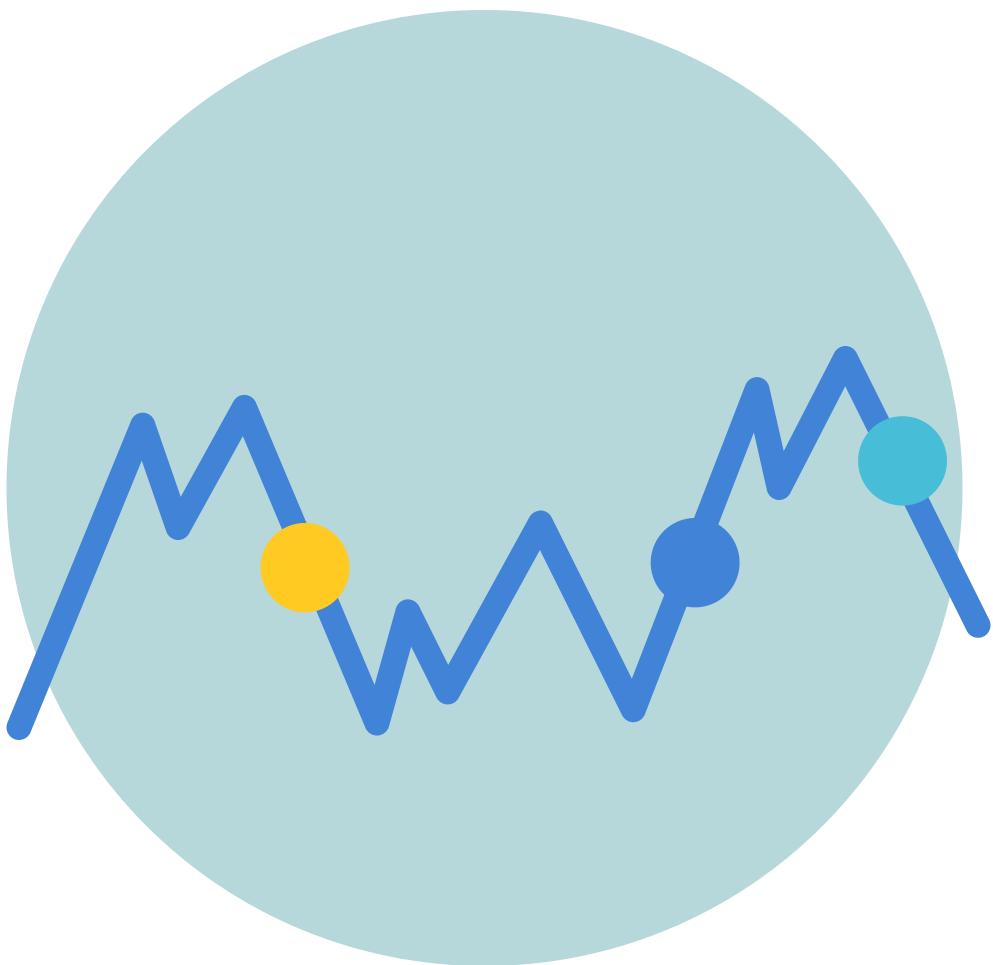




EVENT REPORT

G7++FoGG Plenary, Abidjan

1-2 December 2022



Prepared By: Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute

List of Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FoGG	Friends of the Gulf of Guinea
GoG-MCF/SHADE	Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum/ Shared Awareness and Deconfliction
MMCC	Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre
SWAIMS	Support for West Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States of America
YCOC	Yaoundé Code of Conduct

NB. Some abbreviations are not indicated in full during their first use in this document.

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Background: About the G7++FoGG

Established in 2013 during the UK presidency of the G7, the G7++FoGG was set up as a multilateral maritime security group, intended to support the implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct to enhance maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Now, several plenaries down the line, the G7++FoGG initiative has gained ground as a crucial forum for harnessing multilateral strategic-level efforts towards enhancing the efficacy of the Architecture.

The plenaries in 2022 were held under the co-chairmanship of Cote d'Ivoire and Germany, with the first being held from 5th to 6th July in Berlin and the second, from 1st to 2nd December in Abidjan. Present in Abidjan were over 150 delegates from across the Gulf of Guinea and beyond, including senior government officials, high-ranking naval officers, representatives of international organisations, CSOs and private sector actors with a stake in the region.

