

So steps are also being taken in this regard in order to facilitate the cooperation between the two coast guards. There are confidence-building measures, and these things are going really well. I would like to say, though, that there is what I call the comparison trap. We tend to compare the reality today with what was happening in 2015. But 2015 was an exceptional year, when the flows was extremely high, at their peak almost 800,000 people. When we measure our progress with that year it's always a big progress. So it's obvious that 97 percent of flows have been – is the reduction, actually. But if we compare the flows to previous years, like 2014, for example, it's still higher.

So I would say that there is room for improvement of the cooperation. This is especially in terms of preventing the boats and the vessels from crossing the borders. As I said, the distance is very, very small. It's five miles in most cases. It means very short notice. But I think that a lot of things could be done from the Turkish side in order to prevent the boats from getting too long of their distance, of their shores, actually, and entering the Greek search and rescue area.

On the third question, about the shipping industry in Greece, actually the Greek seamanship tradition is very well-known. So cooperation with Greek ships that actually are operating in the area of the Aegean is really important. The prompt assistance that is provided by these ships is an essential part, actually, of the coast guard, the search and rescue operations. There is a constant exchange of information in this regard. The global merchant shipping has proved to be instrument too for this operation. Merchant ships have, indeed, in numerous cases performed either detection or recovery. So the whole sense of this cooperation between the Greek merchant industry and the Hellenic Maritime Ministry is that it's actually an excellent cooperation and they really try and to help a lot.

HURD: Thank you.

Councilman Blaurock.

BLAUROCK: OK, thank you very much. I'll try to take the questions in the order you posed them.

The first question, I believe, was about the disembarkation of rescued individuals to other countries of the European Union, other than Italy or Greece. I think, first, we need to distinguish between the types of operations that we have, because for those operations that FRONTEX is sponsoring and facilitating, those are actually happening under the authority and supporting of the national authorities of our member states. If they are acting under the authority of Italy or Greece inside their territorial waters, or inside their search and rescue areas, it's automatic and legally there's no question where those people rescued should be disembarked upon. A different question is for Operation Sophia, because it's operating in international waters. So there, that discussion has come up.

Another two points. Maybe one is that when the Operation Sophia was launched, Italy was graciously offering to take upon itself the responsibility to disembark people that the operation would rescue, but also those that the operation would pick up as suspected smugglers. That has been sort of incorporated in the mandate of the mission since its inception. There has been some discussion about burden sharing in that sense, in terms of where to disembark people. But I think there's a couple of factors that have not pushed that discussion very much forward. They have as much to do with practicality as with legal issues. The practicality is just geography, the distance. The distance of a ship that would pick up refugees or migrants on the central Mediterranean route to divert it to other shores would just make it a much longer journey, taking the ship away from the operation, lag time coming back.

So these are issues to be thinking of. The other question, of course, is reception capacity of member states, of – (inaudible) – that there's the destination. More importantly, or also importantly, is the legal question – not so much for the migrants and refugees, but the question about what to do with those that are suspected of smuggling. There is a question of legal finish here, because not all European Union member states actually have in their criminal codes a provision to prosecute somebody who is a smugger in international waters. Italy has that

provision in its statutes. Most other member states don't. So you wouldn't have any legal basis to prosecute a smuggler.

Of course, then, diverting flows and sort of saying, well, we're taking the bulk of the people to a different shore, but the one or two people who we suspect to be the smuggler we'll divert to somewhere else, is creating complexities that in that type of operation, I think, we're not looking forward to. But, of course, overall the question of burden sharing is a political discussion that's ongoing within the European Union. As you know, the Commission has tabled sort of an overhaul encompassing proposal about overhauling the European asylum system as a whole, where the question of sharing the burden and voluntary quarter or not-so-voluntary quarters is a key question one. But that's a question for dealing with the refugees once they're on shore, not so much from the maritime parts, yeah.

To the question of the restrictions, that in July 2017 the Council issued for member states to be allowed to prohibit the sale, supply, or whatever facilitation of basically rubber boats and small outboard motors. I have to disappoint you that I don't have any sort of data points to say how effective that has been. Although, I should I say a couple of things about what the environment of that is, and why there was a belief that that is necessary.

Overall, and that's mainly talking to the effects of Operation Sophia, but also about other coast guards and navies operations on the central Mediterranean route, the types of boat that have been used has changed over time. We've seen initially the boats were much bigger, were wooden fisher boats, much larger capacity per sort of transit. Those boats have basically been disappearing from the waters. Just simply in effect because one part was that boats that have been intercepted have been disposed of. Operation Sophia has disposed over 500 boats over the time of this period. So just the supply of those boats, they were just a scare commodity.

So it has shifted very much to smaller rubber dinghies, initially those that could locally be sourced. Then we saw the operation has detected that there's some flow from smaller boats being sourced from the eastern and western shores outside of Libya, coming through there. They also detected that some of the boats appeared to have been fabricated outside the area basically for the purpose of transporting smuggling, because those rubber dinghies, fairly large in size – so, for high capacities of people, but not very seaworthy, not very study. Those were not boats that were designed to be put on anything else than for that specific purpose.

So there was a necessity to have a legal tool to prohibit that, or at least to have European member states being able to prevent that if those products came through their countries of transit, and to have that possibility. We hope that there's a deterrent effect on that. Otherwise, as I say, we don't have any data points to say that now that it's – we should recall the decision was only made five months ago, to really see if that had an additional effect on things.

On your third question, about the Libyan coast guard, I think we need to be realistic about where the Libyan coast guard, and we're talking mainly about the coast guard that is a military coast guard, and the then there's a civilian coast guard as well. They are sort of different institutes. The military coast guard, which is the one Sophia is dealing with in training, which has been the most capable, in relative terms, out of Libya have basically nothing. There was no

operations room, there was no patrol vessels, there was no crews. So we started from basically a clean slate, restarting to build it up.

Compared to that, it is actually a success story – a very modest one, we agree – but it is a success story. There's about 200 officers trained. There's a couple of rows of patrols going out. The main needs really are technical equipment – such easy things as radar equipment, communications equipment for the ops center room that sits in Tripoli to communicate with patrol boats out at sea, the patrol boats by themselves, and simply training for the crews so that they have more capacity on sea.

We're into that effort. The European Union is doing that. We're pursing more training capabilities. But it is a sort of a slow process ongoing. We've had support from member state, mainly Italy, providing some patrol boats. There's a list of equipment requested. Finally, the military, the Libyan national coast guard, has provided the European Union to ask for equipment, and specific equipment, what they need. So we're looking into that, what we can provide. So hopefully that will develop. They will be strong.

I recall the coast guard has had some effect. They have actually saved 18,000 people out of their territorial waters this year, which is quite a lot. The baseline last year was a couple of dozen. So there is a real effect there. It's also had an effect of deterrence to have boats not start from the Libyan water, because suddenly there are Libyan coast guard boats out in the waters. People will not start when they see the boats. So there has been some positive success here.

In terms of the monitoring, of course that's a key question. It's a task that for EUNAVFOR MED Sophia was not initially in its mandate. It has been added to the mandate to see if the Libyan coast guard complies with international norms, and how it goes actually when its operating on the waters. I should say, and Catherine had said it before, within the training there's a clear module on international human rights and how to treat people. We're actually very pleased that we're partnering with IUM and UNHCR. We're doing those modules inside the EU, under the EU framework for those crews.

But the monitoring is key. We have, unfortunately, seen some instances where the coast guard – the Libyan coast guard has not exactly behaved up to the standards that we trained them. So it is key to do that. There is some practical hindrances. Our mission officials cannot stay permanently in Tripoli in the ops room. We're not allowed to do that for security reasons. So that's sort of day visits to see and monitor these things. Out at sea, the EUNAVFOR MED Sophia cannot be and cannot operate in the territorial waters of Libya. So our ships and vessels have to stay outside the territorial waters, and have to monitor from afar. That is also creating some kind of limitation.

