

Friday, 22 May 2015

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. The majority of you and, of course, our rapporteur, Mr. Fleckenstein, are very familiar to this issue. For me the new proposal of the Commission is a new challenge, a very challenging demand. I represent the EPP political group, and I am a shadow rapporteur for this ongoing Regulation.

I will make the difference; I will ask you to allow me to address the draft report, my approach, in Greek, and then I will apologize that I have to leave immediately, because of something that happened; Mr David Whitehead I have to fly to Cyprus immediately after my speech. So, I know there is a full translation, a very good translation, from Greek to English and I prefer to speak in my mother tongue.

Ports are catalysts for economic development and a source of prosperity not only for Member States but also for the cities and regions where they are. We take for granted that 75% of the trade of the European Union with other countries and 38% of intra-EU trade is seaborne. Ports currently play a very important role and can contribute to the recovery and development of economy in the EU, particularly in times of economic crisis. In this context, the challenge of improving the efficiency of ports and services is essential. The establishment of a framework for access to the service market and financial transparency aims to improve the efficiency of ports, boost growth, proper functioning of the single market and create a transparent and stable legal environment, a level playing field, which will favour the port and the shipping activity. In parallel, it will enhance the competitiveness of European industries and create more jobs in Europe.

If you want me to wait, I can do it, because I've written my draft report and I thought it would be good for you. Is it ok Mr. Fleckenstein? You are OK now? Thank you. I have to tell you, with Mr. Fleckenstein we have, of course, a lot of controversial issues on this Regulation, but I think we will compromise in majority of them. So, I go on.

It is a fact, that improving the efficiency and overall quality of port services could generate the necessary conditions for attracting new investments. In that way, it can be ensured that the 319 ports included in the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) can address the anticipated increase in demand. The proposal for a regulation on ports that we examine in the European Parliament is completing the policy of Trans-European Transport Network, while contributing to a more interconnected Europe.

However, the challenges and obstacles for the exploitation of European ports potential could be summarized as follows: a) the lack of clear rules governing market access to port services and concessions at EU level, b) the lack of financial transparency for port authorities, basically what is suggested in the Commission's proposal, and the provision of port services, and c) the lack of rules guaranteeing that port charges are defined in a transparent and non-discriminatory way, but in such a way to be attributable to the infrastructure costs and services provided. You realize that when we are talking about small ports, which might also be part of the TEN-T, the rigor in the definition of fees cannot be the reason for not allowing their growth, i.e. the cost of regulation affiliation in strictly charges exceed the capability of response of these ports and good supply services according to their capabilities.

Despite the fact that European ports are very different from each other, there is no doubt that the economic and political environment is needed in order to ensure, inter alia, friendly business environment with less administrative burden, stable and equal competition both between ports and within ports, i.e. the quality and the possibility of providing port services and transparency in the use of resources.

In order to be able to meet their role effectively and to fully exploit the entire range of their abilities, an appropriate autonomy should be provided to ports to conduct their economic policy. In this context, the possibility for charges to port infrastructure cannot be denied a priori.

Moreover, the possibility for individual negotiation with individual users should be allowed with the aim and the purpose of obtaining and attracting new users or the conservation of the existing ones especially in times of economic crisis, as in our country, here in Greece. The ability for ports to exercise commercial autonomy aims to preserve the competitiveness of the European port system and holds a special importance for all Member States. For example, in countries like ours here in Greece, the potential fluctuation of the fees should be given, as I mentioned before, due to the strong showing insularity and geographical proximity with non-member countries, which, as you know, neither can follow the rules, nor are obliged to do so.

At this point, it would be of particular importance to mention the need to provide the possibility for small ports to derogate of some provisions of the said Regulation. We are not making this distinction, but reality is. Specifically, smaller seaports can not be burdened with the same obligations corresponding to bigger ports, especially when the volume of migrant there through load is shabby, up to negligible. Not ignoring this relative flexibility will make it particularly onerous to continue their operation. At the same time, free competition and rational public finance crisis does not appear to be substantially affected, altered or distorted. However, this freedom of negotiation and differentiation of charges for port infrastructures and the possibility of derogation from the small ports of the transparency rules – we are talking for very small deviations, which basically help to have the proper provision of port services- shouldn't be a solution or a way either to impose arbitrary charges or to create unfair conditions of competition and dominant role of a port. This Regulation can be adjusted so as to prevent it.

In closing, I would like to mention that for my country, Greece, this legislative proposal might be an opportunity to address a number of particularly important issues in a rational context. Competitive pressures and possible abuse of the market will not allow to increase the efficiency of services because the regulation itself is centred on transparency and regulation in such a way of those services that attract investor interest. In an investment environment it is understood, that in a country experiencing a deep crisis, it is probably the only way or one of the main pathways to recovery and development- and this can be demonstrated from the 319 ports included in the TEN-T, of which 25 are Greek, which have certainly been judged using objective criteria for years and included in the Regulation without any new criteria, as there was no differentiation in that regard.

I would like to thank you very much. I hope there was no problem with the translation. I saw some movements. I have to inform you that my report is given to be translated and to be contributed, because I don't know if there was a problem. Thank you very much and I apologize again that I have to leave immediately because of my flight; I hope I will catch it. We will have a lot of meetings further

on. My office in the European Parliament is open to anyone of you just to have discussions and I can show you that our work, my work as a shadow rapporteur with Mr. Fleckenstein and the other shadow rapporteurs will be in the very, I think, hopeful way just to have a Regulation this time. Thank you very much indeed for your attention.