

23 Sep 2026 -21:04

During UNGA81, Belgium is championing freedom of navigation, safe seas, the protection of global trade and respect for the Law of the Sea

On the sidelines of the General Debate of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, Belgium, in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), organised the ministerial meeting entitled 'The future of combating maritime crime: new technologies and public-private partnerships as a lever'. Ministers, representatives of international organisations, maritime authorities, technology experts and business leaders came together to discuss how innovation and enhanced cooperation can contribute to a more effective approach to maritime crime. Belgium was represented by Bernard Quintin, Minister for Security and Home Affairs. The Port of Antwerp-Bruges also took part in the meeting and shared its experience as a major European port.

Through this meeting, Belgium reaffirmed its support for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which enables safe and free shipping worldwide. At the same time, the event provided an opportunity to further strengthen cooperation with UNODC and to draw additional attention to the impact of organised crime on logistics chains.

For Belgium, maritime security is a strategic priority. As an open economy and Europe's logistics hub, our country is heavily dependent on safe, reliable and free shipping routes. Criminal networks are increasingly using maritime routes to smuggle drugs, weapons and other illegal goods. This poses risks to the safety of citizens, the operation of our ports and international trade.

The meeting therefore focused on how new technologies, such as artificial intelligence, satellite imagery and advanced data analysis, can help governments detect suspicious activities more quickly, assess risks more effectively and tackle criminal networks more efficiently. Belgium emphasised that innovation is playing an increasingly important role in the fight against organised crime at sea.

Attention was also paid to the need for public-private partnerships. Ports, shipping companies, logistics operators and governments each possess relevant information and expertise. By sharing this in a secure and responsible manner, illegal trade flows can be detected more quickly and the misuse of commercial logistics chains by criminal organisations can be prevented.

Furthermore, as maritime crime is cross-border in nature, Belgium called for stronger international partnerships, greater information-sharing and joint investment in capacity and technology.

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