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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on the EU Ports Strategy
- Presidency proposal

With a view to the meeting of the Working Party on Transport - Intermodal Questions and Networks on 30 March 2026, delegations will find attached a Presidency proposal for draft Council conclusions on the above subject.

Draft Council Conclusions on the EU Ports Strategy

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

HAVING REGARD TO

- the Commission Communication on the EU Ports Strategy ¹;
- the Commission Communication on the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy ²;
- the Council Conclusions on "EU Waterborne Transport Sector – Future outlook: Towards a carbon-neutral, zero accidents, automated and competitive EU Waterborne Transport Sector"³;
- the Council Conclusions on the EU Maritime Industrial Strategy⁴;
- the Council Conclusions on "Priorities for the EU's maritime transport policy until 2020: Competitiveness, Decarbonisation, Digitalisation to ensure global connectivity, an efficient internal market and a world-class maritime cluster"⁵;

1. WELCOMES the Communication from the Commission on the EU Port Strategy as a comprehensive framework addressing the key challenges facing European ports in respect to competitiveness, sustainability, resilience, security, digitalisation governance and social aspects, building on the 2013 Ports Policy , while STRESSING the importance of proportionate and efficient implementation, avoiding unnecessary administrative and financial burdens in line with better regulation principles.

¹ Doc. ST 6926/26.

² Doc. ST 6987/26.

³ Doc. ST 8648/20.

⁴ *[Insert reference at a later stage]*

⁵ Doc. ST 9976/17.

2. RECOGNISES that European ports handle more than 74% of goods entering or leaving Europe and around 395 million passengers yearly, generating significant economic value and employment. ACKNOWLEDGES that their strategic role has expanded to encompass energy transition, offshore renewable energy, industrial clusters, military mobility and security, while EMPHASISING the diversity of port ecosystems, including geographical, climatic and operational specificities.
3. RECOGNISES that ports in islands, coastal and outermost regions are lifelines for their territories and are particularly exposed to competitive pressure, climate-related [and security] risks and additional costs and INVITES targeted and flexible support within relevant EU instruments, taking into account their specific characteristics and vulnerabilities.

II. STRENGTHEN COMPETITIVENESS, INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION

4. RECOGNISES that maritime trade is inherently global and that competitiveness is affected by costs, standards and regulatory conditions, and EMPHASISES the importance of ensuring a level playing field internationally and addressing distortions stemming from regulatory asymmetries and third-country practices.
5. WELCOMES the guiding principles set out by the Commission for EU support to port projects in third countries and UNDERLINES that such support should be subject to a robust competitiveness check, ensuring that EU-backed projects do not undermine the competitive position of nearby EU ports.
6. SUPPORTS the pursuit of fair market access in international engagements and CALLS FOR balanced and non-discriminatory conditions for EU operators in third-country port markets.
7. WELCOMES the intention to provide guidance on assessing foreign investment in EU ports and HIGHLIGHTS the importance of applying controls in a risk-based, proportionate and non-discriminatory manner, building on existing frameworks, avoiding duplication and ensuring legal certainty while safeguarding economic security.

8. RECALLS the diversity of port governance models and UNDERLINES that this diversity must be fully respected when designing and implementing EU policies which affect ports.
9. RECOGNISES the role of concession and land-lease agreements in attracting investment and CALLS for a balanced approach ensuring flexibility, resilience, security and sustainability.
10. STRESSES that future Union initiatives concerning port governance, concessions and land-use frameworks should remain non-binding, flexible and without retroactive effect, and should not alter the fundamental legal nature of existing systems.
11. RECOGNISES the evolving role of port authorities as strategic coordinators of port ecosystems and ENCOURAGES their empowerment in line with national governance frameworks.
12. UNDERLINES the importance of financing, by port authorities, of basic port infrastructure open to general use (such as breakwaters, dredging of access channels, publicly accessible quays and common road and rail access within the port area) from port-generated revenues in line with the user pays and economic self-sufficiency principles and INVITES the Commission, in the context of the review of the State aid framework, to take these elements into account in order to provide legal certainty and support the economic viability and competitiveness of ports.
13. INVITES the Commission, when revising the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), to adapt the scope and thresholds of block-exempted port aid to better reflect investment needs in digitalisation, energy transition, safety, security and dual-use mobility, while ensuring simplification and legal certainty and avoiding additional administrative burden.
14. WELCOMES the common principles for EU funding and UNDERLINES that these should simplify procedures, avoid additional bureaucracy and remain neutral with regard to governance and concession models.
15. INVITES improved coordination and transparency across EU funding instruments, ensuring flexibility, coherence and alignment with strategic priorities for EU ports.