We're trying to sort of compensate for that for the last force generation conference, for instance, we specifically asked member states to provide some air surveillance tools, UAVs, basically, to be able to sort of do some monitoring from the air. That has been granted. So we're looking to really closely follow up to make sure that whatever's happening out on sea with the Libyan coast guard is really applying to the standards we would hope and hold them to. That was the third question, I believe.

The last question was what happens to smugglers. It's very similar to what the colleagues explained. The officers on board will do a first screening of all the people and all the individuals that they pick up from the waters. Usually, as was said before, not so difficult to point out who the smuggler is, if there's a smuggler on board. Oftentimes, nowadays, actually there's no smuggler on board anymore because the ships are just set out at sea sort of free to be picked up by international vessels, NGOs, merchants, or naval forces, or coast guard forces. Oftentimes those who have been smuggled actually will point out to the crews who the people arranging things are.

If people have been violent or involved in human trafficking, they're often times on shore not on the boat, of course. That is also recorded on all those records I passed onto the Italian authorities, who will then prosecute and go further. Actually that works very fine. I should also point out that EUNAVFOR MED Sophia is part of a sort of partnership framework in which it operates. This community, again, that details with international criminal organizations, Europol, Interpol, ICC, so that there's a full sort of picture and awareness throughout Europe of what's happening out there.

HURD: Thank you.

Ambassador Thompson.

THOMPSON: Thank you.

First of all, let me start by saying that I am certainly not an expert on SRA operations. (Laughs.) But I would say, as long as people continue dying in the Mediterranean, more resources are needed. So I don't know if all of the colleagues here represented – and I certainly said that there are a lot of heroes in this process. But certainly, for me, as long as there are still an important number of debt, there are more resources and more training that is required. So I would say that they are adequately resourced and trained.

I think it's a very complex operation. I have been on one of those vessels. It's certainly a very complex operation, that requires not only the right equipment – and the colleagues before we talking about equipment – but also the capacity of the people, the capacity of the people to really assist the ones that they rescue, to identify needs that very often are extremely urgent to address, and then to be able to screen those – the people, not only the smugglers, and try to identify them, but also the different vulnerabilities of the people that are there.

So I think we will continue to provide training, as much as possible. We will continue to work with the EU, the member states, in order to try to enhance that. I think as long as we – as I said before, as long as we don't address the causes and we continue addressing the consequences, the resources will never be enough, because we will continue to have people crossing all the time, and in difficult conditions.

With regard to the Italian code of conduct, I really am not – as I said, an expert on this. We have seen the impact that it has had, that there are still NGOs that have continued to actively

participate and do SRA operations. I understand – on a more personal basis, I understand the logic of needing to put some logic into – some standards in the way that NGOs work. But certainly, we think that whatever comes to diminishing the capacity or the possibility of having more actors playing, as long as people continue dying, it's impossible – it's important to look at and see whether those can be diminished as – the conditions can be diminished, keeping in mind that there has to be some standards that have to be applied, and that NGOs have to ensure that those standards are applied.

With regard to Libya, I think – yeah, I agree with the colleague from the European Union that the progress is substantive. Indeed, there was nothing before. The equipment – when we're talking about the equipment, we're talking even about the boats, the ships. So not only that, but everything else that you require within the boat in order to do these rescue operations. But mainly, I think is the shift in the logic of a more humanitarian type of approach, rather than a police approach. We have been working in doing that. We have trained a lot of people.

I will insist that, regardless of whether we manage to create perfect rescue operation in Libya – operations in Libya, and a coast guard that is fully equipped and capable of addressing all the issues, as long as we don't address what is going to happen disembarkation we continue to have – to create, I would say, a vicious circle of – or cycle of potential vulnerabilities and exploitation of people. So we cannot have this contradiction of rescuing people at sea and bringing them into the detention centers where they are going to be in terrible conditions, and they might have even more important risks.

