Building a comprehensive European port strategy

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The European Parliament adopted, by 585 votes to 21, with 26 abstentions, a resolution on building a comprehensive European port strategy.

Ports play a crucial role in the EU economy, creating wealth and jobs, facilitating foreign trade, connecting to the hinterland, ensuring growth in the blue economy and industrial production, the energy transition and security of energy supplies, as well as the EU's strategic autonomy.

Foreign influence

Parliament called on the Commission to present an **EU strategic policy framework** to reduce and limit the influence and financial and operational control exerted over the EU's ports and in their processes and hinterland operations by non-EU countries and monitor the involvement of third countries in the ports of neighbouring countries within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Enlargement Policy.

The resolution stressed that limiting foreign investments, in particular by state-owned-controlled-or-influenced enterprises, in an individual port in one Member State can negatively affect the competitive position of that port relative to neighbouring ports that do not have these limitations, which underlines the need for a joint European strategy for ports.

Members underlined that, in particular, the **aggregated presence of enterprises under the control and /or influence of the Chinese state** in the core network ports and nodes of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) has important implications for the resilience and security of individual nodes and the network as a whole.

The Commission is called on to:

- propose a framework for the continuous monitoring and reporting, jointly with the Member States, on the influence of non-EU countries in EU ports, in particular TEN-T ports, EU terminal management and global container shipping and assess the potential links between the actions of a given non-EU country in these sectors;

- strengthen the role of the protective measures for ports via an ambitious revision of the Foreign Direct Investments Regulation (FDI Regulation), including by making a foreign direct investment screening system mandatory in all Member States;

- urgently carry out a risk assessment of China's involvement in maritime infrastructures that includes its impact on labour and the environment.

Security

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to specifically address the need to prevent and **reduce the risks of espionage and sabotage** in ports with a dual use or military function, such as ports that are used by NATO, including via foreign vessels. It expressed concern about the increasing dependence on non-EU producers for (border) security equipment in ports, as well as ship-to-shore cranes that are able to collect data on the origin and destination of containers.

The Commission is called on to:

- pay particular attention to the threat that foreign investments may pose to **intellectual property**, in particular through forced technology transfers;

- do further research and to collect data on the coverage and risks of non-EU companies' involvement in **cyber and data security** in critical infrastructure and to support the development of comprehensive contingency plans for ports.

Members deplored the fact that EU ports are misused by criminal organisations as key entry points for illicit drugs. European ports are particularly exposed to the trafficking of other illicit products such as weapons or counterfeit items, as well as to customs and VAT fraud. It is necessary to step up the fight against these activities.

Role of ports in the energy transition

Parliament stressed the vital role ports play in the energy transition. It called on the Commission and the Member States to address the **increasing need for investments in ports and terminals and their infrastructure** so that they can assume their role in the energy transition. It called on the Commission to analyse and address the need for fast track permitting of port expansions in the context of the energy transition.

The Commission is also asked to:

- include ports in its **Circular Economy** strategy and assist the Member States and local port authorities by providing guidance on implementing projects related to circularity;

- deliver on its **modal shift** ambition as put forward in the Green Deal and tackle the remaining challenges for inland waterways and, especially, rail freight to boost their uptake in ports and their connectivity to the hinterland;

- provide **future-proof training, education and life-long learning opportunities**, and to promote social dialogue, to put port workers in the centre of the digital and green transition.

Competitiveness of EU ports and companies

Parliament stressed that strengthening the economic position of EU ports and improving their competitiveness in a global economy is crucial for limiting foreign influence and security risks as well as for Europe's supply chain sovereignty. It considered that European legislation should not undermine the competitiveness of EU ports and create carbon and business leakage to ports outside the EU.

Members underlined the **risks of delocalisation** of container transhipment activities to non-EU ports with the aim of evading the requirements of the EU emission trading system (ETS) Directive and the FuelEU Maritime Regulation. The called for the strict application of the transhipment monitoring provisions of these two pieces of legislation to detect and prohibit such behaviour.

Stressing that a consistent European port strategy is essential to ensure fair competition, the resolution encouraged increased cooperation between European ports and the elimination of harmful practices such as under-pricing. Members believe that a **reformed and strengthened customs union** with a common customs code will preserve the integrity of the single market, helping to maintain EU competitiveness in the twin green and digital transitions and avoid unfair competition between European ports.

In conclusion, Parliament called for a **European Port Summit** to further develop the aforementioned issues and to explore the possibilities for enhanced cooperation between European ports to this end. It called on the Commission to present a **comprehensive European Port Strategy** addressing the aforementioned issues by the end of 2024.