

Symposium on Seaport Innovation and Requirements

Hamburg, 28 October 2009

Speech of Joost de Bock, European Commission DG Research

It is a pleasure to say a few introductory words on this symposium on "Port Innovation and Requirements".

This is especially so since with this symposium we celebrate the happy end of the research project "EFFORTS" which has been co-financed by the European Commission.

And it has taken EFFORTS some doing to get where we stand today!

I will not tell about this nor its results.

Professor Froese will do this on behalf of the consortium,

- setting the further scene for today's speakers; and
- kicking off a lively discussion amongst all of us on current and future port innovations and requirements and the EFFORTS' project contribution to that.

I have been asked to say a few words about "ports as a target for EU funded RTD".

I can immediately confirm that ports will continue to be addressed by EU research. Seaports play too much a vital role in the European economy to let it go.

The European Union simply cannot function without its seaports. Almost all of the Community's external trade and almost half of its internal trades enters or leaves through the more than 1000 seaports that exist in the maritime Member States of the European Union. On average 3.5 billion tonnes of cargo per year. In addition, every year 350 million passengers pass through European seaports – the equivalent of 70 % of the European population.

Approximately 350,000 people work in ports and directly related services which together generate an added value of about € 20 billion

You know of course these figures much better than I do.

These figures, and others such as increased size of container vessels, all breathe the word "mega". This will not be different in the future.

Notwithstanding this importance, ports are no magnets for young people as the London city is (in good days). Seaports have mostly a negative image with the public that seems to have more eyes for the negative externalities rather than looking at the positive contribution of seaports to Europe's welfare. Lack of public support for seaports is most clearly shown when ports present their new plans for extension. Approval usually takes years, tens of years. Indeed, expansion of spatial development, often one prerequisite for improved capacity, certainly in the years of rapid expansion during the last decade, is hard to come by.

So the key challenge for ports is to cope with the effects of strong growth in traffic intensity, vessel sizes and cargo volumes while at the same time respect increasingly tight national and EU environmental legislation((EU Birds and Habitats Directives), and legislation on security. To cope with this complex issue, ports must be frontrunners of technical innovation and environmental awareness.

The Commission aims to accelerate and facilitate research and innovation.

On the basis of EU communications such as "the agenda for freight logistics"; on "establishing a European maritime transport space without barriers"; on "the EU maritime transport strategy", the Commission will continue opening its RTD programmes for research and innovation on issues such as

- accelerated development of new port and infrastructure facilities;
- integration of ports in the logistic chains;
- improved efficiencies and quality of the hinterland connections;
- e-maritime;
- clean operations in ports;
- energy systems in ports

While taking up this facilitators' role, the Commission is of the opinion that successful innovation and research needs to comply with two principles:

Change & innovative technologies are as a rule not neutral towards employment. Certainly in ports. Therefore, one needs to be very careful and embed innovation within often a very sensitive social fabric; A simple top-down technology research agenda will not work.

The recently concluded EU funded project Securcrane has shown that also at the basis one is open to cooperate for innovation and change.

(In this project crane drivers in a big French port, cooperated to develop and test a ground station from where they could operate the huge gantry cranes to load and unload container ships)

In addition, the Commission is of the opinion that integration of marine and maritime research and an **interdisciplinary approach is another key element for being successful.**

Hereto the EU Commission has taken an important initiative when publishing its communication on

- **A European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research**
- **A coherent European Research Area framework in support of a sustainable use of oceans and seas.**

This strategy must give an answer to the question of balancing economic development and environmental considerations and help to find a pragmatic rather than an attitude that seems sometimes to be dogmatic anti-port.

Continued innovation is a challenging task.

European seaports are naturally diverse and complex;

There are a number of critical questions for the future, for you, the industry, and for us, the Commission.

Such questions are:

- How can pre-competitive EU funded RTD and competitive RTD efforts reach out together?
- How can ports compete and co-operate at the same time in their drive for innovation?
- How can we pool human and material resources effectively?

I hope to take some good advice home from today's discussion and presentations

Thank you