



David Hooper, 2011

European ports brace for Brexit

Technology looks set to be the main weapon in European facilities' efforts to smooth any problems created by the UK's departure from the European Union. **Jon Guy** reports

Almost 70–80% of traffic at Germany's Cuxhaven would be impacted by new UK customs checks

As the UK government struggles to find any consensus on the country's withdrawal agreement and future trading relationship with Europe, a no-deal scenario is very much still a possibility.

European ports have not been idle over the past two years, and the potential for disruption increasingly looks to be residing with the customs and regulatory authorities, rather than the ports themselves.

The secretary-general of the European Sea Ports Association, Isabelle Ryckbost, told *P&H*, "We are still unclear as to what will happen. In terms of the European

Union side most of the ports have prepared as much as they can and continue to do so."

Those plans have included the creation of data platforms and port community systems to speed the delivery of data and certification to ensure that cargoes have the correct documentation when they arrive at the port gates. This includes the ability to register for the necessary permissions online to enable firms to register cargo and any tariffs more efficiently.

There are concerns over the issue of lorries being delayed as they seek to access vessels and ports if they have no documentation.

"We have seen ports creating new parking areas," explained Ryckbost. "The aim is to have areas where haulage firms who do not have the right documentation can be parked while they obtain what is required. This is to ensure they are not holding up those with the right documentation in the line to access the port."

"The European Union has made it clear that under a no deal scenario imports and exports to and from the UK will be treated as any other third country, with no favourable regime for the UK," she explained. "As such it is the health and customs checks that are a concern as it is a case whether there are the necessary facilities and staff trained to carry out the checks available."

Of particular concern is the ability for EU ports to cope with the current levels of food exports from the UK. Fears have been raised over the number of Border Inspection Posts attached to EU ports that have the ability to carry out the sanitary and phytosanitary checks on food produce, especially given current staffing levels.

There are fears that the backlog could be such that UK exports of food produce may simply become unsustainable for some businesses unless the feared backlogs fail to materialise.

However, ports have been investing heavily in new systems and facilities, and Ryckbost believes they are now adequately prepared for Brexit's impact on the shipping sector.

"The UK authorities have visited Zeebrugge to meet with port operators and discuss what Brexit will mean from the UK side and what can be expected," explained Ryckbost. "Ports are concerned that the smaller companies will not be as prepared as their larger peers in terms of understanding what they will need to move goods to and from the UK after Brexit."

"There is a belief that the immediate aftermath of the UK's departure will see some disruption but the hope is that those issues will be solved quickly." Yet ports remain confident they will be able to cope.

Head of the Calais and Boulogne Port Authority, Puisseuseau said, "We will definitely be ready for Brexit whenever it happens."

"Yes there will be more controls after Brexit. The only thing lorries will need is additional documentation. We have prepared if they have to stop then we have created 200 additional parking spaces in the port."



Irish Maritime Development Office, 4/03/11

Under a no-deal Brexit, Dublin port could struggle to cope

He added, "We should not be afraid of Brexit. For the hauliers, the only difference is having e-declarations before they leave the country. When they are on the ferry, they will know whether they are going to leave via the green or the orange channel."

"More than 90% of them will be in the green channel, with nothing to declare, no controls, and we don't think they will face any delays."

Puisseuseau said the port authority has invested EUR6 million (USD6.8 million) in new facilities in an effort to be prepared for a no-deal scenario.

As a major port for traffic to the UK as well as for the international fishing industry, the German port of Cuxhaven warned it is expected to be "strongly affected" by the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

In a statement the port said, "Great Britain is the fifth most important trading partner for the German economy, so imports and exports would be considerably impaired by the introduction of customs clearance procedures."

"Like many companies and organisations, the Cuxhaven business community has already been dealing with the possible effects of the Brexit in the long term. Among other things, the processes required for customs clearance were developed in consultation with shipping companies, terminal operators, freight forwarders, shippers, and customs."

"The employees of the companies are prepared for new requirements through training and special qualifications. New IT systems for terminal management and electronic interfaces to customs systems are also being introduced."

Cuxhaven Port Association Chairman Hans-Peter Zint confirmed that, like many German companies, the port is preparing for a "chaotic Brexit".

"We are currently assuming the worst case scenario and preparing our processes and transports for the UK's withdrawal from the EU customs union and the internal market without an agreement. Nevertheless, we want

to do everything we can to ensure that this does not happen," he added.

In Ireland, Dublin has been working to build new bridges with European ports such as Zeebrugge, as it gears up for an expected influx on trade if the only tariff free access to the UK is via the republic's border with Northern Ireland.

Indeed, EU ports have been busy working alongside each other to develop new access to shipping firms for new routes to move goods around the continent and beyond in the post Brexit environment. There has been an expectation that there will be demand for new routes in the future, and European ports have been looking at how these new routes will boost trade.

However, while work to increase throughput continues, the Irish government has been keen to ensure that any burden of renewed trade can be accommodated in the short term.

The Irish Ministry for Transport has also drawn up plans to utilise other ports, including those on the west coast of the country, to take vessels if Dublin is unable to meet demand.

Under the Department of Transport's recently published briefing papers, the ports of Rosslare Europort and the port of Cork at Ringaskiddy are set in to take ro-ro lorry traffic from Dublin port. Dublin handles more than 85% of the country's road freight, and fears are that a no deal scenario would require alternative access ports for the country.

Brendan Keating, Port of Cork chief executive, has publicly stated the port has the capability to handle a ferry service to the UK, with the likely destinations either Fishguard, Swansea, or Bristol.

"All we can do is plan for the worst scenario and, in that context, if a hard Brexit comes to pass we can step up to the plate and facilitate an additional service or two," he said. Brexit news breaks daily, yet nothing has changed. The UK still lacks a deal and is facing a deadline soon. **PH**