

EU expresses concerned at forthcoming expiry of anti-piracy mandate off Somalia

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Although piracy off the East African coast has come to a virtual halt in the past few years, the EU is keen to maintain its Operation Atalanta mission under the EU NAVFOR mandate.

The EU noted that Somalia was in the middle of a political crisis, with increased disagreements between the president and the prime minister. Parliamentary elections are scheduled to end on February 25th, but the EU said that the political environment remained uncertain.

Last month, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – in partnership with the Somali government – voted to extend all international navy missions for an extra three months. These include Operation Atalanta, also known as EU NAVFOR Somalia; the US-led Combined Joint Taskforce-Horn of Africa; and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield.

With the expiry point approaching once again, EU officials have said that the three months' extension was insufficient to build long-term structures for maintaining stability in the region.

An EU foreign-service paper reported by the *EU Observer* said that Somalia's future intentions were "rather ambivalent and to be doubted. The new posture towards international presence is to be seen in context of Somalia's ongoing electoral process, notably increasing tensions and electoral fragmentation".

Somali leaders appear keen to pivot current or future foreign naval assistance to focus more on partnering to reinforce Somalia Coast Guard and the Navy. The Somalia government has also said that Operation Atalanta needed to focus more on illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping if a further extension was to be approved.

If the UN resolution expires in March, then Operation Atalanta will lose its legal basis to operate off the coast of Somalia. The EU has said that, without access to

Somalia's territorial waters, the capacity for EU NAVFOR to carry out counter-piracy activities in the region would be crippled.