

European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO)

ESPO 2011 Conference – Limassol, 5-6 May 2011

Opening statement Victor Schoenmakers, Chairman of ESPO

- Ladies and gentlemen,
- I would like to welcome all of you to the 8th edition of the ESPO Conference.
- We are very happy to be in Cyprus, a great maritime nation with a port tradition that goes back many centuries.
- Most of our members re-emerged from the crisis during the past year and it is good to see that several ports are recording healthy growth figures again.
- To accommodate this growth we need to continuously invest in port capacity and hinterland connections. We also have to ensure that our ports maintain an excellent performance record. That is vital to safeguard their status as gateways for European trade and passengers.
- This year's ESPO conference features a double bill, with port performance on the agenda today and the review of ports policy tomorrow. Both themes tune in very well with the roadmap of the European Commission's new Transport White Paper.
- Many of us feel uncomfortable with the measurement of port performance. Although I know that most ports and terminals measure and compare their own performance through various kinds of indicators, very few publish anything more than the number of tonnes and passengers they handle. The idea of publicly comparing and ranking performance of ports is still something of a taboo. In a way this is remarkable for a modern industry that claims to be so important for the European economy. In other sectors, for instance aviation and railways, it is quite accepted already to publish performance indicators in an open and transparent manner. Also ports in other parts of the world seem to be embracing a culture of benchmarking.
- Maybe the time has come to change our attitude and become more open about what we are and what we do. With the PPRISM project we want to take a first step in establishing a culture of performance measurement in European ports. A modest step, which will only establish indicators for the port system as a whole, but nevertheless an important one in creating that new culture. Our new 'Fact-Finding Report' on port , which we will present tomorrow, is part of the same process of creating more transparency about our sector.

- The more transparent we are, the easier it will be to maintain the current European soft law policy for ports, which brings me straight to the second theme of the conference.
- The Commission announced in its White Paper that it will review its current policy for ports in function of possible restrictions that may still exist, for instance in the market of port services. I think we should not be afraid of that, but rather work openly with the services of the Commission to see where and how any remaining problems may be remedied in an effective manner.
- I am convinced that ports in Europe generally perform well and that specific problems can be singled out easily through dialogue, be it social or otherwise. That is the best way to avoid 'one-size-fits-all' regulatory intervention. But, again, this requires an open mindset of all stakeholders and a culture of transparency that we all need to work on.
- The ports policy review is also an opportunity for us to say what we want from Europe. After all, the Commission made some promises a few years ago that still need to be fulfilled, State aid guidelines being perhaps the best example.
- Finally, allow me to say two words about the on-going review of the Trans-European Transport Networks, which does not feature explicitly in the conference programme, but is nevertheless reaching an important stage these days.
- Whilst we continue to support the dual layer approach the Commission proposes, we are nevertheless concerned about the criteria that are being developed for the inclusion of ports.
- The proposed minimum thresholds for the comprehensive network are higher than what they presently are, which risks to exclude a significant number of ports that are now part of TEN-T already. This would be contrary to the whole idea that a comprehensive network should be as inclusive as possible.
- The criteria for the core network should on the other hand be as clear and objective as possible and avoid any loopholes. We must be careful not to overstep or dilute the critical mass that is necessary to collect the positive effects of concentration, which also provides gains for sustainability. En we must ensure of course that there are sufficient entry points into the European markets.
- So in summary, we call upon the Commission to be as generous as possible for the comprehensive network, and to be stay as objective as possible for the core network. Member States should of course also take their responsibility in this respect.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for being here, I thank Cyprus Ports Authority already for hosting us and I wish you all a fruitful conference.