

EU renews its commitment to Gulf of Guinea anti-piracy patrols

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The European Union has said that it intends to carry on with the deployment of its member states' warships in the Gulf of Guinea.

After a review of the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) pilot programme, which has seen member states deploy warships to the region over the past two years to help local forces in the battle against piracy, the EU has said that it needed to maintain a presence.

The EU has proposed a two-year extension of the CMP mandates, starting January this year. It has outlined deployments of Danish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish warships into the region.

Denmark will patrol the area for four months, followed by Spain for seven and a half months, then France for eleven months, Italy for eight months and Portugal for three and a half months. The EU said that the deployment would ensure a continuous EU presence in the Gulf of Guinea, with at least one ship in the area.

An EU External Action Service memo addressed to the Political and Security Committee of the EU said that "the Gulf of Guinea continues to be particularly dangerous for seafarers. None of the coastal navies, with the partial exception of Nigeria, can operate the required high-sea patrol boats to respond to attacks," adding that, for West Africa's coastal navies, responding to the threats on the high seas was not always a possibility or a priority.

The EU launched the CMP in 2019, but it was 2020 before it got around to implementing it. Last year five member states deployed naval ships in the region, meaning that there was a continuous presence of at least one ship throughout the year.

The EU said that the pilot programme had shown that the CMP concept could be an effective and useful instrument to contribute to maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea.

A minor setback occurred last year after Denmark made a high-profile arrest of four alleged pirates in the area. While one of them was injured in the firefight and had to be taken to hospital in Denmark, the other three were eventually “set loose” in a boat, with supplies and within reach of land, because Denmark could not find a country willing to arrest them and charge them.

This year, the EU believed that the risks of pirate activity remains high, mainly in the coastal waters of Togo and Gabon, with Nigeria as the source centre.

“Possible attacks might focus on targets closer to the Niger Delta, changing the modus operandi in light of increased naval presence,” the EU memo stated.