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Maritime security and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is an intergovernmental organization created in March 1997 and consisting of 21 members (Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, UAE and Yemen). It is a regional forum mainly focused on sustainable growth, balanced development and economic cooperation bringing together representatives of government, business and academia.

In the last year, the increased concern of the regional organization regarding maritime (in)security resulted in including maritime security as a priority. In fact, as stated by the IORA “*[t]he Indian Ocean faces many traditional and non-traditional security challenges including piracy, illegal fishing, human trafficking, drug smuggling, trafficking of weapons, maritime pollution and climate change. A key priority of IORA is to ensure the reliable, uninterrupted and safe movement of people, goods, energy and resource supplies throughout the Indian Ocean*”.

On the basis of the above declaration, the Association rapidly changed its view of maritime (in)security from illegal fishing to international terrorism. In fact, so far illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has been considered as an economic threat (annual economic losses for natural resources exploitation) and a security threat (no real capacity of patrolling national waters) among all the members. However, a new and different IORA Concord, pushed jointly by the Indonesian and Australian governments, will be implemented next year regarding security in terms of terrorism and mass migration.

We will see in the future the relevance and the lobbying potential of such a regional association, still unknown to the major part of EU nations but surely underestimated for its potential.

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