



Press Release

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FEPORT calls for a focus on competitiveness and sufficient time for regulatory implementation.

On May 31st, 2024, FEPORT members gathered in Antwerp for the mid-year General Assembly meeting of the organisation and formally adopted **FEPORT Manifesto 2024-2029**. The document is a contribution to the ongoing reflections within the EU Commission regarding the new EU roadmap and an invitation to dialogue to all institutional stakeholders who will have the task to work on the new priorities and proposals of the EU Commission.

European ports are in competition with other industries and with other ports in the world to attract investments. So, while the strategic nature of European ports as critical infrastructure is recognised, it is important that this specific status does not entail a lack of stability in the legal framework, among others regarding foreign investments. It is crucial that the EU adopts a consistent approach regarding all critical infrastructures and particularly those situated upstream and downstream ports. Vulnerabilities can also result from fragmented sectoral policies.

The competitiveness of European ports should not be sacrificed on the altar of over-regulation.

The Green Deal and the Fit for 55 package represent an ambitious roadmap implying significant efforts in terms of compliance and additional costs. The focus should now be on proper implementation instead of new rules.

It is also time that the competitiveness and resilience of the maritime ecosystem are placed at the heart of the next EU Commission's roadmap. The financing of the energy transition as well as more money for the Transport sector should be strategic priorities for the EU. It is important to realise that in the absence of meaningful measures of support in favour of EU industries, many companies and industries will lose points of competitiveness vis à vis their non-EU competitors.

"The competitiveness of European ports will be challenged by the changes in trade patterns or the incurred costs resulting from the entry into force of new regulations. Private port companies and terminals located in the EU will compete with operators performing operations in non-EU ports which

are not concerned by pieces of legislation such as EU ETS Maritime. The impact of this Directive on European ports has not been sufficiently assessed and will unfortunately lead to business leakage to the detriment of EU based private port companies and terminals” says Mr Gunther Bonz, President of FEPORT.

“The EU should intensify its diplomatic efforts to obtain the adoption of a global scheme comparable to ETS for maritime at IMO. Should this not be possible in the short term, it is crucial that the EU envisages the adjustment of its legislation that harms competitiveness and exposes EU ports to the detrimental effects of carbon leakage both on businesses and employment” adds FEPORT President.

“We also need mitigation measures now and not in two years’ time. The competitiveness of European port stakeholders cannot be put at risk because some shipping lines will reorganise their rotations to avoid calling EU ports and paying ETS allowances. We hope the EU Commission will hear this call.” concludes Mr Bonz.

FEPORT members call upon EU regulators to also ensure that support measures for one sector of the maritime logistics chain are not used to distort competition in other sectors or towards other players. State Aid schemes that grant a competitive advantage to some actors and not to others while both operate in the same market should be prohibited. In this respect, FEPORT calls again on the EU regulators to restrict tonnage tax schemes to maritime transport and prohibit their extension to cargo handling operations.

In the coming years, EU competition law and trade policy should absolutely keep up with market and technology developments as well as with geopolitical shifts affecting trade and foreign investment policies. Agility and timely reactivity are also needed from EU regulators.

For more information, please contact:

Ms. Lamia Kerdjoudj, Secretary General of FEPORT

E: lamia.kerdjoudj@feport.eu