

PRESS RELEASE**Port-Net partners meet for final conference at Hamburg**

AFTER more than two years of workshops, conferences, best practice tours and several papers and studies being published considering the common challenges faced by ports across Europe, the EU's Port-Net project holds its closing conference and general assembly in Hamburg this week. (Sept 25-28). Delegates will be focusing on EU Port Policy at this final event, presenting a series of high-profile speakers.

The Port-Net "family" can look back with satisfaction on what has been achieved over the past two years. Port-Net was set up with a budget of Euro 1.5 million and has focused on four key topics: EU policies, port administration and finance; maritime cargo transportation challenges; port operations, hinterland cargo distribution and "ports and people".

"We have discussed and learned about the many common challenges facing ports across Europe; among these are increasing the efficiency and capacity of terminal operations; encouraging short-sea shipping instead of long-distance haulage; promoting "green" inland connections; tackling issues of finance and administration; reconciling the different priorities of waterside residents and cargo handling operations, often in close proximity; and attracting and providing facilities for today's massive cruise ships," says Hans-Ulrich Wolff, head of the Port-Net project management team at Hamburg-based UNICONSULT, which has been responsible for the overall financial and organisational implementation of the project on behalf of Hamburg Port Authority (HPA).

Dissemination of all conference results beyond the 18 Port-Net partners has been one core issue of the project, with all papers, studies etc., published on the Port-Net website (www.port-net.net), says Mr Wolff.

"At the same time, the Port-Net delegates have had the opportunity to make many useful contacts in the European ports sector and gather useful knowledge along the way."

The Port-Net conference will open with a talk entitled "Beyond Port Package II – latest developments in EU port policies" by Jana Schiedek of HPA.

Riina Palu, of the Port of Tallinn, will then discuss "EU port policy – a new member state's position".

Roel Hoenders, from ESPO (the European Sea Ports Organisation), will speak on "EU policy on port and environment". Later in the programme, the EC's José Fernandez Garcia will discuss EU maritime transport policy.

Port-Net's closing conference coincides with the EU Interreg Northern Maritime Corridors II conference being held in Hamburg, and some joint sessions will be held by the two projects to look at the Motorways of the Sea topic.

Also in Hamburg this week is the Seatrade Europe cruise exhibition and conference. Port-Net delegates will spend a morning at Seatrade.

Port-Net's final general assembly in Hamburg on Friday (Sept 28) will draft first guidelines for an application for a Port-Net II project under the new Interreg IVC programme being launched last week at Lisbon.

"A possible new project will on the one hand further strengthen the network already built up, extending it where appropriate, and on the other hand work towards sustainability in building up multimodal transport structures for EU ports in general and the Port-Net partners in particular by transferring concrete best practice from and to different regions of the EU," says Mr Wolff.

PORT-NET: notes for editors

Port-Net is an EU Interreg IIC Network project with partners from 12 European countries and Russia. Its objective has been to identify and tackle the main challenges faced by European ports in order to create better operational structures and capacities as well as to achieve the best possible regional integration of ports. Port-Net has worked towards these targets through a series of workshops, presentations, studies and best practice tours. Previous events have taken place in Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands and Poland.

Three components differentiate the activities by topics. The first component deals mainly with the application and further development of EU policies. Improvements in the multimodal transport structure and maritime cargo challenges are the subjects under discussion within the second component. The final component focuses on tourism and urban development from a port perspective.

The lead partner of Port-Net is the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, represented by the Hamburg Port Authority (HPA). A full list of partners can be founded at www.port-net.net. 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.

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