16. NOTES the review of EU merger guidelines and STRESSES the need to preserve effective competition while taking into account evolving market structures, including vertical integration.
17. STRESSES the importance of integrating ports into the TEN-T through strengthened hinterland connections, and CALLS for prioritisation of rail and inland waterway connectivity as well as last mile connections.
18. UNDERLINES the importance of adequate infrastructure capacity and quality and INVITES reinforced development of port-related infrastructure, including multimodal links and dry ports.
19. WELCOMES the proposal for a Military Mobility Regulation and CALLS for its swift implementation, ensuring appropriate support for dual-use port infrastructure.
20. WELCOMES efforts to strengthen technological leadership and support innovation deployment, and CALLS FOR clearer pathways for scaling up digital and technological solutions across ports.
21. ENCOURAGES the development of EU digital initiatives and CALLS for their effective and harmonised implementation, avoiding fragmentation and unnecessary additional requirements.
22. WELCOMES the development of data-sharing guidelines and STRESSES the importance of interoperability, data protection and efficient logistics chains.

III. ENERGY TRANSITION, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLEAN INDUSTRIES

23. RECOGNISES that ports are becoming strategic energy and industrial hubs and play a key role in decarbonization and energy transition.
24. WELCOMES support for onshore power supply and UNDERLINES that deployment should aim for economic viability, competitiveness and alignment with demand, avoiding stranded assets.

25. CALLS for the promotion of smart-grid solutions, demand management and efficient use of existing infrastructure.
26. RECOGNISES the role of ports in alternative fuels and renewable energy and INVITES stronger alignment between TEN-T, TEN-E and national planning frameworks.
27. RECALLS the importance of facilitating grid deployment and ensuring timely and efficient connections for port-related projects.
28. RECOGNISES the role of ports in the supply of sustainable fuels and WELCOMES further measures to support availability.
29. CALLS for strengthened cooperation between ports and industrial clusters to support energy transition and circular economy solutions.
30. RECALLS the importance of ETS revenues for climate investments and EMPHASISES the need for adequate support to port and maritime decarbonization while ensuring flexibility and efficiency in their allocation. STRESSES the importance of a coordinated and balanced support across the maritime ecosystem.
31. NOTES concerns regarding the potential impact of ETS on competitiveness, in particular as regards the risk of traffic diversion, and INVITES the Commission to monitor and, where appropriate, propose targeted corrective measures, while preserving environmental ambition and ensuring coherence with international frameworks.
32. RECALLS the importance of supporting investments in decarbonization and energy transition technologies and infrastructure in ports.
33. NOTES upcoming reviews of relevant legislation and their importance for port competitiveness.

34. WELCOMES flexibilities in environmental legislation and CALLS for their effective use to facilitate port development. SUPPORTS efforts to simplify regulatory frameworks, in particular in respect to permitting procedures, while safeguarding environmental protection.
35. WELCOMES the development of a climate resilience framework, including tools for the assessment of climate risks, and STRESSES the need for climate-proofing of port infrastructure.

IV. PROTECT AND SECURE PORTS

36. RECOGNISES the increasing range of security threats affecting ports and the need to increase resilience.
37. WELCOMES efforts to update maritime security frameworks and address emerging threats.
38. WELCOMES initiatives to combat organized crime and SUPPORTS proportionate and effective security measures, taking into account operational realities and avoiding unnecessary burdens.
39. WELCOMES strengthened cooperation with international partners to enhance port security.
40. CALLS for the EU-wide implementation of relevant cybersecurity legislation and enhanced cooperation between the competent authorities.

V. SOCIAL COHESION, SKILLS AND QUALITY JOBS

41. RECOGNISES the role of ports as vital enablers for the economic development, resilience, social and territorial cohesion of the Union. EMPHASISES the importance of small and medium-sized ports, notably on islands, remote and outermost regions in this respect.
42. UNDERLINES that effective workforce adaptation, reskilling and operational training measures are needed, to ensure that technological transformation leads to the creation of quality jobs, improves workforce safety and makes the sector more attractive for women and young people.

43. CALLS for an increased level of protection of port workers, in particular in the context of increasing security risks and the key role of the ports in military mobility. Port workers should be provided with a secure working environment, as well as regular training and exercise.
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