This report provides an overview of critical issues discussed during the plenary in Abidjan and concludes with some salient approaches to strengthening the role of the G7++FoGG in contributing to positive maritime security outcomes for the region in the next decade. The report is structured in accordance with the presentations and panel sessions delivered during the event.

Areas of Discussion

The event employed a mixed format of direct presentations to the plenary and breakout group discussions to facilitate deeper dialogue on matters arising from presentations delivered.

The points below highlight the primary areas of discussion during the forum.

- Challenges and opportunities for the Yaoundé Architecture
- The blue economy and the role of civil societies in protecting marine and coastal resources
- Women in the maritime sector
- Controversies and the way forward with the EU's CMP concept
- The UNSC Resolution 2634: possibilities and next steps
- Linkages between piracy and oil theft in the Niger Delta
- Lessons from SWAIMS
- Synergy between G7++FoGG and SHADE
- Synergy between G7++FoGG and the Yaoundé Architecture
- Zone updates
- Updates from the various G7++FoGG Working Groups
- International partner strategies for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea in 2023
- Harmonisation of maritime security initiatives across the region

On Setting the Context

The plenary commenced with the reiteration by co-chairs of the conference, Cote d'Ivoire and Germany, of their strong commitment to maritime security (and particularly for Cote d'Ivoire, fisheries conservation) in the Gulf of Guinea. Both parties used the opportunity to announce the extension of their co-chairmanship for an additional year - an action that they believed was necessary for continuity, sustainability of knowledge and best practices acquired. The co-chairmanship of Germany and Cote d'Ivoire has been centred on three strategic priorities:

1. Supporting resilience and rule of law in maritime security governance
2. Enhancing marine environmental security
3. Boosting coordinated regional responses and aligning international initiatives with regional priorities.

These multi-faceted priorities were reflected in the increasing inclusion of issues surrounding blue economy, the protection of the marine environment and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, as well as in the greater involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) during the plenaries held under their co-chairmanship.

A clear rhetoric throughout the conference was that 2023, which will mark the 10th anniversary of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct (YCC), presents a unique opportunity to take stock of the entire Architecture to ensure that it achieves its ultimate ends. Naturally, issues of harmonisation of efforts were pivotal to debates on taking stock of the Architecture. On the part of the co-chairing states, the issue was addressed with the stipulation that a priority of the G7++FOGG plenaries was not to duplicate existing efforts, but to integrate them across all divides.

On Challenges & Opportunities: Perspectives of Regional Organisations

There was a general consensus that no single state can face the transnational challenge of maritime insecurity on its own. The Yaoundé framework and the regional organisations supporting this framework at the strategic level were described as imperative catalysts in the process of working towards a more secure maritime domain for Gulf of Guinea states. There was therefore the need to preserve and consolidate the achievements of the past decade if progress was to be made.

For the ECOWAS Commission in particular, there was a clear recognition of lessons learnt from ECCAS, which empowered the Commission to establish more MMCCs, taking into consideration some of the notable errors made by ECCAS. The Commission indicated that maritime cells had been set up to facilitate maritime operations within the region. A crucial success had also been chalked, as agreements were finally in place to make Zone G in Cabo Verde operational, with funding provided by the German government.

The following noteworthy points emerged from the discussions:

- Tangible efforts had been made to develop a consolidated budget across the regional communities
- The UNODC was commended by regional bodies on its persistent efforts to facilitate an adequate legal framework/regional agreement to ensure that pirates arrested at sea could be transferred to states with adequate national legislations for piracy prosecution. Thanks to these efforts in tandem with regional actors, an ECOWAS piracy transfer agreement was already in place.

In terms of challenges faced by the framework at the regional level, issues of financing raised were as contentious as they were inconclusive. What remained clear, though, was that the architecture would be unable to survive without an adequate financing mechanism. Debates extended from the need for a comprehensive financial plan by regional actors, to the need for the international community to show stronger financing commitments if they are to be taken seriously by GoG states.



On Blue Economy & the Role of CSOs: Perspectives from SWAIMS Project

The plenary saw much greater civil society engagement than previous plenaries, with an entire panel discussion dedicated to addressing the role of civil society in advancing the blue economy.

The discussions highlighted some of the concerns leveraged by CSOs during SWAIMS activities, including a strong emphasis on the need to have CSOs serve as key partners in strategies and initiatives embarked on in the region. It was clear that CSOs wanted to transition from their peripheral roles to become actual pillars of maritime strategies and partners in intelligence gathering. Another interesting point raised was the need to extend CSO engagement beyond West Africa to Central African CSOs. This was buttressed by concerns of land-locked countries that they were often left behind when it came to active civil society involvement - a situation that needed to change if maritime security issues across the entire region were to be adequately taken into account.



