
INTRODUCTION

The articles in this report deal with the topics of MASS, maritime security, and capacity building.

The first article reports on the first time an autonomous unmanned vessel has sailed in Dutch waters.

The second article explains a recent call from NGOs asking the EU and Italy to end their cooperation with the Libyan Coast Guard following a serious incident that took place in August 2025.

The third article introduces drone-related tools in EASA's new version of its Innovation Air Mobility Hub.

The fourth article is dedicated to the topic of the cooperation between the EU and India in the fields of maritime safety, security and capacity building.

First navigation of an unmanned surface vessel in Dutch waters

On 8 October 2025, an unmanned surface vessel (USV) completed its first operational voyage in open waters of the Netherlands. The term “first” here refers to the vessel being the first to legally operate outside a designated test area under Dutch law. Unlike prior trials confined to controlled environments, this voyage represented both a technical and operational milestone in Dutch waters.¹ Similar international examples include the autonomous survey vessels tested in Singapore’s port waters² and Norway’s fjords³.

The trial took place at Prinses Margriethaven on Maasvlakte 2, Rotterdam, and was monitored by a crewed ship from the Port of Rotterdam.⁴ The vessel, named V3000, is a three-metre autonomous survey craft developed by Demcon Unmanned Systems, a Dutch company based in Scheveningen. The V3000 operated fully autonomously, collecting hydrographic data such as water depth and seabed mapping.

This trial was made possible by a legal amendment to the Dutch Inland Navigation Police Regulations (Binnenvaartpolitiereglement, BPR) enacted in April 2025.⁵ Previously, all vessels were required to have a crew. The amendment allows exemptions under strict conditions, including mandatory monitoring, safety system certifications, and adherence to port authority guidelines. The V3000 became the first vessel to receive such an exemption, marking a significant regulatory milestone for autonomous maritime operations in the Netherlands.⁶

The collaboration between Demcon Unmanned Systems and the Port of Rotterdam Authority is a public-private partnership model. Demcon supplied the vessel and technical expertise, while the Port Authority managed operational approval, safety oversight, and integration with port traffic.⁷ Comparable collaborations exist internationally, such as Singapore’s Maritime and Port Authority working with tech companies to deploy autonomous surface vessels.⁸

The V3000’s successful trial provides several insights for future port operations. It demonstrates the technical feasibility and legal viability of autonomous vessels performing hydrographic surveys in operational port areas. Over the next 12 years, the Port of Rotterdam Authority plans to renew its fleet, focusing on sustainability, standardised maintenance, and adoption of new technologies.

¹ <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/news-and-press-releases/premiere-unmanned-sailing-maasvlakte-2-trial-unmanned-surface-vessel>

² <https://safety4sea.com/nyk-and-mpa-singapore-join-forces-for-autonomous-shipping/>

³ <https://www.rivieramm.com/news-content-hub/news-content-hub/vessel-remote-control-trials-set-to-begin-in-norway-82049>

⁴ <https://en.portnews.ru/news/382978/>

⁵ <https://www.porttechnology.org/news/port-of-rotterdam-tests-autonomous-survey-vessel/>

⁶ <https://www.porttechnology.org/news/port-of-rotterdam-tests-autonomous-survey-vessel/>

⁷ <https://www.porttechnology.org/news/port-of-rotterdam-tests-autonomous-survey-vessel/>

⁸ <https://safety4sea.com/nyk-and-mpa-singapore-join-forces-for-autonomous-shipping/>

Autonomous vessels like the V3000 may enhance efficiency, enable safer operations in restricted areas, and complement traditional crewed vessels in large port environments.⁹

NGOs call on the EU and Italy to cease cooperation with the Libyan Coast Guard

On 24 September 2025, 42 European humanitarian and civil society organisations sent an [open letter](#)¹⁰ to the European Commission and Italy's government. They addressed these two actors because they both fund, train, and equip the Libyan Coast Guard through EU and bilateral programmes aimed at migration control. Italy manages operational cooperation, while the EU provides financing under the [Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#)¹¹. The NGOs called for an end to this cooperation, arguing that it supports forces that endanger people at sea.

The appeal followed a serious [incident](#)¹² on 24 August 2025, when the Libyan Coast Guard opened fire on the Ocean Viking, a rescue ship operated by SOS MEDITERRANEE, in international waters. The Libyan vessel reportedly ordered the ship to leave before firing warning shots while 30 crew members and 87 survivors were on board. The Libyan patrol boat had allegedly been supplied by Italy under the Support to Integrated Border and Migration Management in Libya ([SIBMMIL](#)¹³) programme.

The NGOs claim that this incident shows that European and Italian funding has “enabled and legitimised abuses.”¹⁴ They argue that EU-supplied equipment has been used to intercept and forcibly return migrants to Libya. They urge the European Commission to suspend all cooperation with Libya in search-and-rescue activities and call on Italy to end its [2017 Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\) with Libya](#). This MoU has been implemented primarily through Italy providing support to Libyan authorities for border control and search-and-rescue operations

Libyan authorities defend their actions as part of migration control and national sovereignty, saying they are preventing irregular departures and rescuing boats in distress. NGOs counter that such interceptions amount to unlawful returns and violate international maritime and human rights law.

The letter also calls for a state-led European search-and-rescue mission in the Central Mediterranean and the creation of safe, legal routes for people fleeing Libya. The signatories include SOS Humanity, Sea-Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières, and others.¹⁵ EU and Italian officials maintain that cooperation

⁹ <https://www.portofrotterdam.com/en/news-and-press-releases/premiere-unmanned-sailing-maasvlakte-2-trial-unmanned-surface-vessel>

¹⁰ <https://sos-humanity.org/en/press/open-letter-ov/>

¹¹ https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/where-we-work/regions-countries/north-africa/libya_en

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/25/libyas-coast-guard-fired-upon-rescue-vessel-searching-for-boat-in-distress>

¹³ https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/support-integrated-border-and-migration-management-libya-first-phase_en

¹⁴ <https://sos-humanity.org/en/press/open-letter-ov/>

¹⁵ <https://sos-humanity.org/en/press/open-letter-ov/>

with Libya aims to save lives, though similar NGO coalitions have urged Malta and Greece to review comparable agreements.

EASA introduces new drone-related tools in new version of its Innovation Air Mobility Hub

On 9 October 2025, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) launched the fifth version of its [Innovative Air Mobility \(IAM\) Hub](#)¹⁶. EASA's full press release is available [here](#).¹⁷

The IAM Hub promotes safe and sustainable use of drones and eVTOL aircraft across Europe. It supports delivery, inspection, and passenger transport drones by connecting cities, authorities, and manufacturers, harmonizing EU rules, and sharing data to guide innovation, manage noise and sustainability, and build public trust in new air mobility. It also serves as a central platform aligning national regulatory frameworks with the EU [Drone Strategy 2.0](#)¹⁸, helping Member States implement consistent certification, airspace management, and operational standards.

The Hub's new features include:

- [Drone Rule Navigator](#)¹⁹: a tool to help operators understand applicable regulations, determine the category of their operation, and identify the relevant requirements.
- A [guide](#)²⁰ for cities and governments: showing how local authorities can help shape and manage urban drone services.
- eSORA tool: an automated version of SORA 2.5 that helps Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) operators plan their operations and gather all required evidence for an authorisation. It also features a Cross-Border Operations function to simplify operations across multiple Member States. It walks operators through each step of the risk assessment, identifying ground and air risks, defining mitigation measures, and automatically generating documentation. The integrated Cross-Border Operations function simplifies compliance when flying in several EU Member States.

The Specific Operations Risk Assessment ([SORA](#)²¹) is a 10-step methodology required before conducting higher-risk drone flights, such as those beyond the visual line of sight or in urban areas.

¹⁶ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/drones-air-mobility/drones-air-mobility-landscape/innovative-air-mobility-hub>

¹⁷ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/newsroom-and-events/press-releases/easa-presses-accelerator-support-drone-operations-eu>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7076

¹⁹ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/drones-air-mobility/operating-drone/drone-rule-navigator>

²⁰ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/drones-air-mobility/drones-air-mobility-landscape/roles-of-cities>

²¹ <https://www.easa.europa.eu/en/domains/drones-air-mobility/operating-drone/specific-category-civil-drones/specific-operations-risk-assessment-sora>

The eSORA version makes this process faster and more accessible, especially for small operators and start-ups, by automating technical and administrative tasks.

According to EASA, the IAM Hub also reflects the growing maturity of Europe's drone ecosystem. While several countries, such as France, Spain, and Finland, already operate national drone corridors and pilot programs, EASA expects broader integration of drones into logistics, infrastructure inspection, and emergency response by 2030. For maritime law enforcement and coast guard operations, these tools could improve surveillance, pollution monitoring, and search-and-rescue efficiency by standardising risk assessment and cross-border coordination.

