



2023/2059(INI)

28.11.2023

OPINION

of the Committee on International Trade

for the Committee on Transport and Tourism

Building a comprehensive European port strategy
(2023/2059(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Iuliu Winkler

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on International Trade calls on the Committee on Transport and Tourism, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its draft recommendation:

- A. whereas European ports are a key artery for EU and global trade, with 74 % of goods entering or leaving the EU by sea; whereas, in addition to their strategic function, ports are taking on an increasingly important role as the anchor of social and economic growth of European regions as well as in the supply, production, provision and storage of energy, and the greening of transport and industry;
- B. whereas ports are not only the final destinations of trade flows, but also nodes in international value and supply chain networks and regional trade flows, alongside rail-, road-, and air-transport links, which deserve equal attention in terms of security, resilience and competitiveness;
 - 1. Emphasises the role of European ports as critical infrastructure in EU efforts to boost supply chain resilience, especially in key areas linked to the green and digital transformations and in boosting energy security; stresses that during the pandemic ports played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of emergency supply chains;
 - 2. Highlights that in the new geopolitical context, in the wake of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, ports play an essential role in keeping trade routes and supply chains operational and in setting up new alternative routes, including humanitarian and solidarity lanes, while building resilience through diversification; further underlines that European ports are pivotal in safeguarding energy supplies and in reducing energy dependency from Russia and will remain instrumental in repowering Europe in the short term, by fostering the development of alternative routes for the provision of gas and increasing gas storage; in parallel, stresses that ports will play an important role in the greening of transport, industry and energy;
 - 3. Acknowledges that Member States bordering Russia are facing new types of logistical challenges, and since well-functioning ports are key to overcoming these challenges, the EU should pay special attention to the ports in these Member States;
 - 4. Highlights that while ports represent a key engine for growth, these can also be a strategic source of vulnerability that needs prioritised attention at EU level;
 - 5. Notes that European ports have an impact on the regional economy and society, and are exposed to a high security risk, stresses that European ports should be particularly protected as critical facilities for Member States;
 - 6. Believes that the development of European ports is necessary in order to uphold the EU's aim of working towards international, rule-based trade that benefits growth and wealth globally;
 - 7. Highlights that an open, fair, sustainable and assertive EU trade policy, coupled with ambitious and balanced trade agreements, is key to the competitiveness and resilience of

European ports and for Europe's growth, jobs and social prosperity; stresses that Europe's long-term competitiveness is dependent on a global, rules-based level playing field;

8. Recognises that Europe's maritime manufacturing capabilities are essential to the EU's maritime strategic autonomy, innovation and sustainable growth as well as to the EU's ambitions to lead the twin green and digital transitions; believes that the EU Regulation on Foreign Subsidies and autonomous tools are essential to preserve and foster the European maritime industrial base;
9. Recalls that the EU needs to strike a balance between attracting foreign investments and defending its critical infrastructure, including the integrity of its ports;
10. Notes that the operation and further development of Europe's ports is a complex issue that requires an appropriate approach across a number of functional dimensions, not just strictly in terms of infrastructure or superstructure, but above all in terms of trade relations, security and IT systems;
11. Emphasises that a consistent European port strategy is essential to ensure fair competition; encourages increased cooperation between European ports and the elimination of harmful practices such as underpricing;
12. Expresses its concern about potential unfair competition from non-EU ports as these are exempted from the application of the Emissions Trading System in European maritime transport;
13. Notes that the implementation of recent or pending EU legislation, including in the field of trade, requires effective enforcement by the EU and its Member States, as well as sustained investments and training for port operators and authorities, including as regards obligations stemming from the Fit for 55 package, or in enabling EU ports to play a role in the green transition, meeting the demand in key areas such as hydrogen imports; recalls the importance of a global level playing field in this key area;
14. Stresses the need to ensure sufficient resources for border and customs control authorities so that they can better enforce EU legislation;
15. Recalls that by 2030, the EU aims to import 10 million tonnes of green hydrogen and to achieve this goal, a comprehensive strategy on importation, coordination, and infrastructure development is essential to the European Port Strategy and should be established promptly; notes that with the European Green Deal and updated energy strategies, European ports are evolving into pivotal energy hubs, this emerging role must be recognised and appropriately emphasised in future financing strategies and infrastructure developments;
16. Further highlights the need for EU programmes to support ports as hubs in line with the Connecting Europe Facility, advancing the digital and green transitions in areas such as electrification, 5/6G investments and hydrogen;
17. Emphasises that in certain cases foreign trade and investment can cause security vulnerabilities, in particular in the case of foreign ownership, control or access to EU

critical infrastructure, including European ports; notes, in this regard the special nature of some ports, which not only provide logistical infrastructure but also contribute to the European defence system; calls for increased vigilance and more coordination at EU level, including as regards the facilitation of information sharing and relevant security guidelines for national and private operators; encourages the national authorities of EU Member States to give high priority to the protection of critical infrastructure;