CSOs noted the inadequacy of training/capacity-building opportunities available to them, despite these being a prerequisite for the effective execution of their roles in society.

On the whole, CSOs were perceived as offering the following strategic benefits:

- They offer opportunities to adopt new concepts of governance such as integrated management of coastal areas, bringing together a broad range of actors for the management of coastal resources. Such participatory and inclusive management draws away from traditional, centralised management approaches
- They are rooted in society and offer a high probability of garnering support from local chiefs/heads of communities
- They act at various levels through awareness, training and information sharing. More importantly, they are able to assess the needs and vulnerability challenges of communities impacted by maritime insecurities.

One useful posit was that given the crucial role played by CSOs in the protection of marine resources, their impact should by no means be limited to coastal areas. It is therefore necessary that the efforts of CSOs are better organised through a permanent consultative framework to make their actions more impactful.



- Participate in training sessions on mobilisation of funding
- Engage in strategic partnerships with the potential to boost visibility and impact
- Embark on social entrepreneurship projects, including but not limited to eco-tourism, where revenues generated are ploughed back into mainstream research and advocacy activities
- Bid for relevant projects in line with their vision when calls are published
- Negotiate Memoranda of Understanding at the governmental level to facilitate their activities.

On Women in Maritime

Another unconventional focus of the plenary was on the role of women in the maritime industry and in contributing to addressing maritime insecurities in the region. Unique perspectives were shared on the increasing involvement of women in crude oil theft in the Niger-Delta creeks, not only as facilitators of the crime but also as owners of artisanal refinery camps.

It was highlighted that given the frequent association of crude oil theft with militancy, there was little attention paid to non-militant actors involved in the crime and even less to the potential involvement of women. However, it was clear from studies that had been conducted in the region that women were not as ancillary as was often believed to be the case. In reality, several women were directly engaged as:

- Sponsors of young men who "cook" the crude oil
- Distributors and sellers of the oil, along the entire value chain

The motivations for women to take part in crude oil theft within the creeks were not significantly different from the motivations of men; thus, the clamp-down on militancy and crude oil theft in the region had also led to a slump in the activities of these women, especially in the Delta state. However, there were indications of women going deeper into the hinterlands to continue their business.

A clear pathway to addressing these concerns discussed was the need to take a closer look at the involvement of women and to consider transformational programmes that could help women transition from being perpetrators to being positive advocates in the region.

Beyond the involvement of women in maritime criminality, efforts were also made during the plenary to understand gender roles in tackling maritime crime. For one, it was underscored that the increased participation of women in addressing maritime criminality would have positive externalities for human rights protection.

Again, while gender analysis was under-employed, when applied to maritime issues, there were indications of some linkages between women's involvement in maritime security and enhanced food security.

According to discussions, facilitating the involvement of women in maritime security required ensuring equal employment opportunities for women in the maritime industry and maritime security sector, through the avoidance of negative discrimination in the maritime domain. As a matter of fact, positive discrimination was recommended until balance is restored.

There were some marked consequences of women involvement in security forces that were discussed. For instance, women would be viewed as combatants, and this could have implications for the targeting of women during armed conflicts. In conflict environments, the goal is often to ensure that women do not become unintended combatants.

The following key conclusions were reached:

- It is important to critically assess how women can play an effective role in promoting peace and security, especially within the maritime domain where they are often marginalised
- Understanding gendered aspects of maritime criminality generates new opportunities for effectively tackling maritime crime
- By empowering women within the maritime justice system, maritime regulation and enforcement is made more effective.

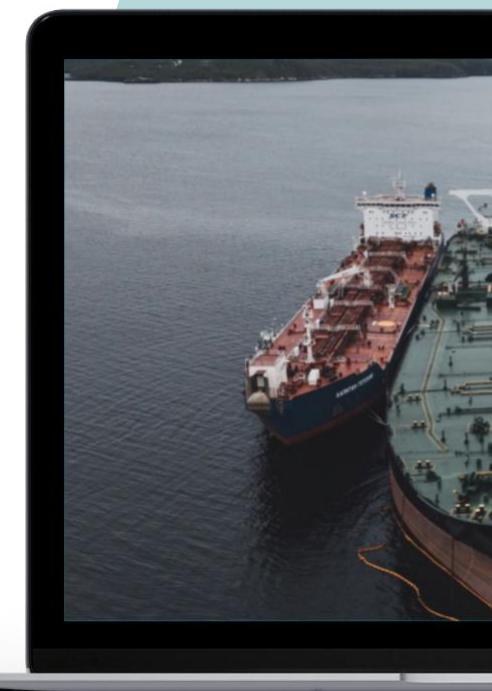
On the CMP

On 25th January 2021, the pilot of the European Union's (EU) Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept received political endorsement at the EU Council level, with the declaration of the Gulf of Guinea as a *Maritime Area of Interest to the EU*. The concept allows EU member states to coordinate existing naval and air assets in the region to increase the EU's capacity to support the Gulf of Guinea in addressing maritime insecurities.

Issues surrounding the CMP were highly contentious during the plenary; nonetheless, a verity that was stated was that the security of the Gulf of Guinea is also the security of Europe. Thus, while the CMP had been surrounded by a few controversies, these presented the opportunity not to demobilise, but to work in the crucial lessons that had been learned along the way.

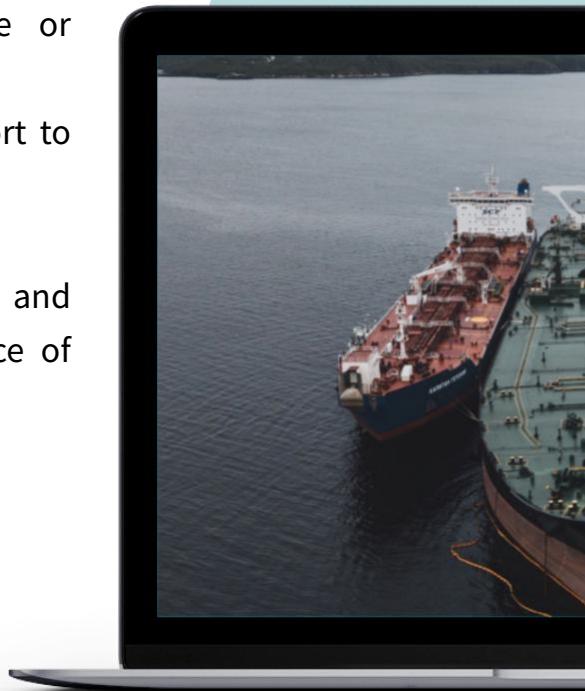
The following perspectives were shared:

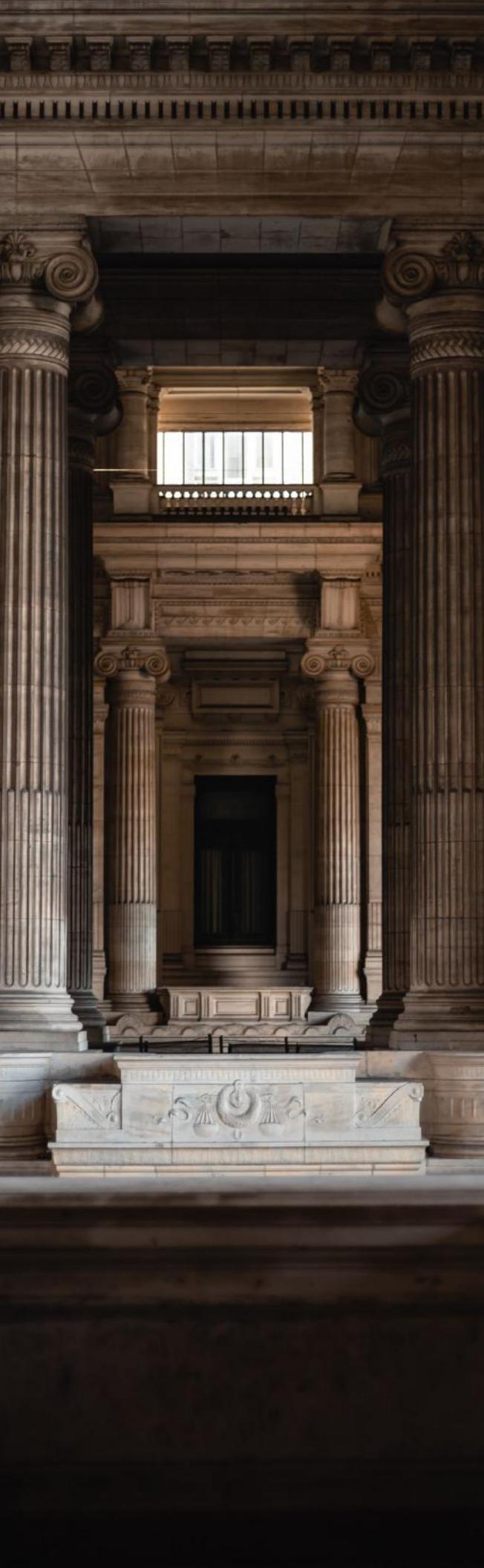
- There is the need to pass clear messages to Gulf of Guinea countries and regional organisations through closer and more regular dialogue on the CMP, which simply builds on the global presence of EU member states at sea
- For the CMP to be successful, there must be increased coordination to avoid duplications. Joint exercises, training and exchange of crew members between navies and coast guards could provide useful approaches to harmonising efforts
- Local participation in the planning stages of the CMP is key and should not be overlooked going forward



