

## **The strategic importance of the Mediterranean - future development and challenges for the Mediterranean ports**

Speech by Mr. Joaquim Tosas, President of the Port Authority of Barcelona

From the outset of its activities in 1997, INTERMED has been playing an active role in defending the interests of the Mediterranean ports.

In the beginning, our work was oriented towards countering the EU's attempts to ban state aid for the building of breakwaters, as proposed in the initial drafts of the Green Paper on ports prepared by the Commission. After numerous internal preparation meetings, we managed to present our arguments to the European Transport Commissioner. Indeed, after several meetings, Mr. Kinnock finally accepted our argument that it was unjust that no public subsidies could be received in the Mediterranean, where the ports required very costly works to build infrastructure for sheltering port waters, whilst in the north, where the large ports are located in sheltered waters along the great European rivers, such investments were not required. However, on the other hand, by the very fact that they were located along the flow of the rivers, these ports required expensive dredging works to keep their access open and maintain the draughts of their wharves, which were eligible for public funding.

As well as dedicating efforts to this successful initiative, which allowed the payment of subsidies for dredging ports and accesses in the north and building breakwaters in the south, there is another very important question on which we must act in the Mediterranean. For the time being, we have to accept that we have not made great advances for the southern Mediterranean ports of Europe to be able to enjoy the same possibilities as their equals in the north.

The statement that in the Mediterranean we do not have the same opportunities as the ports of the north to serve the shippers of central and eastern Europe is based on evidence, not on value judgements, nor on any feeling of victimisation in an attempt to justify any supposedly unfair advantages of other countries. We all know, although sometimes it may seem difficult to understand this concept, that ports are facilities that serve land-sea intermodal transport, and in order to compete, to provide service to customers, the maritime leg is as important as the land leg. If we analyse the map of the European network of intermodal transport on the screen here, we can see at the outset that there is a great north-south imbalance in terms of the density of the network. It is true that the density both of population and of economic activity is much greater in the north than in the south, but it is undeniable that with the current policy of not discriminating investments by area, with significant increases in the south instead of rebalancing Europe, we are leading to a greater imbalance. Look again at the map and judge for yourselves.

If this is a worrying prospect for ports, it is also for the economic activity of the countries located on the shores of the Mediterranean, and much more so since the decision to enlarge the European Union, incorporating ten countries from Eastern Europe. If we take another look at the map, we can see that the enlargement accentuates our peripheral position and that once again the best-placed ports in terms of connections to the new markets are those of Northern Europe.

This situation, which in itself is already worrying for the Mediterranean ports, is aggravated by the considerable congestion on the railways linking the ports of Barcelona, Marseilles and Genoa with the centre and north of Europe, which effectively blocks new rail services until the problems are resolved in three bottlenecks: the stretch from Nimes to Montpellier and the accesses to Lyon and Dijon. With these bottlenecks, it is impossible for there to be any increase in current traffic travelling through them, which means that there can be no increased use of the railway until 2020, which is the date currently suggested for their removal.

This situation of blockage in the use of rail transport will seriously affect the future competitiveness of the Mediterranean countries in their trade with the north and the centre of Europe, which naturally includes the new Member States of the European Union. We are not only highlighting a problem in terms of port competition, but we are also facing a problem for some EU and Mediterranean states whose commerce with Europe will be affected by their not having access to competitive rail services.

As we mentioned before, the inferior situation of the Mediterranean area as far as accessing the European internal market is concerned will be aggravated with the accession of the new EU states from the east, with whom there is naturally a wish to link physically to their neighbours with new road and rail connections.

The European Commission's White Paper is a clear statement of the will to create the Trans-European Transport Network. It states that: "the Commission proposes to concentrate the revision of the Community guidelines on removing the bottlenecks in the railway network, completing the routes identified as the priorities for absorbing the traffic flows generated by enlargement, particularly in frontier regions, and improving access to outlying areas." From this text, taken from the White Paper we can deduce the will of the EU to act upon all the fronts that concern us, i.e., the removal of rail bottlenecks and the strengthening of the accessibility of peripheral areas. As we have already said, this last point concerns us directly, since in the south we will be even more peripheral after enlargement. However, in the same text there is also mention of the logical need, which we share, for new infrastructures to strengthen the connection with the new EU states. What we are discussing is a matter of priorities. We therefore highlight the urgency of strengthening north-south connections, investing in the TEN currently defined, before going ahead to define and invest in a new configuration facing east.

This great challenge for the Mediterranean ports that we have described will require all our attention and efforts over the coming years. It is clear that we cannot wait until 2020 to increase the use of rail transport to serve our customers, the importers and exporters who use our facilities. We trust that with the support of our institutions and civil society we will very shortly see our requests satisfied.

Thank you very much for your attention.