



Europe must complete its internal market and strengthen its transport policy

Message for the European elections of June 2009

14 May 2009

In a few weeks from now elections for the 2009-2014 term of the European Parliament will be held in the 27 Member States of the European Union. In November this year a new European Commission will take office. The challenges for this forthcoming European legislature are not to be underestimated, especially given the current climate of economic slowdown of which the recovery remains difficult to forecast.

The European Sea Ports Organisation believes that the EU should in these trying times not give in to calls for protectionism. On the contrary, it recommends that further initiatives are taken to complete the internal market and to achieve an efficient and sustainable transport policy framework reinforcing Europe's competitiveness as an open economy and society.

Europe relies greatly on transport to ensure its prosperity and cohesion. Seaports are indispensable components of the European transport system. As gateways of most of Europe's external trade and half of its internal trade, seaports are also key turntables of logistics chains designed to provide a vital link between industries and their market and supply sources. By moving cargo and passengers, seaports finally bring innovative ideas, technologies and cultural wealth to Europe.

Seen from a broader perspective, the benefits of seamless logistic and transport systems for the EU economy are tremendous. Apart from ensuring cost competitiveness of industry, these systems encourage the establishment of new companies therefore increasing employment opportunities and fulfilling the objective of improving growth and jobs in Europe which are the cornerstones of the Lisbon Agenda.

The political answer of the EU to the economic slowdown should therefore not lie in protectionist reflexes but in strengthening Europe's open economy by completing the internal market and achieving a common transport policy which fosters efficiency, competitiveness and sustainability. Seen from this perspective, ESPO believes the 2009-2014 legislature should focus on the following five priorities:

1. Fostering sustainable development of transport infrastructure through an adequate Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy which strengthens the role of seaports and improves and further develops hinterland connections between ports and land transport networks.

2. Recognising the public interest of vital transport infrastructure projects and achieving fast-track procedures in order to allow their speedy execution and compliance with environmental and other assessments.
3. Fostering the “co-modality” principle whereby the competitive advantage of each transport mode is fully exploited in a sustainable and equal manner.
4. Ensuring full liberalisation of rail freight transport and removal of all operational cross-border bottlenecks and barriers.
5. Creating an internal market for short-sea shipping through a rapid implementation of the “Common Maritime Transport Space without Barriers” package.

As regards European seaport policy in the strict sense, ESPO calls for the urgent implementation of the policy framework set out in the European Commission’s 2007 Ports Policy Communication, in particular where it concerns the development of State aid guidelines and guidelines on the implementation of environmental legislation.

The achievement of these priorities calls for a comprehensive European transport policy framework which is administered in an efficient and coherent manner. Fragmentation over different administrative departments must be avoided but full integration with complementary policies, especially in the field of environment and customs, has to be ensured.

Since 1993, ESPO represents the port authorities, port associations and port administrations of the seaports of the European Union. The mission of the organisation is to influence public policy in the EU to achieve a safe, efficient and environmentally sustainable European port sector operating as a key element of a transport industry where free and undistorted market conditions prevail as far as practical.

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