

# TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE TEN-T POLICY

The European Commission has put another ambitious package on the table while we are still in the process of assessing the full implications and combined impacts of the port relevant *Fit-for-55* proposals, says **Isabelle Ryckbost**, secretary general, ESPO

**This time it's a set of four proposals to modernise the EU's transport system in line with the Green Deal.**

## TEN-T makeover

The Commission proposal to review the guidelines for the development of Europe's Transport Infrastructure Network is of high relevance for ESPO. Just to refresh your memories, in 2013 Europe finalised a complete makeover of its TEN-T policy by establishing a two-layered European Transport Infrastructure Network, with a comprehensive and core network. For the first time not only lines and connections for each of the transport modes were identified, but in addition ports, airports and urban nodes were defined as import nodes in the network.

The Commission has now issued a proposal to review these 2013 Guidelines. The aim is to align the TEN-T policy with Europe's evolving transport policy and with the Green Deal. At the same time, the Commission aims to make Europe's Transport network more resilient.

Based on a first reading of the new proposal, I believe we can say that the Commission has done a good job. The draft text demonstrates that some important messages which Europe's ports have been voicing over the last years were understood and incorporated. The proposal explicitly mentions the cross-border character of Europe's maritime ports and recognises their role not only as multimodal hubs of transport, but also as hubs of energy and industry.

The new TEN-T proposal moreover clearly stresses the sustainable character of short-sea shipping and its contribution to the decarbonisation of the transport sector. It

**“Ferry connections cannot be developed everywhere, but I am convinced that they should and can be boosted further as a very good alternative to certain flight connections, at least in and between certain regions.**

gives, finally, the maritime pillar the place that it deserves in the overall transport infrastructure network, by taking away the uneven playing field between the land and maritime dimension of the TEN-T network. The alignment of the TEN-T Core Network Corridors and the Railfreight Corridors are also an important step forward.

## Room for improvement

Even if this review meets a lot of our expectations, we see some room for improvement, or at least for reflection. Since the aim of this review is to align the TEN-T network and its requirements with the Green Deal ambition, we regret that pipelines have not been considered as part of Europe's



**Isabelle Ryckbost**, secretary general, ESPO

Transport Infrastructure. Pipelines will increasingly play an essential role in the implementation of Europe's decarbonisation agenda and will be a necessary and sustainable mode of transport for new energies.

Moreover, at a time where ports will move from being not only hubs of transport but also hubs of energy and industry we might have to question on which basis to "weigh" the importance of a port as node in the transport network.

Should "tonnes" be the only indicator or should we add some other indicators, considering for instance the port as connecting and/or landing point for renewable energies. Take the example of Ostend, which is an important player in the offshore and blue economy sectors, but on the basis of its throughput tonnes, is not any longer a TEN-T port, not even an comprehensive port.

It is finally worth taking note of the Action Plan the Commission released together with its TEN-T review boosting long-haul rail transport for passengers as a sustainable way of travelling and an alternative to short haul flights.

The promotion of rail as a unique alternative to flights was first voiced in the Commission's new Mobility Strategy and is now further developed in this action plan. While I see the merit of this, I wonder why ferry connections are not taken up in this debate. Ferry connections cannot be developed everywhere, but I am convinced that they should and can be boosted further as a very good alternative to certain flight connections, at least in and between certain regions.

In any case, proposals are there to be discussed. And having a solid basis to work on, as is the case with this package, always helps.