So I think that continues to be an important – and we are working also on that, with the support of the European Union. We are working in trying to address the situation of the people in the detention centers. We are working in trying to raise awareness of the Libyan authorities on the possibilities to have alternative ways to detention that can give also protection to the people. We are working on creating standard operating procedures for the Libyan authorities when the people are disembarked, on how to screen the people, how to address those. But still, is work in progress. We need to do much more.

With regard to your final question, that's probably one of the most difficult questions – how to improve response to human trafficking and the smuggling. I would say, first of all, we have to make a big difference between the two. People used to try to put them together, and these are two different type of activities and two different, I would say, crimes, and that need to be addressed in a totally different way. IOM has been working on preventing human trafficking for as long, I think, as the organization exists. We have made – us, and a lot of other international organizations, national organizations, governments, a big effort, particularly I would say in the last 15, 20 years. We have made a lot of progress. I'm talking about human trafficking.

We have made a lot of progress in creating laws almost everywhere in the world that punish human trafficking as a crime, that look at the victim in a different way, that create some protection possibilities for the victims. We have built the capacity of thousands of officials, of judges, of prosecutors, of NGOs, of everybody. We have worked with everybody on this. We

have not managed to stop the crime. I think a very important element that we have started to address in the last years, and it's relatively new, is actually the demand.

This is why human trafficking happens, and what it is for. Is it labor trafficking? It is it for sexual exploitation? What we need to try to address more and more is the demand of these services and goods that are provided or produced by the victims. We have started in the last two or three years to work very much with the private sector on that, and to raise awareness of the people of all of us, as consumers, of what is important, to raise awareness, to look at the products that you're buying and seeing what the chain – supply chain that those products are, in order to be assured that not in the main company but in the supply chain of the company that there are not trafficked people working on that. So I think it's a shift in the logic that can bring a little bit more results, because honestly up to now we haven't been very successful.

With regards to smuggling, it's a different, and also very difficult , type of response. It's true that as long as there are – and we continue to see on this – that as long as there are jobs that are available in the regular and the black market, and people that are willing to take the risk to move in irregular ways to countries and suffer all the potential exploitation and abuses and the dangers that it implies, because they are desperate in their home countries, because they don't have any other possibilities, we will continue to have smugglers, and we will continue to have people that are willing to pay others to help them cross.

The reality is that if we don't open regular channels of migration, we will continue to have this. Obviously, situations like the one we have today that are mixed migration flows – refugees, asylum-seekers, people looking for reunification of their families, migrant workers – and the crisis that exists around the Mediterranean region, the Sahel situation – all these makes a lot of potential clients available there. We will not be able to limit the number of smugglers and the potential people using smugglers if we don't address root causes.

HURD: Director Murray.

It's frozen. John, can you hear me? John, over to you. John, can you hear me?

While we're sorting that out, are there any questions from members of the audience? Yes, if you could please come to the microphone and if you could identify yourself and if you have an affiliation if you could identify that as well, please.

Q: Yeah, hi. Thanks a lot for this panel. My name is Izza Leghtas. I work at Refugees International as a senior advocate on Europe.

So this is an issue that I've worked on lots, so I have a couple of questions. First of all, regarding search and rescue, members of the panel have repeated many times how important and crucial this is. So my question is why, then, isn't proactive search and rescue a part of the mandate of EUNAVFOR MED. This is something that we've recommended, obviously. There are search-and-rescue activities that happen by EUNAVFOR MED in the Mediterranean, but this happens while there's a border control operation or fighting smuggling. So why hasn't that sort

of been put in place given that actually the rate of deaths has gone up, right? Because the number of arrivals has gone up over the past year compared to last year.

My second question – Mrs. Thompson, you alluded to this – is the question about what happens after people who are being brought to Libya. Basically, the support that the EU and the Italian government have been providing to the Libyan Coast Guard has led indeed to an increase in the number of people who were brought back to Libyan territory. But has it been well-documented by us and by others the horrendous conditions happening in official detention centers run by the Department of Combatting Irregular Migration under the authority of the government of national unity. So what is the EU and the Italian government doing as part of sort of responsibility and due diligence to make sure that the abuses – that people who are basically returned as part – as a result of this cooperation and support are no longer exposed to abuses of torture, rape, executions, forced labor that occur and have been well-documented in these centers? Thank you.

HURD: Before you answer those questions, Director Murray, can you hear me now?

MURRAY: Yes, I – and apologies for this. It keeps dropping out, therefore the question I heard but perhaps if I missed something could you please remind me.

HURD: Did you hear the questions that I asked you during – as I was doing my round of questions?

MURRAY: I heard some of them and then it dropped out in the middle. So if I give you some answers and perhaps repeat the question.

HURD: Sure, great.

MURRAY: I think to put the questions in order, perhaps, the equipment onboard ships is generic in that all ships are required to have a capacity to rescue in the water. IMO doesn't specify how many people. When the regulation was developed, it was intended to mean that if a ship came across another ship, for example, that had difficulty, or people were in the water from another ship, it would have some recognized capability of rescuing those people. That is often using existing ship's equipment, and only if there's nothing onboard the ship that could be reasonably used have some specific equipment.

But the average ship is certainly not designed to recover large numbers of people, which although this equipment that I allude to, there's a requirement to train with it. A typical ship's crew can range from below 20 to quite a significant number more than that. But 20-odd people would not be representative of many ships. The average rescue of survivors onto merchant ships number over a hundred people. Don't forget, when the ship has rescued people onboard, it's still got to function as a ship. So those 20-odd people are doing their normal work – i.e., keeping the ship safe – and that has to be the primary job, navigating and all the other activities onboard, and then trying – (off mic) – the people who have been rescued, plus the physically difficult effort of actually rescuing people.

So then I think the question was, what about the people who might be troublesome onboard the ship? Well, in the guidelines that I made reference to, Section 6 of that deals with the management of rescued persons, and the guidance with segregating people so far as possible without categorizing them beyond the basic means.

But other people have said it's fairly obvious who's who. Ships can't write lists of who people are and what their backgrounds are. But, so far as the ship can, it can keep family groups together, it can keep vulnerable people to the best of their abilities; and provide food, water, accommodation, shelter to the people who are most in need of shelter. But all of that is current with the safety of the ship, which is the master's primary duty.

The communications systems that we have, there are long-established methods which work very well with the majority of ship – (off mic) – the Italian, RCC, MRCC, but also Greek and other ones as well. That's the communication that we have in place – (off mic) – and it operates very well. Although, with Operation Sophia, there are proposals to further develop the communication protocols – we're losing it again. It'll come back again in a moment, or reestablish contact.

Can you hear me?

HURD: We can.

MURRAY: It didn't take too long that time.

So the positive of Operation Sophia would be that there be a voluntary reporting area in the Mediterranean that ships would provide some information, which is very similar to information that is put into the automatic reporting system, that it would help to verify the ship with the – with the Operation Sophia resources. Then the ship might be asked – a ship might be asked specific information which would help the authorities to – (off mic) – that, although we have some questions. Because there's a limit to what the ship might reasonably be asked to do.

One of the questions that you had was that some ships are reported not to respond to distress calls, and I have heard of a small number of reports of that. I don't know that it's been quantified, but it's one of those things of trying to prove a negative. It's not – the information doesn't really reach us about that. Clearly, as I've said, there is a strong tradition in the shipping industry of giving assistance, and it would be regrettable – (off mic) – very good reasons for – (off mic) – and ships were systematically and indeed the law.

Having said that – (off mic) – UNCLOS recognize that there are reasons why a ship might not render assistance in that if – I mean, I'm paraphrasing the regulations exactly – in effect, if it's unreasonable or not actually possible for the ship for whatever reason to render assistance, then it should – it should identify that and why the reason is. But if a ship doesn't participate and the details of the ship are known then the flag state the ship is registered with should be informed of that, and that lack of cooperation, lack of support should be then investigated.