18. Believes that foreign investments in essential and critical infrastructure that might enable effective participation or control (direct or indirect) in the management of the port should be thoroughly scrutinised; underlines that foreign investments, from state backed companies or state subsidies in all forms that enable effective participation or direct or indirect control over the management of the port, should be avoided; considers that, in order to strengthen Europe's resilience, competition on an equal footing must be ensured and that the level playing field and Europe's competitiveness cannot be allowed to be undermined by distortionary foreign subsidies in European ports;
19. Underlines that Chinese state-owned companies have sought to acquire majority or controlling stakes in a number of European ports, currently estimated to include total or partial control over 14 ports in the European Union and 10 % of European shipping activities; warns that this is not only done out of simple economic interests, but these investments are also part of the Chinese government's so called 'international ocean governance', translated into policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which is a strategy aiming to gain influence over key European naval infrastructure and a distinct matter of economic security of considerable importance in the current context of geopolitical competition; is convinced that the EU-China bilateral trade and investment relationship is of strategic importance, bearing strategic challenges, and should be rules-based, with the multilateral trading system and the principle of reciprocity at its core, and with clear European control of its critical infrastructure; emphasises in this context the expectation that China would support ambitious WTO-reform; insists on more reciprocity and advocates strong EU actions against unfair Chinese regulations and practices;
20. Encourages the national port authorities, the Member States and the European Commission to develop an adequate format for strategic cooperation between European ports in order to minimise the risk of being played against each other by third actors;
21. Draws attention to the ban on cabotage for European vessels between Chinese ports and between US ports and calls for increased reciprocity and for the establishment of an EU-wide reciprocity review mechanism that would allow the EU to determine the level of openness of foreign markets to European shippers;
22. Reiterates that the independence, competitiveness and security of European ports alongside other trade relevant critical infrastructure must be an integral part of the European economic security strategy¹, in line with the EU's de-risking paradigm;
23. Stresses that a European Port Strategy must incorporate measures to prevent an oligopoly in liner shipping companies from dominating both on-shore and off-shore

¹ [Joint communication](#) from the European Commission and the High Representative of 20 June 2023 on a European Economic Security Strategy (JOIN(2023)0020).

logistics and that for the sake of fair competition and a level playing field, the current preferential tax treatment for liner shipping companies must be terminated immediately; notes that this favourable treatment has endowed these companies with market power, enabling them to branch out into other segments of the logistics sector and that this disparity in competition and tax regulations allows dominant entities in container shipping to exert undue influence over port and hinterland logistics;

24. Highlights the strategic importance and the economic potential of the Arctic, and thus the EU's need to enhance its understanding of the arctic maritime industry and attract new investments in the area;
25. Calls for access to all EU ports to be refused for ships whose last or next port of call is in the Russian Federation, except in the case of necessary justified humanitarian reasons;
26. Recalls that the regulation on the screening of foreign direct investments (FDI Screening Regulation)² addresses risks to security and public order resulting from investments from non-EU countries, including those concerning European ports;
27. Looks forward to the upcoming review of the FDI Screening Regulation; encourages the Commission to present an ambitious legislative proposal adequately addressing all the loopholes that have emerged during the implementation of the FDI Screening Regulation, including with regard to critical European infrastructure; calls for a strengthened instrument, with increased consistency concerning the definitions, scope and procedural aspects of national screening mechanisms; encourages Member States that have not adopted national screening mechanisms to do so without delay; considers that assessments on the basis of the FDI Screening Regulation should take place within a reasonable timeframe and respect confidentiality during the screening process, in order to ensure legal certainty for potential investors and stakeholders and safeguard the attractiveness of Europe for new investments;
28. Emphasises the considerable role that the Global Gateway could play in strengthening the network of European ports with third countries, facilitating trade and expanding investment opportunities, hence creating mutually beneficial partnerships and promoting sustainable value chains; recalls the role of economic diplomacy, including its parliamentary dimension, in promoting such European flagship initiatives and strengthening international partnerships for resilient, sustainable and diversified trade;
29. Stresses in this context that this strategy must also contribute to the strengthening of the partner countries, and in particular of their independence in terms of critical strategic infrastructure to prevent them falling under the control of foreign investors with ambiguous goals;
30. Once again stresses the importance of ensuring the competitiveness of European ports, including the related technological innovations and skills for EU trade policy; argues that a comprehensive European Port Strategy must provide coherence, stability and predictability to a strategic area of growth, fostering the potential for development of

² [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/452](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union (OJ L 79I, 21.3.2019, p. 1).

