After 148 days in charge, the Finnish Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment (AVPD) handed over the responsibility for the protection of the World Food Program (WFP) Ship MV Caroline Scan to a Lithuanian AVPD on 10 August. On behalf of Rear Admiral Bob Tarrant, Operation Commander European Union Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia, Lieutenant Commander Laurent Sergheraert, Officer in Command of the Support Element Atalanta (SEA), presided over the ceremonial handover in the port of Djibouti. The MV Caroline Scan delivers much needed food and aid to Kismayo, Mogadishu, Berbera and Bosaso.

“Let me say to the outgoing Finnish AVPD team how impressed I have been by your achievements. You have remained vigilant and your dedication to the task has been outstanding – thank you. You should be proud in the knowledge that the EU Naval Force has maintained 100% success rate in protecting WFP shipping and helped to keep the seas safer for all during your tenure”, said Lieutenant Commander Laurent Sergheraert on behalf Rear Admiral Bob Tarrant.

The Finnish AVPD has been providing protection to the WFP shipping for over the last five months. During that time it has protected over 23,000 tonnes of aid, ensuring its safe arrival into Somalia. “The supply of the Somali population is crucial for us. We are very pleased and grateful that the EU AVPDs support us to bring the much-needed goods to those who need it the most” said Jacques.

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**European Union Naval Force**

Media and Public Information Office
European Union Operation HQ
ES-OHQ Rota
Rota Naval Base, 11530
Rota, Cadiz, SPAIN

Tel: +34 956470570 (ES office hours)
Mobile: +34 661438969 (silent hours and weekends)
E-Mail: media@eunavfor.eu
Higgins, WFP Country Director and Representative to Somalia.

The AVPDs are deployed with the EU Naval Force and play a crucial part within that mission.

“I am absolutely proud of our AVPD and their order fulfillment in the last 5 months. With your professional training and individual skills you have contributed to the success of this mission. The cooperation of all participations from WFP and EU is the key to success to bring help to this region”, said Captain Mika Martikainen, Deputy Chief of Staff of Operations, Finnish Navy.

Major General Leika Almantas, Commander Land Forces Lithuania said: “The mission around the Horn of Africa is our first deployment in this geographic region. Our team is very professional, highly motivated and well prepared for the upcoming mission. The soldiers have already done a lot of experience in application areas such as Afghanistan and Kosovo. With current Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union it is also a great honor for us to be part in this very important and noble humanitarian mission.

The protection of MV Caroline Scan is welcomed by Captain Yuriy Oksanenko, Master of the Caroline Scan, who said: “I would like to thank the Finnish AVPD for all their professional work. I wish them all the best. My crew and I are very pleased to welcome the Lithuanian team onboard. We are very pleased to have them protecting the Caroline Scan.”

Following the handover Lieutenant Commander Laurent Sergheraert, awarded the members of the outgoing Finnish AVPD with the Operation Atalanta Medal. Representatives from the French, Italian, British, Serbian, Spanish, German and Finnish militaries, as well as representatives from the WFP and the crew of MV Caroline Scan were in attendance.