

Press Release from Port-Net opening conference: (17.06.2005)Port-Net partners "fear the consequences" of EU's revised directive

HIGHER port dues, more expensive port services, lower investments and, in the long run, a monopolistic dominance by non-European companies could be the consequences of the EU's revised access to port services directive, according to the members of the new European networking initiative Port-Net.

An intensive discussion on the proposals took place at Port-Net's opening conference, which was held in Hamburg. "All participants feared the consequences of implementation of this directive and these were their conclusions," said Dr Matthias Ross, representing Port-Net's lead partner, the City of Hamburg.

"Hence, Port-Net does not expect the targets of more competition and improved efficiency to be achieved and rejects the current version of the directive. Only the announced state aid guidelines indicate a right way towards more financial transparency and fair competition. Within its activities, Port-Net intends to contribute constructively to further discussion on the market access to port services."

Port-Net, an EU-Interreg I I I C project of 20 partners from 12 European countries and Russia, formally started its activities with the four-day conference in Hamburg, discussing current transport issues relating to European Union policies.

The 35 participants identified a wide range of common problems and agreed that improved co-operation and combined efforts will contribute to a more efficient and environmentally sustainable transport policy.

The main subjects under discussion were questions about EU transport policy, the port services directive and urban integration of former port areas.

Ioannis Gheivelis of the Directorate General Transport & Energy spoke on EU transport policy.

"All participants agreed that in the face of the high growth of transport, European ports have a crucial role to play in shifting a significant share of this to more environmentally transport modes," said Dr Ross. However, Port-Net points out that ports are only one link in the intermodal transport chain and promoting intermodal transport requires the improvement of all involved modes, including rail, shipping and inland navigation. Even more attention should be directed to the use of up-to-date technologies, modern administrative procedures and equal conditions guaranteeing fair competition within the transport market.

Urban integration of former port areas is something most of the partners of Port-Net are currently involved in. Exchanging best practice knowledge of how to deal with flood protection and noise conflicts as well as how to attract residents and create environments offering good quality of life will be an important aspect of future Port-Net activities.

Port-Net was approved by the EU in January 2005 and has a € 1.7m budget until 2007. Its objective is to identify and tackle the main challenges faced by the European ports industry in order to create better operational structures and capacities and achieve the best possible regional integration of ports. These targets will be achieved through workshops, lectures and best practice tours at the locations of the partners as well as through external expertise and studies.

Lead partner of the project is the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg but a democratic network structure guarantees equal involvement and a proper consideration of the interests of all partners. Project co-ordination is executed by UNICONSULT, a port and transport consultancy from Hamburg.

Port-Net's partner locations cover all four EU zones as well as "old" and "new" member states. The partners are the Haven Gateway (UK), Antwerp (BE), Lübeck (D), Koege (DK), Wismar (D), Szczecin (PL), Elblag (PL), Kaliningrad (RU), Klaipeda (LT), Riga (LV), Tallinn (ES), Hamina (FI), Genoa (IT), Allessandria (IT), Emilia Romagna (IT), Ancona G.E.I.E. (IT), Volos (GR), Souda (GR) and Malta (MT).

Further information can be obtained from the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, State Ministry for Economic and Labour Affairs, Dr. Matthias Ross, Email: Matthias.Ross@hpa.hamburg.de, Phone: +49 40 42847 3012 and www.port-net.net.