The project is funded by the European Commission and Parliament and is part of the EU's [Drone Strategy 2.0](#).²²

EU plans to deepen maritime cooperation with India

The European Commission and the European External Action Service have recently adopted a '[New Strategic EU-India Agenda](#)'.²³ It is a rather general publication and its timing and expected outcome is not very specific. At the end, the agenda reads that "*the EU stands ready to work with India on developing a Joint EU-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda which could be adopted at the next EU-India Summit.*" According to the Business Standard, this summit is expected to be held in New Delhi in early 2026.²⁴

The strategy includes a few elements related to maritime transport, in particular maritime security, but also maritime safety and capacity building. When it comes the strategy's link to the EU-ASEAN strategy, both are meant to be complementary. However, there are also a few differences: the EU-India strategic agenda aims for a cooperation that is more direct, military-focused, and operational, involving joint naval activities and defence-industrial elements. The EU-ASEAN cooperation is more diplomatic, institutional, and centred on multilateral dialogue and capacity building to support regional stability via the ASEAN framework.

As regards maritime security, the EU and India would among others explore "*the creation of an EU-India Security and Defence Partnership*" which "*would (...) enable closer cooperation and joint initiatives on shared priorities such as (...) maritime security*". This could include "*increasing engagement on maritime domain awareness to promote shared assessment, coordination and interoperability*" as well as the protection of critical maritime infrastructure. In addition, according to

²² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_7076

²³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025JC0050&qid=1758611751949>

²⁴ Business Standard: EU member nations back EU-India strategic agenda to boost ties, cooperation, October 23, https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/eu-member-nations-back-eu-india-strategic-agenda-to-boost-ties-cooperation-125102100673_1.html

the strategy, the EU *"will seek to conclude arrangements between the EU naval operations and the Indian Navy to facilitate greater information sharing and cooperation in the western Indian Ocean. In addition, the EU and India could pursue joint sea activities in other areas of common interest such as the Gulf of Guinea."*

Curbing the activities of the shadow fleet and engagement in favour of a rules-based maritime order is also mentioned as a common objective.

On safety and environment, the strategy explains that *"the EU and India should also continue to cooperate on maritime safety, including tackling the threats to the environment and to safe navigation posed by substandard shipping and risky navigation practices"*.

On capacity building, the strategy expresses the EU's readiness to *"deepen cooperation with India in support of regional maritime security frameworks, helping to strengthen the capacity of coastal states to address shared challenges. This includes joint work on maritime domain awareness and strengthened support for regional information-sharing platforms such as the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar."* According to the strategy, *"the EU and India could also work more closely together on capacity-building projects for Indian Ocean countries."* Capacity building cooperation could take the shape of a Joint EU-India Indian Ocean Cooperation and Training (IOCAT) maritime capacity building programme.²⁵ However, this is so far only a theoretical suggestion and at the time of writing, this is not a formally established initiative. When it comes to maritime domain awareness and information sharing, the main platform for cooperation between India and the EU is [CRIMARIO](https://crimario.eu/#)²⁶ (Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean). India is involved in the information sharing component of this project through the Indo-Pacific Regional Information Sharing ([IORIS](https://ioris.org/))²⁷ platform.

A recent example of cooperation, the EU and India organized a first of its kind counterterrorism training from 13 to 15 Oct 2025 to protect critical infrastructure and soft targets against emerging threats from unmanned aerial systems (UAS) or drones.²⁸ According to the report by the European External Action Service (EEAS), *"the three-day exercise brought together senior officers, instructors and technical experts from India's **National Security Guard (NSG)** and the EU's **High Risk Security Network (HRSN)**, and focused on the use of advanced UAS and Counter-UAS (C-UAS) capabilities. The peer-to-peer activity blended tactical and technological training, culminating in a joint exercise designed to strengthen interoperability and set the foundation for future collaboration."* As regards unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), the exercise included *"training on UAS counter-terrorism tactics in urban environments, combined with a joint tactical simulation exercise"*. This *"allowed NSG and HRSN*

²⁵ European Council of Foreign Relations: The battle for the Indian Ocean: How the EU and India can strengthen Maritime Security, <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/The-battle-for-the-Indian-Ocean-How-the-EU-and-India-can-strengthen-maritime-security.pdf>

²⁶ <https://crimario.eu/#>

²⁷ <https://ioris.org/>

²⁸ European External Action Service, European Union and India carry out joint counterterrorism training to strengthen defences against drones, 15 October 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/india/european-union-and-india-carry-out-joint-counterterrorism-training-strengthen-defences-against_en

*units to test and strengthen real-world response capabilities. The activity will result in the **drafting of standard operating procedures** for integrated drone and counter-drone operations."*