- There is the urgent need to address issues of legal finish in the region and to establish relevant bilateral agreements to facilitate this
- Debates on the CMP present a unique opportunity to improve on existing tools and arrangements
- Due consideration should be given to an extension of the CMP to address other facets of maritime crime or interrelated threats
- The CMP must involve a clear mobilisation of support to existing measures within the Yaoundé framework.

It was concluded that CMP based on capacity-building and information sharing would be key to ensuring the prevalence of maritime security in the region.





On the UNSC 2634

On 21st May 2022, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 2634 on Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea. Discussions during the plenary provided an overview of the Resolution on the premise that the unenviable title of the Gulf of Guinea as the world's most dangerous region for seafarers had to change.

The Resolution, co-sponsored by Ghana and Norway, was described as a call to **greater** action, especially since the nature of maritime insecurities in the region had evolved drastically since the last UNSC resolution on the matter.

UNSC 2634 places emphasis not only on the importance of regional leadership in tackling maritime insecurities, but also on the need to tackle the underlying causes of piracy and armed robbery at sea if stability is to be maintained. To foster regional leadership, the need for demand-driven support was underscored during the plenary.

The following concluding statement resonated with the entire audience and was rehashed severally throughout the conference:

"When it stops raining, it is time to mend the roof, not to go to sleep."

On Pirates of the Niger Delta

Discussions on the linkages between piracy and other transnational organised crimes were largely based on the findings of an EU-funded study titled *Pirates and Oil Theft in the Niger Delta*. The report looked into various factors both onshore and offshore that may deepen accounts of the drop in piracy. One notable change onshore observed by the authors was the significant increase in oil bunkering and oil theft within the Niger Delta region.

The authors observed that while findings were insufficient, they could point to linkages between the decline in piracy and oil theft. People involved in different aspects of kidnapping-for-ransom piracy were also observed as being increasingly involved in different aspects of oil crime including transporting, bagging, escorting, etc. On the field, data corroborated the fact that it was riskier engaging in piratical activities than in the more profitable venture of illegal oil bunkering and oil theft.

Discussions highlighted that oil crime was not only a Niger Delta problem and occurred along three layers:

- The local level, involving oil theft and refinery
- The regional level, involving the transportation of oil to other states
- The international level, involving the sale of the oil on international black markets.

Another interesting finding of the report was the fact that oil theft no longer resulted from subsistence motivations. Ultimately, the report underscores the need to take onshore dynamics into account in order to gain a holistic understanding of pirate groups.

On Synergies with SHADE

The forum underlined the fact that a strong interface between the G7++FoGG plenaries and SHADE would be vital to the effective coordination of maritime security efforts in the region. While SHADE functioned largely at the operational level, it strongly recognised the crucial role of G7++FoGG plenaries in enhancing piracy prosecution in the region.

The dialogue was concluded with the announcement and launch of the finalised Terms of Reference, intended to synergise the activities of both fora to avoid duplication of efforts.





On Efforts by International Partners

The plenary showed increasing efforts by rising global powers to position themselves as crucial maritime security providers for the region. For instance, a bold statement was made by India, emphasising that the state had, for the first time, deployed a ship to contribute to surveillance in the region. The vessel had been deployed for 41 days, between August and September this year.

Japan also highlighted its contributions in several millions of dollars to UNDP efforts aimed at addressing maritime insecurity in the region and to Nigeria, for the facilitation of maritime regulation and enforcement operations.

Brazil used the opportunity to draw attention to its Operation GUINEX, which included training cooperation, building on the concept of naval and maritime diplomacy. The operation was run between October and August in 2021, the same period in 2022, and will be continued in 2023.



