

PRESS RELEASE

Port-Net delegates call for transparency in port finance

TRANSPARENCY over port finance is still lacking in many areas of Europe and clear definitions are needed in all discussions of port development funding in order to make fair comparisons, port delegates from across Europe concluded at a workshop in Hamburg.

Members of the European Port-Net project also agreed that timely and sufficient infrastructure financing is one of the outstanding challenges for nearly all European ports, whether publicly owned, private or “intermediate”.

The Port Financing Workshop, organised in parallel with Port-Net’s General Assembly 2006, considered current trends in the financing of port developments, discussed the various options for funding such investments, and listened to “best practice” cases from Hamburg and from the UK, the latter being presented by representatives of the Haven Gateway, the UK’s Port-Net partner.

Among their results and recommendations, the 35 delegates, mainly from European port authorities, agreed that transparency is still lacking in some areas/countries, although basic rules exist, including the EU Directive 2000/52/EC.

“The participants agreed that an ongoing study for the European Commission could bring some more ‘definite’ clarity and that a closer look at ‘EU aid’ for ports and its impact on competition in this sector could also be worthwhile,” said Dr Matthias Ross of Hamburg Port Authority. “Also, it was agreed that, in particular, clear definitions are needed for all terms used in infrastructure financing discussions, to avoid comparing apples and pears.”

Other conclusions were:

- The role of private investors in financing port infrastructure will grow, especially in the light of increasing public funding constraints;
- Examples of privately financed projects in UK ports demonstrate demand-driven investments and operational efficiency;
- Future EU-seaport policy and the development of Seaport Policy Guidelines should take into account all factors, including efficiency and external welfare.

“We have still to become used to the fact that we are living in ‘one Europe’ and that national port policies sometimes still follow not economic rationality but political (national, regional and local) preferences,” said one delegate.

The issue of port financing is becoming ever more critical in the light of the European Commission’s ongoing liberalisation policy and the dramatically increased demand for new port handling capacities and improved hinterland connections, especially in the container sector.

“As it is the clear objective of the European Commission to encourage private investment in the port sector, the ‘Public Private Partnership’ (PPP) model was discussed and experiences exchanged, especially with regard to their impact on the port’s role as a catalyst for regional development,” said Dr Ross.

A follow-up workshop, Port Financing II, will be hosted by two more Port-Net partners, Hamina (Finland) and Tallinn (Estonia) in June 2007.

PORT-NET: notes for editors

Port-Net is an EU Interreg IIIC Network project with 20 partners from 12 European countries and Russia. Its objective is 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. These targets continue to be achieved through workshops, presentations, studies and best practice tours. Previous events have taken place in Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, Latvia, 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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