Since 21 September an EU Naval Force Autonomous Vessel Protection Detachment (AVPD) from Serbia has been embarked onboard the World Food Programme (WFP) chartered vessel MV Douro and will remain so for the next three months.

One of the core tasks of EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia Operation Atalanta is the protection of World Food Programme (WFP) vessels delivering aid to Somalia. Initially, the protection for WFP vessels was guaranteed by an escorting warship and for short-term charted vessels this remains the case. Since January 2012 AVPDs have been protecting longer term chartered vessels like the MV Douro allowing more flexibility for the tasking of warships whilst still ensuring the protection of the WFP ship.

The Serbian AVPD will live and work together with the crew of the MV Douro. The team includes a medic and will be responsible for protecting the vessel when it is at sea. Whilst onboard the Serbian team conducts daily training and exercises to ensure they are always ready to respond to any threat.

The Operation Commander of EU Naval Force, Major General Smith recently met the Serbian AVPD whilst on a visit to the region and spoke to the team onboard:

“The work of the Serbian team is crucial in ensuring the food aid reaches the people of Somalia. I am proud of the task this detachment will perform - it is a way in which we can help the WFP make a real difference to the lives of
people in desperate need. I’m also delighted to see Serbia, although not part of the EU, operating within Operation Atalanta; a unique cooperation.”

As of 8 October 2014 EU Naval Force has successfully protected World Food Programme ships carrying over 910,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid since 2009.