What we are doing to follow up and try to – because I think behind a lot of your questions was how could things work better in the future. Well, having recently returned from the recent – from the last SHADE MED meeting in Rome, one of the things that we are investigating is to run a workshop with various participants in that SHADE MED process which would maintain the momentum of the SHADE MED meetings with developing networks of people. We've already heard about the anti-crime agencies – Interpol, et cetera – and there are marine versions of those – less formal, but Maritime Anti-Corruption Network – so there are other groups who we feel could benefit from liaison where they seek to work with the SHADE MED organizers in a meeting in the – hopefully the first part of next year.

Onne other thing. We've talked about different reporting systems and mechanisms, and it is very important for shipping we fully understand the different jurisdictions that exist between the EU, NATO, and various individual countries. For shipping to contribute effectively and efficiently, there's a much-used phrase that is a "one-stop shop". But it really is important, and that's where the value of the RCC/MRCC comes in and – (off mic). But a ship going about its business, say, engaged, has to participate in distress-related work, is – has a single point of impact rather than being expected to know and to understand the differences between different people's jurisdictions, arbitrary lines in the water, et cetera. So the ability to talk to a single point of contact that may well then lead onto other contacts is important.

I have slightly made a mistake there. When I said about other activities, one of the things we're very keen on is to avoid the suggestion of financial compensation for the reasons that I've said. But one of the things that does cause difficulty is when ships have on a small – on a small number of occasions have been asked to stand by and report on a developing situation rather than actually engaging a distress or a rescue. So a ship should engage in a SAR activity, but should not be asked to become an extended arm of one of the various agencies that's involved. So standing by, reporting on a developing situation is not something that should be asked of a merchant ship.

And I apologize if I missed other questions, but I think they were during the time that it dropped out. Either that, or my wonderful memory has – (off mic) – and I missed a question. So, if I have missed a question, please, ask again.

HURD: Will do. Thank you.

If you could answer the question from the audience, please.

BLAUROCK: Sure. Thank you very much for your questions.

Towards your first question about the mandate of Operation Sophia, first of all, it is true that the FRONTEX-facilitated and -supported missions have search and rescue as part – explicitly as their mandate because those are Coast Guard operations. For Operation Sophia, we have to recall it's a military mission, so search and rescue is not sort of part of their typical set of operations. It was consciously decided that their main task was to sort of build a situational awareness picture of the business model of smuggling and human trafficking, and then to try to disrupt that model and go at it that way.

I believe part of why that was the case is, first of all, because that's sort of the approach of – like, an active approach to take. De facto it also, of course, means that you track very closely where the different routes are, where sort of boats are taking off from, and you recall that and so you're following that. So de facto you're actually doing pretty much the same thing, but it's sort of a fine line to tread.

There's also an element of not wanting to be a pull factor out there. If it's known that you're part of an active mission to seek out sort of boats in the Mediterranean, you have the chances that that will sort of be counterbalanced by another part.

Also, you have to call that Operation Sophia has an operational plan that you're probably aware. We're currently in the – in the phase two alpha still, which, according to our plan, is operating within territorial waters, without – not within territorial waters of Libya. So the Operation Sophia can only stay in international waters, and only upon concrete incidents of safety of lives at sea can they enter Libyan territorial waters at all. So there's a practical and legal limit to what they could do, because it's actually inside Libyan territorial waters that most deaths occur because that's sort of the most dangerous piece of it.

Finally, another partner to recall, Operation Sophia is of course part of the international effort to save lives at sea. In part of that effort, they are coordinated by the Italian-run Maritime Rescue and Coordination Center, which are the ones who have taken over the responsibility for that piece of Mediterranean that should be taken care of by Libya, which they can't do because lack of capabilities. So they're part of that effort.

Then, part of their situational awareness picture that they're building, they're in constant contact with that center, and they will allow that center to coordinate what ship and what vessel is best-placed to do an individual rescue operation. That's a more effective and efficient method of doing things, we believe at least, than asking for active SAR operations, as you suggested.

As so the second question, the situation in Libya on the shore – and Laura has repeatedly reminded us how dire that is, and how important it is and crucial it is to address it. I believe the European Union member states are trying to do that, and with a renewed urgency now to do so, and that's really two-fold.

