

FROM GREEN DEAL TO GREEN RECOVERY?

Just as the EU's Green Deal to fight climate change was put forward, Covid-19 happened, so what now? writes **Isabelle Ryckbost**, secretary general, ESPO

All political and societal attention that had been focused on the climate crisis has shifted towards the Covid-19 pandemic and its profound impact on the economy and society.

But now, with the peak of the health crisis in Europe seemingly behind us, it is all hands-on deck to get Europe's economy started again and to find ways to recover and revamp Europe's economy and society.

In the heat of the health crisis, the climate crisis seemed to have disappeared from the newspapers and there were many reasons to believe that climate had lost its momentum and that Covid-19 would be taking over. But this does not seem to be the case and luckily so.

GREEN RECOVERY

On 27 May, Commission President von der Leyen presented her Recovery plan for Europe, re-emphasising that the Green Deal is its growth strategy. What was already whispered about in the corridors of European institutions was confirmed: Europe wants to go for a Green Recovery and turn the crisis into an opportunity.

In this context, Commission President von der Leyen's stated: "We can now lay the cornerstone for a Union which is climate neutral, digital and more resilient than ever before." And the architect of the Green Deal, Vice President Frans Timmermans, was even more explicit: "The European Green Deal is not a luxury, but a lifeline to get out of the corona virus crisis."

It is thus clear Europe will fund, invest and facilitate the recovery efforts, but there is no such thing as a free lunch. All budget lines, all support mechanisms will be linked to the climate and environmental targets, introducing green



■ Isabelle Ryckbost

conditionality for recovery support. For many applicants there will be no alternative; they will need the support, so they will do their utmost to meet the climate and sustainability criteria.

GOOD OR BAD?

Is this bad news for European ports?

ESPO has been strongly supportive of the Green Deal ambitions and we believe that the current path is the only feasible way forward. Of course, the current health and economic crisis will directly impact the ports' ability to finance the investments needed to meet the decarbonisation goals.

At the same time, it is clear that the scale of climate and green investments remain the same whether volumes (and incomes) go up or down. It is therefore important that the proposed funding and financing mechanisms are well designed, meeting the needs of European ports.

More than ever it will be important for a port managing body to make the right choices and avoid stranded assets. A clever legislative framework for the implementation of the Green Deal ambitions will be paramount in that regard. Different proposals are in the pipeline: The review of the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive, the Fuel EU maritime initiative and the review of the Energy Taxation Directive, to name a few.

On all these issues it will be important to develop a legislative framework and a support and funding policy that enables and encourages the port ecosystem to move towards climate neutrality.

However, this should not compromise the independence and influence of ports when it comes to making operational and business choices. Legislators should rely on the know-how and varied insights of European ports when designing this legislative framework and favour a goal-based and technology-neutral approach over prescriptive measures.



■ Digitalisation at ports has accelerated in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic