

# SAFEGUARDING SUSTAINABLE CRUISE ACTIVITY IN EUROPE

European ports are currently facing pressure to prove their sustainability. ESPO Secretary General **Isabelle Ryckbost** outlines the issues

**Many European port cities are attractive tourist destinations due to their proximity to Europe's cultural heritage and main 'must-see' sites. Their ports are or have become much in demand as cruise ports.**

European port managing bodies are happy to be an access gate to Europe's cultural heritage, but understand that they must do whatever is possible within their remit to keep this activity sustainable and acceptable for the local population. In recent months, ESPO's Cruise and Ferry Port Network has been reflecting on the way forward. The result is a statement that aims to explain how important it is for European ports to keep all their port activities sustainable and what can be done to enhance a balanced development of cruise activities in European ports.

To start with, European ports want to clarify some issues.

First, the growth in the European cruise sector follows the overall growth of tourism in Europe, which is a leader in the global tourism market. It remains the most visited region in the world. According to UNWTO's 2018 European Tourism Trends report, the European Union had 538 million international tourist arrivals in 2017, accounting for 40% of global international tourist arrivals. Cruise remains a very small share of the total number of tourists. A report by the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) indicates that 6.50 million passengers embarked on cruises from European ports in 2017, 6.1% more than in 2015.

Second, we should not forget that the development of the cruise port business in a port is only partially in the hands of the port authority. The changing attractiveness or new branding of a tourist destination can suddenly turn a port into an in-demand cruise destination. Equally, changing

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geopolitical situations or any event or circumstance that makes a tourist destination less popular will affect the cruise port, whatever the quality of service or facilities it proposes.

Third, European cruise ports are very diverse. They serve different market segments and can have a variety of roles (e.g. home versus transit ports). Some cruise ports are situated in cities that are at the same time top touristic destinations, while others are situated in port cities which only have a limited number of tourists. In some European ports, the cruise industry is the main port activity, while in others the freight function prevails. Some cruise terminals are located in or very near to the city centre, while in other ports the cruise terminal and/or port is situated at a distance from housing areas.

Fourth, the cruise industry significantly contributes to the



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European economy. In 2017, €4.23 billion was spent by cruise passengers and crews in Europe. Passenger expenditures include spending for shore excursions, pre- and post-cruise hotel stays, air travel and other merchandise at ports-of-embarkation and ports-of-call. Statistics from CLIA show that crew spending is concentrated in expenditures for retail goods and food and beverages.

Fifth, 91% of European ports are located in or very close to urban areas. While this makes European ports interesting cruise destinations for tourists wanting to discover the rich cultural heritage of Europe, it equally increases the pressure on these ports to do as much as possible to limit the pollution and externalities of the activity in and around the ports.

## REPRESENTATIVE ROLE OF PORTS

Taking these facts into consideration, European ports understand that they are the face of the maritime transport and logistics sector in the port city. They strongly believe in the sustainable growth of the European cruise business.

ESPO therefore calls on the cruise lines to step up their efforts in order to further reduce the environmental footprint of cruise activity. We welcome in that respect the commitment of the global cruise industry to reduce the rate of carbon emissions across the industry fleet by 40% by 2030. We equally support the recent efforts and investments made by certain cruise lines to change towards more environmentally friendly sources of energy and encourage the sector as such to continue on this path.

European ports also understand that the demand for clean air is a priority for European citizens. Air quality will become a

key determinant of public acceptance of port activity in the years to come. Cruise port activity, as with any other port activity, must be looked at from this perspective. Keeping the emissions in ports and in the vicinity of housing areas to a safe and acceptable level must in that sense be seen as a first priority.

In addition, ESPO believes that the energy transition of the shipping sector, including the cruise lines, will be the first and most important way to guarantee the sustainable development of the cruise business in Europe. We therefore ask for a prompt implementation of the IMO target for shipping. The first priority is to roll out the measures to reduce emissions and to define pathways to be pursued in terms of future fuels. Cleaner fuels for cruise shipping must deliver both in terms of air quality and decarbonisation. European ports therefore ask European policy makers to discuss the implementation of an EU Emission Control Area (SECA and NECA), in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

#### KEY PRIORITIES

We also agree that reducing the emissions and noise at berth and in the port area – or even bringing those to zero – is a top priority. One of the best available technologies to achieve this goal at the moment is Onshore Power Supply (OPS). Further deployment and use of onshore power supply must in that respect be encouraged where possible. However, the corresponding investments both at port and port-grid connection are costly and often without a direct return on investment for the investing port authority. Moreover, the use of OPS by the shipping sector is often hampered by remaining barriers, both in terms of taxation and standards. Finally, OPS can only deliver in terms of environmental performance, if the energy supplied is green. To address these issues, funding must be made available and use of OPS should be tax exempted, taking away the disadvantage compared to electricity generated onboard, which enjoys a tax exemption. While OPS is an important way to reduce emissions in ports and at berth, other upcoming technologies, such as hydrogen, can be equally effective in mitigating emissions in the port.

Furthermore, European ports need to address the issue of tourist saturation. This must be done in close dialogue with local communities in view of finding the right balance between the need to show and share Europe's heritage and the need to preserve a sustainable and liveable environment for the citizens living in or near these touristic hotspots. Cruise ports cannot develop further without receiving the licence to operate from their local community.

We also understand that ports must better explain the added value of cruise business for the port and the city and



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share the knowledge of the sector with the surrounding community and wider public. Ports must show, wherever possible and relevant, more transparency on the externalities generated by cruise activity. They should at the same time promote good practices that are already in place and inform the local community with facts and figures about the real share and impact of cruise tourists compared to the total number of tourists in a given destination, which contributes to a better understanding of the problem.

Moreover, cruise ports know that they do not function in isolation: it is essential to maintain a constant dialogue between the cruise ports and tourist destinations along each itinerary on how to limit externalities. A commonly agreed approach for ports on each individual journey is essential. A one-size-fits-all approach to concrete measures for all cruise ports in Europe seems less effective, given the diversity of the sector.

Finally, port managing bodies believe that sustainability should be at the core of the partnership between cruise lines and cruise ports. Improving the operational understanding and optimising schedules and itineraries can help avoid congestion and peak-hour traffic and improve the passenger experience at the same time.

Overall, ESPO and its members engage themselves to further exchange, promote and build on the good practices developed in the ESPO Code for Good Practices for Cruise and Ferry Ports.



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