One part of it is really to try to ease the situation and better the situation inside the camps for those people. There's a line of effort, I believe about 90 million, that the European Union is putting towards that aim, mainly channeling through IOM and UNHCR, to better the living conditions and practical conditions of people in the – (inaudible). There's a political discourse also with the Libyan government to decriminalize illegal migration, because you have to remember that illegal migration in Libya is a crime. So, of course, when you pick up people, what is done? They are put in detention. So trying to find alternatives to that is another important, more political side of the discussion.

Then there's also the question about easing the burden to the Libyan state. That has to do with finding those people in most need, who are in the most dire situation in those camps, and try

to repatriate them to their countries of origin. That's a decision that's been taken, if you followed it closely, at the African Union-European Union summit at the end of the month of last month, 29th and 30th of November in Abidjan. They created for the first time an African Union-European Union-U.N. joint task force to facilitate and really speed up assisted voluntary returns out of Libya, with a target, I believe, of 15,000 people by next February. It's a steep target. It's an ambitious one, but it also speaks to the necessity and urgency of the cause.

HURD: Ambassador Thompson, I believe there were several questions for you.

THOMPSON: Yeah. Well, I will repeat a lot of what Ludwig said already, so I don't want to do that.

I think the third element besides alternatives to the tension and bettering the conditions on the tension is really to build the capacity of the Libyan authorities, to understand that there are specific vulnerabilities and needs that people have, and that they have to be able to not only identify them but address them. I would say is its working purpose.

A lot of the problems that we – I think we have in Libya is to try to convince authorities that we also care about them, OK? It's not only about migrants that are crossing the country. So with the support of the European Union, we are putting a lot of effort also to do community stabilization programs, particularly in the areas where the migrant flows in the south of the country, in order to really – because the Libyans have also big problems. They have a large number of displaced people, some of which are going to the places or have gone to the places where the migrants enter, others that have left from that. So there is a mix of needs that need to be addressed, and we have also to show to the Libyans that we also support them and we support their needs and bring the different government and the different militias into this. So it's a – also a political work.

I think the other part that we are also trying to do more and more is to try to prevent people arriving to Libya. Part of this is not only the work that we are doing in Niger and in Agadez, but also in other regions that we are trying to replicate a little bit the success stories that we have had in Niger trying to prevent people, particularly those that we see that they are going there in order to cross the Mediterranean, trying to inform people better and prevent them from doing already the risky trip from Niger to the north of Libya. At the end of the day, what we need is to again try to convince people that the risks that they face are much bigger than the opportunities that they have. I think that that's a very important message.

To conclude, I would say the providing assisted voluntary return for those that want to return is extremely important. We have done it up to a certain level now, and now there is a bigger commitment also from African-origin countries to do that because of the terrible news that have been distributed everywhere. I think we really need to take action, all of us. It's a common responsibility and a shared responsibility. Countries of origin I think have come to the conclusion that they also need to play a role in all this.

BLAUROCK: If I just might add and underline this last part. I mean, I spoke about the comprehensive integrated approach we're trying to do with transit countries, origin countries, but

I think one of the most hopeful news that we've seen out of the African Union-European Union summit was just what you said here. The African Union as an institution and countries of origin for the first time have really stepped up and recognized their responsibility and their role and their ownership of that issue as well, and not sort of asked us to do these things but really actively said we'll be part of that and we'll partner with you in a very active manner. I think this joint task force that I alluded to earlier is a first concrete measure in that. Certainly, it's only a very first step, but it's a sea change in the mindset, I think, of partner countries as well. I think that is sort of at least a cause for hope, even though we recognize there's still a very steep and long challenge ahead of us.

HURD: On that note, I'd like to thank our panelists for a very rich discussion, and your endurance as well. I would also like to thank my colleagues Stacy, Ruben, Jordan, and others for helping to put together this briefing. Thank you. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 4:46 p.m., the briefing ended.]