European operators, shipbuilders and seafarers; is convinced that such a strategy would be in line with the Commission's Communication on Economic Security, boosting the resilience of supply chains by increasing internal strength, alongside the supply and demand dimensions of value chains for such critical infrastructure;

31. Underlines the importance of a healthy, competitive and diversified maritime and logistics environment for ports; points, however, to the increasing market power of a small number of stakeholders, in particular shipping lines, which risks affecting the level playing field and fair power balance between the different actors in the port ecosystem; as such, emphasises the importance of effective and timely dialogue between ports and other logistics stakeholders in order to ensure well-functioning supply chains and avoid stranded assets;
32. Emphasises the importance of viewing Ukrainian ports and terminals as an integral part of the European port and trade system even today; applauds the support that European operators of these ports have given their local staff since the onset of the war; recognises the severe financial challenges these operators currently face due to Russia's unlawful war in Ukraine; believes that these ports and terminals can – and should – play a pivotal role in the country's reconstruction;
33. In that context, underlines the importance of strengthening the role of European ports in facilitating the transit of grain originating from Ukraine in order to disencumber mainland routes, thus contributing to getting Ukrainian grain to third countries that need it;
34. Highlights the importance of safeguarding the competitiveness of Europe's ports and ensuring a robust assessment of legislative measures that may lead to business leakage and loss of competitiveness to the advantage of ports outside the EU; believes that Europe's ports need to be further empowered, including at EU level, allowing them to play their critical and essential role as gateways to trade and partners in the energy transition;
35. Highlights the important toolbox of autonomous legislative instruments at the disposal of the EU and its Member States to ensure the integrity of its ports;
36. Considers that a well-functioning customs union is fundamental to the EU's competitiveness, sustainability and resilience; believes that a reformed and strengthened customs union with a common customs code will preserve the integrity of the single market, helping to maintain EU competitiveness in the twin green and digital transitions and avoid unfair competition between European ports;
37. Stresses that differences in customs procedure policies at the EU's points of entry into the customs union often distort trade flows and put at risk the integrity of the European single market;
38. Recalls the importance of having in place harmonised customs controls in all European ports to avoid different application of sanitary or due diligence standards; insists that the Commission ensure that custom controls throughout the EU follow the same standards, by means of a direct unified customs control mechanism, in coordination with Member States and in full compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur has received input from the following entities or persons in the preparation of the opinion, until the adoption thereof in committee:

Entity and/or person
The European Sea Ports Organisation
Federation of European Private Port Operators

The list above is drawn up under the exclusive responsibility of the rapporteur.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	28.11.2023
Result of final vote	+: 34 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Barry Andrews, Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, Tiziana Beghin, Geert Bourgeois, Saskia Bricmont, Daniel Caspary, Paolo De Castro, Markéta Gregorová, Heidi Hautala, Danuta Maria Hübner, Karin Karlsbro, Martine Kemp, Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, Bernd Lange, Margarida Marques, Gabriel Mato, Sara Matthieu, Emmanuel Maurel, Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó, Samira Rafaela, Catharina Rinzema, Inma Rodríguez-Piñero, Helmut Scholz, Joachim Schuster, Mihai Tudose, Kathleen Van Brempt, Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, Jörgen Warborn, Iuliu Winkler, Jan Zahradil, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Substitutes present for the final vote	Michiel Hoogeveen, Javier Moreno Sánchez, Ralf Seekatz

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

34	+
ECR	Geert Bourgeois, Michiel Hoogeveen, Jan Zahradil
NI	Tiziana Beghin, Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó
PPE	Anna-Michelle Asimakopoulou, Daniel Caspary, Danuta Maria Hübner, Martine Kemp, Gabriel Mato, Ralf Seekatz, Jörgen Warborn, Iuliu Winkler, Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez
Renew	Barry Andrews, Karin Karlsbro, Samira Rafaela, Catharina Rinzema, Marie-Pierre Vedrenne
S&D	Paolo De Castro, Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, Bernd Lange, Margarida Marques, Javier Moreno Sánchez, Inma Rodríguez-Piñero, Joachim Schuster, Mihai Tudose, Kathleen Van Brempt
The Left	Emmanuel Maurel, Helmut Scholz
Verts/ALE	Saskia Bricmont, Markéta Gregorová, Heidi Hautala, Sara Matthieu

0	-

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention