



THE IRISH MARITIME FORUM

Increasing Awareness of Ireland's Maritime Dimension

21APR17

Mr Enda Kenny TD
An Taoiseach
Department of the Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Dublin 2
D02 R583

It has been reported that you are planning to meet the leaders of like-minded EU Countries to seek support for Ireland's position in the upcoming negotiations on the departure of the UK from the EU. The Irish Maritime Forum (TIMARFOR) believes that it has a proposal which would add to Ireland's credibility as a committed EU State. Specifically Ireland needs to support EUNAVFOR Med - Operation Sophia. We have already submitted this proposal to the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

In the wake of the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the EU, Ireland needs to strengthen her ties with the remaining EU nations. Joining Operation Sophia would demonstrate Ireland's commitment to European cooperation to the nations whose understanding and assistance we will need when BREXIT negotiations get underway.

The deployment of Irish naval ships to the Mediterranean Sea for a humanitarian mission (Operation Pontus) in support of Italy is one of the most significant developments in the history of our Navy. How our naval personnel have responded to the many challenges posed by Operation Pontus has demonstrated to the nation the many qualities of professionalism, seamanship and humanity which they possess. The nation has begun to develop a pride in the Navy, which had not been widespread heretofore.

While TIMARFOR supports the Navy's deployment to the Mediterranean Sea as a demonstration of Ireland's humanitarian and maritime credentials, we cannot understand why Ireland continues to operate in a bi-lateral arrangement with Italy when an EU Mission acting in compliance with UNSC 2240 (2015) commanded by an Italian Admiral has commenced operations in the same area. EUNAVFOR MED, also called Operation Sophia, enjoys widespread support from EU member nations. Twenty five EU states contribute to Operation Sophia, including several neutrals and several non-maritime ones. The current contributing states are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Ireland is notable by her absence and this absence misses an important opportunity to garner diplomatic points from the other twenty five EU contributing member states as opposed to Italy only.

TIMARFOR understands that the mandate of Operation Sophia is more robust than that of Operation Pontus but has no doubts regarding the capability of Irish ships or of the men and women who crew them. There certainly has been no negative publicity emanating from Operation Sophia as it discharges its mandate. TIMARFOR believes that our ships and personnel would benefit from the increased security and support associated with operating within a multinational force. Conversely operating independently without that security and support exposes our ships and personnel to an avoidable risk in this volatile region.

It is worth noting that from a political perspective the precedent has already been set for Ireland's involvement in such missions with the Army participating in EU Battlegroups.

We urge that Ireland joins Operation Sophia without delay.

On behalf of The Irish Maritime Forum

Captain James Robinson DSM FNI
Irish Navy (Retired)