



**Blue Shield**  
Strengthening European  
Maritime Security

## FACT SHEET #2

# EU'S BEST PRACTICES IN ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY

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## EU'S BEST PRACTICES IN ENHANCING MARITIME SECURITY

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### I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Best practices are essential to maritime security in the European Union because they help coordinate the actions of diverse member states that may otherwise prioritise different national or organisational approaches. Through frameworks such as the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS), the EU strengthens information-sharing, operational coordination, and collective responses to challenges including illegal trafficking in the Mediterranean, piracy affecting European trade routes, cyber threats targeting ports, and risks to critical underwater infrastructure in the Baltic Sea. This is particularly important in a system of shared authority, as it demonstrates how the EU can enhance cooperation while preserving national sovereignty. Furthermore, best practices encourage collaboration with international partners and support the integration of emerging technologies, thereby improving maritime situational awareness and decision-making.

### II. EU BEST PRACTICES AT SEA

#### II.1 Operation Aspides

Operation Aspides is a maritime military operation launched in 2024 as a reaction to Houthi attacks on maritime shipping since 2023.

#### Location

Strait of Hormuz, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and the Gulf.

#### Objectives

- Protect and escort vessels
- Contribute to maritime situational awareness through monitoring and information sharing
- Coordinate with partners and ensure safe freedom of navigation

#### Function

- EU warships accompany commercial vessels, providing protection
- Members contribute naval vessels and aircraft for defence and reconnaissance
- The operation is purely defensive with no land-operations targeting Houthis

Results: Operation Aspides represents an important response by the European Union in the maritime domain, providing a protective mandate and helping ensure compliance with international maritime law.

Since the launch, [Aspides](#) has:

- Supported 640 merchant vessels
- Destroyed 370 unmanned aerial vehicles
- Destroyed 2 unmanned naval vehicles
- Rescued 50 sailors

## II.2 [Operation Atalanta](#)

Operation Atalanta is a maritime military operation launched in 2008 by the European Union.

### Location

Coast of Somalia, Northwest Indian Ocean

### Function

- Coordinated naval deployments, including patrols and escorts
- Air surveillance and reconnaissance
- Inspections across key maritime routes
- Promotion of industry self-protection measures
- Intelligence sharing to prevent threats

### Objectives

- Combat piracy & armed robbery
- Protect vulnerable vessels
- Disrupt drug & arms trafficking

Results: Operation Atalanta shows effective responses by the European Union to ensure security of international trade and protection of humanitarian efforts (such as shipments by the World Food Programme).

Since 2008, [Operation Atalanta](#) has:

- 100% Success rate in providing protection to WFP vessels.
- Allowed for successful prosecution of suspected pirates by competent authorities.
- Provided an EU military footprint in the area of operation.

### **II.3 Critical Seabed Infrastructure Protection (CSIP)**

CSIP is a defence project of the Permanent Structured Cooperation framework of the European Union (PESCO), led by Italy, and was launched in 2023.

#### **Objectives**

- Strengthen operation efficiency
- Improve situational awareness
- Effective response to threats such as sabotage and natural hazards
- Promote European strategic autonomy

#### **Function**

- Develop advanced capabilities for underwater surveillance
- Operation through a “system of systems” approach; integrating autonomous and remotely operated vehicles with fixed and deployable platforms connected via a secure underwater network
- Continuous monitoring, early warning and coordinated responses

**Results:** The CSIP shows promotion by the EU of cooperation between member states, integrating military capabilities with industry expertise; creating a coordinated and resilient approach to protecting critical infrastructure.

### **II.4 The Essential Elements of European Escorts (4E)**

The 4E, developed by PESCO, is a naval deployment project launched in 2021 and led by Spain to define key systems for future European surface warships between 2030 and 2045. Other actors include industry, such as Navantia, the leading naval industry in Spain.

#### **Objectives**

- Enhance interoperability
- Reduce fragmentation (among member states)
- Develop more capable, cost effective, and sustainable vessels
- Strengthen EU strategic autonomy

#### **Function**

- The project operates through collaboration between Member States and industry, forming advanced digital “smart ships” capable of adaptable and coordinated operations

### Five pillars

- Combat system
- Communication and information system
- Platform management system
- Navigation system
- System of systems

Results: It is considered a best practice because it promotes multinational cooperation, standardization, and innovation, while aligning long-term defence planning with technological advancement and sustainability, creating a coherent and forward-looking approach to European maritime security.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

These initiatives show how EU maritime security best practices bring together member states with diverse priorities into a coordinated maritime security framework. Operations such as Aspides and Atalanta focus on practical cooperation, intelligence-sharing, and joint operational responses, while CSIP and the 4E project prioritise technological innovation and long-term capability development, including underwater surveillance, protection of critical infrastructure, and enhanced naval interoperability. For Portugal, these developments are particularly significant given its strategic Atlantic position and its role as a gateway between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. As a result, they reinforce Portugal's security and economic interests, strengthen its contribution to EU maritime security, and further consolidating its role as a key Atlantic maritime actor in an increasingly complex and interconnected security environment.