

Captain Andreas Ioannides

Commander of the Cyprus Navy and Chairman, Chiefs of European Navies

Port security and relationships with Africa are among the topics being discussed by the Chiefs of European Navies, which gained a new chairman in August. As chief of one of Europe's smallest navies, Captain Andreas Ioannides brings a particular perspective to the table, as Guy Toremans discovers.

Following its initiation in 1990 by Admiral Sir Julian Oswald, the UK Royal Navy's First Sea Lord, the inaugural meeting of the Chiefs of European Navies (CHENS) brought together 12 senior officers from across the continent.

The forum was officially established in 1992 and, with enlargement of NATO and the EU, now has 24 nations on board.*

CHENS sees itself as an informal, independent and non-political forum set up to promote understanding between its members, examine issues of mutual interest and increase public awareness of the role played by navies in international affairs.

The Cyprus Navy Command took over the chairmanship of CHENS in May 2008, when the post went to the navy's then commander, Captain Panayotis Vougioulakis. He was succeeded in both appointments in August by Captain Andreas Ioannides, who will lead the multinational body until the Royal Danish Navy takes the helm in May 2009.

CHENS has a number of working groups examining topics such as the future role of European maritime forces, inter-agency collaboration and best practice for maritime security operations.

Capt Ioannides says: "We have the Maritime Strategies Dialogue [MSD] working group, the Maritime Co-operation with Africa working group and the Protection of Naval Units in Ports working group. The latter is the only virtual group, where its members exchange information and ideas through the CHENS website."

The MSD group recently compared the US Navy's latest maritime vision, A Co-operative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, with its CHENS counterpart. "The working group concluded that there are significant but understandable differences in terms of time, scale, character and aims," says Capt Ioannides.

"The threats and challenges identified are broadly similar but more systematically described within the US document. Core capabilities are also handled differently, with a greater emphasis placed by the US on strength whereas CHENS emphasised co-operation."

The Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in May 2004 and as this is the Cyprus Navy's first stint in the CHENS chair,



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Capt Ioannides intends to grasp the opportunity to show the other members that his navy, although being one of the smallest in Europe, has a meaningful role to play in the context of regional security.

"Located at the crossroads of three continents and being one of the EU borders we saw, and see still, an increase in our commitments," he observes.

"The major challenge is to match our assets to the new risks we face nowadays, such as terrorism, sabotage, organised crime and the illegal transfers of weapons and illegal immigration. The gradual replacement of our assets by new platforms became one of our priorities."

The navy, which is an arm of the Cyprus National Guard, has established counter terrorism training programmes and in June conducted its first large-scale exercise, 'Argonaftis 2008', with Greece and France.

The service is also working closely with maritime assets of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, which has taken up residence in the island's ports since July 2007. "It is our

intention to increase this type of co-operation. We recently signed an MoU [memorandum of understanding] with the French Navy to exchange information and conduct joint exercises," says Capt Ioannides.

He is confident the navy has the necessary capabilities to fulfil its missions and tasks, but adds: "Of course, there is always room for improvement. The commissioning of the two Vittoria-class patrol boats in 2004 is an important step in the modernisation of the fleet.

"Being the Head of the Warships Command when these units joined the fleet, I can say that their speed [46 kt maximum] and their manoeuvrability and flexibility is really something we were looking for."

Following the acquisition of the two 27 m, waterjet-powered inshore craft from Italian company Cantieri Navale Vittoria, Capt Ioannides is looking forward to several new projects bearing fruit.

Among these is the installation of new radars for the VTMISS (Vessel Traffic Management and Information System) Project and the replacement of the two Poseidon-class patrol craft, which were commissioned in 1991. The Dilos- and Esterel-class boats are also due to be replaced within five years.

One of Capt Ioannides' priorities is to "increase the level of interoperability of our personnel through the implementation of advanced training. We are already sending some of our personnel to schools abroad".

Another area that he believes should be the object of greater attention is the enhancement of the Cyprus Navy's maritime surveillance capabilities and — finance and other resources permitting — the acquisition of bigger vessels.

"The goals I have set myself, and which I will try to achieve by the end of my tenure as Commander of the Navy, is the acquisition of more ships, improving the training of our personnel and, of course, bring our chairmanship of the CHENS to a successful end."

* Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.