

# European ports policy

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The European Parliament adopted by 572 votes to 12, with 10 abstentions, a resolution on a European ports policy, in response to the Commission's communication on this issue.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Josu **ORTUONDO LARREA** (ALDE, ES) on behalf of the Committee on Transport and Tourism.

MEPs welcome the Commission's communication. They recall the crucial importance of the ports sector to the European Union from the economic, commercial, social, environmental and strategic points of view and consider that the Commission's role is important in order to ensure that all European ports are able to reach their full potential. MEPs believe that the European ports policy should promote the following four principles: safety, swift service, low cost, and respect for the environment.

**Environment:** MEPs welcome the Commission's intention to publish guidelines on the application of Community environmental legislation to port development and their infrastructure and call on it to publish these guidelines before the end of 2008. The Commission and the Member States are urged to support the proposals to replace the current fuel with diesel by 2020 as well as the possibility of including the maritime sector in the emissions trading scheme. MEPs also call on the Commission and the sector to encourage shipping companies to reduce the number of empty containers transported. Lastly, they believe that possible investments by public authorities to develop ports must not be seen as State aid where they are directly intended for environmental improvements or decongestion and reducing the use of roads for freight transport.

**Multimodality:** MEPs consider that maritime and river transport cannot be considered in isolation from land and air transport and that links to a port's hinterland are of great importance to its commercial success. They underline the need to establish interconnections between ports and consider that the co-modal participation of ports is needed in relation to both the trans-European transport networks (TEN-Ts) and the future Community green corridors. Stressing the social and cultural role played by ports for the population of the hinterland, MEPs support the intention of the Commission to evaluate ports' hinterland connections status and needs and their impact on a balanced network of traffic flows on the occasion of the mid-term review of the TEN-T in 2010. In this context, the Commission and the Member States are called upon to promote cooperation between European ports.

**New technologies:** MEPs consider that new technologies, particularly information technologies, are key elements that will enable European ports to increase their efficiency and profitability. They call on the Commission to systematically monitor the development of new technologies and management methods used internationally at ports and ship service, freight, passenger and land transport terminals. The Commission and the Member States are invited to hasten the implementation of remote pilotage systems and to support research into safety issues, so as to keep accidents to a minimum and to improve the use of space in ports, and into environmental questions, so as to curb CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and pollution caused by waste. Regarding the technological changes needed for the development of intermediate ports, MEPs consider that the regions concerned should be entitled to draw on the European Structural Funds, particularly to finance the acquisition of advanced technological installations, to create jobs in innovative fields, and to rehabilitate urban areas freed up by the transfer of port business to out-of-town areas.

**Cooperation and international aspects:** MEPs draw attention to the territorial dimension of the development of European ports, particularly the need for cross-border cooperation and coordination between neighbouring port regions. They highlight the importance of the European Neighbourhood Policy

and the regional strategy for the Mediterranean, Baltic and Black Seas. The resolution encourages the use of European territorial cooperation programmes under the cohesion policy and cooperation programmes under the EU neighbourhood and enlargement policy. The Commission, the Member States and the relevant regional authorities are invited to employ a trans-border approach to the use of existing capacity when co-financing port infrastructure.

**Competitiveness:** MEPs welcome the Commission's intention to conduct a survey of the problems encountered by European ports in terms of competitiveness and costs. They invite the Commission to tackle problems generated by competition with non-EU ports and anti-competitive and discriminatory measures taken by EU neighbouring countries. MEPs also welcome the Commission's intention to submit a legislative proposal on creating a barrier-free European maritime transport area in order to ensure fair competition between maritime transport and land transport in the Union. In this context, they recommend that Community-cleared goods should be exempt from customs controls in short-sea shipping in the Community and advocate the creation of separate port zones for intra-community and international traffic, together with simplification of internal transport, standardisation and identification of special containers. The Commission is called upon to publish guidelines for State aid to ports in 2008.

**Social dialogue:** MEPs call for a European social dialogue committee to be set up and consider that it should deal with subjects related to ports, including workers' rights, concessions and the 1979 International Labour Organisation Convention No 152 on occupational safety and health (dock work). The resolution stresses the importance of protecting and securing the highest possible level of training for port workers and proposes that the topic of professional qualifications and lifelong training be addressed together with the social partners within the future European social dialogue committee.

**Scanning US-bound cargo:** the resolution urges the Commission to continue its efforts to ensure that the US regulation to scan 100% of US-bound cargo is changed. It calls on the Commission to evaluate the potential costs of this measure to business and to the EU economy, as well as its potential impact on customs operations.