For the United States (US), there was a clear indication that there was no intention to deviate from the long-standing policy to work with and through Gulf of Guinea partner states to increase operational capacity, MDA and communication to make the region stable and more prosperous.

Emphasis was placed on the fact that regional efforts by the US would mean much less without the active collaboration not only of Gulf of Guinea States, but also of the growing list of international partners in the region, including Korea, Japan, India and several others who recognised the increasing importance of the region.

Moreover, from US perspectives, there was the need to expand maritime security to its broadest form to cover all critical issues, including marine environmental protection and the ocean-climate nexus.

The forum was used to re-announce the intention of the US to form a new, multilateral, pan-Atlantic platform - a partnership that is intended to bring together states bound by the Atlantic to develop collective solutions to shared challenges in the region, through an open, prosperous and sustainable relationship.

On September 20th, 18 countries signed a joint statement in which they pledged as members of the Atlantic, to partner on common challenges facing the Atlantic Ocean.



While the goal is to build and solidify this structure of partnership first with states that sign the joint statement, the US noted its willingness to collaborate with other partners that show interest and intend to join the coalition to advance shared priorities along the way. A clarification was made that the partnership would not be a security or military alliance and did not seek to replicate or create any military architecture.

The EU statement on the other hand, situated the CMP as a crucial initiative and indicated that there were ambitious plans for 2023, which included increasing operational dialogue and joint exercises in partnership with other regional and global actors and the provision of more detailed information to coastal states about the initiative and positioning of vessels in the region.

Facilitating legal finishes to anti-piracy prosecutions would also be a priority, and bilateral dialogues would continue to ensure more consolidated agreements in 2023.

The EU indicated that although several of its initiatives in the region would be coming to an end in 2023, the year would be used to facilitate planning and engagements within the EU, with regional organisations and coastal states, to roll out new relevant projects.

On Harmonisation of Initiatives

The Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute (GoGMI) echoed the voices of regional partners and actors by positing that the 10th anniversary of the Architecture was a clear reminder of the need to take stock of its functionality. However, according to the Institute, it was important to have clarity not only on what we need to take stock of, but also on how we intend to take stock of it.

GoGMI stated that taking stock was not just about fulfilling procedural requirements. It was about recognising the strong ties that exist between maritime security and livelihoods across West and Central Africa and finding plausible approaches to enhancing maritime security outcomes in order to safeguard those livelihoods.

A core aspect of the Institute's message was that we cannot take stock of the Yaoundé Architecture in isolation because it does not function alone. Any attempts at taking stock therefore had to factor in the broad range of maritime security interventions, initiatives and projects in the region, with the ultimate intent of developing pathways to harmonising collective efforts towards achieving shared goals.

The Institute's Maritime Security Intervention Audit addressed this by working across three thematic areas:

- First, to look at the evolution of maritime initiatives in the region
- Second, to explore successes and failures of existing maritime initiatives
- Third, to identify synergies and complementarities across each of the initiatives to see how they can be harmonised.

As GoGMI called on greater partnerships and collaborations to conduct the audit, the following were highlighted:

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- Much like the synergy and interconnectedness of the maritime domain, initiatives across the region need to be synergised if they are to have desired impacts
 - Attempts at synergy must be backed by a clear understanding not only of the broad range of initiatives we already have in the region, but also of the objectives of each of these initiatives, the mutual benefits for both parties and the potential areas for harmonisation of the initiatives, drawing on the strengths of each
 - We cannot adequately take stock of the Yaoundé Architecture and its supporting initiatives without contemplating the entire range of maritime security threats that these initiatives are actually intended to address.

Next Steps

CHARTING THE WAY FORWARD



New Decade, New Opportunities

The forum generated a holistic understanding of the broad range of initiatives in the Gulf of Guinea, as well as the potential complementarities across these interventions. One of the most belaboured messages during the plenary was the need to view the Yaoundé Architecture's 10th anniversary as an opportunity to take stock - an admonition that is corroborated so far by GoGMI's ongoing efforts as part of its Maritime Security Intervention Audit.

The new decade of the Yaoundé Architecture represents a symbolic milestone that should be exploited in garnering more intensive efforts towards achieving the extensive goals of the Code of Conduct it represents. As both a think-tank and a CSO, GoGMI is well placed to create the unique platform required for all Gulf of Guinea stakeholders (including often marginalised groups) to interact, share ideas and collaborate on joint efforts, on the basis of verifiable research and data.

Get in Touch

The Institute would be pleased to dialogue further with stakeholders on matters arising from the report and discussions during the G7++FoGG.



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