

Common and improved maritime surveillance

By Sten Tolgfors

At any given moment there are 2000 ships in the Baltic Sea. Oil transport has doubled in a short time and will continue to increase. Forty per cent of all Russian exports are shipped via the Baltic Sea, which is designated a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA). Serious accidents could entail both humanitarian and financial risks for the countries in the neighbourhood.

A common recognised maritime picture (RMP) will make it easier for us to maintain and secure major transport flows through seas like the Baltic. At the same time, integrated maritime surveillance will make things easier in many other areas, such as maritime safety, marine rescue services, environmental emergency services and border controls.

During the Swedish Presidency of the EU, integrated maritime surveillance was a priority issue. There is a great need to improve coordination of maritime resources in the EU. This involves coordination of resources, both civilian and military, and also increasing coordination between maritime agencies.

Not only has the information acquired up to now been divided among countries, it has also been divided among various agencies within countries. The basic idea of increased cooperation on maritime surveillance is to utilise resources more effectively through improved coordination and increased interoperability between existing systems. The Swedish Presidency promoted the approach of linking systems already in operation rather than developing new systems.

Many of the civilian and military systems available in the EU Member States have not been equipped to exchange information with each other. But today's challenges with regard to crisis management do not allow a strict division between civilian and military actors. Instead, a coordinated approach is required to protect countries' interests more effectively.

Greater cooperation on maritime surveillance was initiated after the Estonia disaster in 1994. Like our neighbours, Sweden saw the need to improve maritime surveillance in the Baltic Sea so as to be better able to deal with accidents. Sweden and Finland began this cooperation by sharing radar images with one another. Step by step, this cooperation has been expanded.

A cooperative undertaking in which the Swedish Presidency was particularly active was the Sea Surveillance Cooperation in the Baltic Sea (SUCBAS) project. This is a regional project in the field of maritime surveillance involving cooperation between the defence forces of eight countries. SUCBAS is an administrative and technical solution for transferring information and means that the defence forces of the Baltic Sea region can exchange information on the maritime situation with each other more effectively.

Its use in civilian systems is designed so that sensitive military information is removed from the military maritime

picture and the remaining information is transferred to a civilian system, e.g. the Swedish SJÖBASIS-system. In this way, civilian agencies can obtain rapid information to fulfil their tasks. This may involve, for example, intelligence on hazardous goods, maritime security and border and criminal intelligence. The system can also provide indications of abnormal shipping movements and warn the agency responsible. Other benefits are the provision of situation reports and oil spill drift forecasts in accidents. This year, Finland, Denmark and Sweden have obtained electronic access to each other's maritime pictures. The costs are small, currently a couple of hundred thousand Swedish kronor a year for Sweden, but the effect is considerable for our security.

The major challenge in efforts to integrate maritime surveillance in the EU is not a matter of investing in new, expensive technological systems, but primarily of legal and administrative issues.

To make existing systems for maritime transport and maritime surveillance more interoperable among Member States with coasts bordering the northern European maritime areas, the European Commission is co-financing a pilot project named MARSUNO (Maritime Surveillance Integration Northern European Sea Basins) for the northern European maritime areas. Twenty-three agencies from ten countries are participating in the project, which aims at showing how agencies working in the maritime area can cooperate more effectively by exchanging information among themselves and other measures.

The objective is the more efficient exercise of official authority, cost savings and the facilitation of maritime transport by simplifying notification procedures for shipping, and to enable better support for different agencies.

Maritime safety and safe transport are necessary for positive development in the Baltic Sea region. During the Swedish Presidency the EU Member States agreed to continue the process of integrating maritime surveillance. Together with our neighbours around the Baltic Sea and other EU countries, we will continue to develop the capacity to handle major accidents and emergencies. In this way, we will establish the capacity for an effective, safe and integrated maritime surveillance that, in the long term, will be able to cover the whole of Europe.

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