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Intermodal logistics and Motorways of the Sea

Gian Paolo Basoli

The new scenario of European Community policy aims to promote enterprise competitiveness through an action plan favouring the integration of logistic services and transport infrastructures. The objective of the European Commission is to develop alternatives, to road transport, based on integrated and intermodal logistics capable of optimising the entire operative chain of freight transport. Public authorities can and must play an active role in creating the pre-conditions that will back logistics supply innovation.

Logistics and intermodality

Intermodal logistics is defined as a system of services that includes various phases of planning, organization, management, control and implementation of freight transport in door-to-door chains. A comparative analysis between European and American logistics highlights the constant growth of European expenditure (in relation to the GDP) in this sector and the loss of competitiveness. Road transport is highly vulnerable to bottlenecks due to geographic, administrative and customs barriers. Even road/rail intermodal transport presents problems caused by the low number of rail lines and the lack of interoperability amongst rail systems. On the contrary, Motorways of the Sea (MoS) satisfies the requirements of sustainable development by reducing the factors of environmental and social risk represented by congestion and delays in the distribution chain, accidents, environmental deterioration and increased energy consumption. The loss of competitiveness is

simply the consequence of these negative effects. Logistics based on MoS services provide high quality, economically convenient and competitive advantages to full road transport.

The EU maritime traffic statistics 1994-2005 shows an average increase higher than 30% on account of two particularly favourable conditions: the high development rate of short sea shipping and the increase in transoceanic container traffic.

With regard to intercontinental traffic, competitiveness amongst ports is based on infrastructural comparison. For MoS, on the other hand, critical issues are shifted to the territory 'behind' the wharf and competitiveness is related to other aspects, such as the availability of operative space, motorway and railway accessibility, and interference with city traffic. The availability of good port services is similarly important.

Terminal Services: operations must be carried out rapidly and efficiently in order to allow a free flow of traffic through the terminal.

Nautical Services: the MoS paths regularly and frequently reach the same port and therefore the cost of port services must be reduced to the minimum.

Customs and Security Services: security problems must be foreseen and acted upon in a preventive manner.

Transporter Services: these include the need for large parking areas with all the necessary services, including the possibility of communicating with all main port operators. Information and telecommunications: a progressively increasing part of all services must make use of ICT technologies (gates equipped with telepass, one-stop-shop administrative functions, and call centres for the

transporters that require assistance or intend to evaluate the MoS alternative.

Motorways of the Sea

At present, two maritime service networks are present in the Mediterranean: the first, connected to transoceanic traffic from the Far East, utilizes Italian transshipment ports (Gioia Tauro, Taranto and Cagliari) and redistributes freight to the major national hubs; the second, which consists of internal Mediterranean traffic, connects pairs of ports with high frequency and periodicity of use along the MoS.

The development of MoS can be accelerated by two important factors: naval technology (which leads to increases in commercial velocity and transport capacity) and logistics (which allows the improvement of port system efficiency). In particular, the creation of more efficient logistic platforms is based on the concept of 'port clusters': the concentration of traffic in platforms constituted by groups of ports that present an elevated capacity for the production of logistical and intermodal services.

The Italian port system, practically uniformly distributed along the entire coastline, requires that port clusters be identified in order to present the following advantages: limiting the effects of competition and eliminating the so-called "last mile bottleneck". Therefore, all efforts must be oriented towards the improvement of road-rail interconnections within individual port platforms.

Technology for maritime transport safety

The maritime corridors that are already operative in the Mediterranean basin require action to assure an adequate level of safety, as defined by the international

IMO regulations. In this perspective, the European Commission (EC) has indicated the following objectives: the safety of all ships, from passengers to freight, the protection of marine environments and the monitoring of accidents. In order to attain these goals, the EC has promoted the SAFEMED Project (2006/2008) which is based on the VTIMS (Vessel Traffic Information Management System) and the Galileo Satellite System. VTIMS provides monitoring services in ports and is based on radar systems that have already been widely experimented in air-traffic control. The Galileo System is based on satellite radio-navigation and can play a fundamental role in improving safety conditions in rescue operations, but also in the selection of optimal routes in relation to sea and weather conditions. Moreover, the Galileo Programme will also take advantage of the existing Mediterranean Shortsea Promotion Centres (SPCs) Network.

EU financing channels

The PACT (Pilot Action for Combined Transport) Programme was launched in 1997 and financed for 55 million euro. The majority of the resources have been used in rail projects, while the remaining funds were destined to short sea shipping, internal navigation and joint transport. For 2003-2007, the PACT Programme has been substituted by the Marco Polo Programme, which can finance projects in all of the three mentioned areas. At present available funding amounts to 100 million euro, but this will be increased to 400 million euro.

Through this programme, the EC has allotted, for the first time, financing to enterprises presenting projects on the transferral of road freight transport to rail and maritime services. The projects, presented by

European enterprise consortiums, provide a very important contribution to identifying the future lines of action and represent an initial indication for the definition of a Master Plan for the Mediterranean. The new EU budget outlook reserves significant resources for strengthening the competitiveness of European enterprises by implementing the Lisbon Strategy, centred on technological research and innovation programmes and the development of the TEN Networks. In fact, TEN-T resources for the Corridors and MoS amount to 7,200 million euro to which we must add the 400 million euro of the Marco Polo II Programme and the 900 million euro of the Galileo Programme.