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## The maritime transport situation

Matteo di Venosa

In recent years, Italian ports have recorded a noticeable phase of growth. Analysing traffic in the major Italian ports from 1996-2000, the Censis has revealed very positive growth, reporting on the three main typologies of traffic (general cargo, container and passenger). This trend is confirmed also in more recent years: (2002-03) both the National calculations for infrastructure and transport (Cnit) and associated surveys, show almost the same results for growth as those indicated in the period 96/00.

From 1996 to 2000, overall traffic has increased in Italy with percentages notably higher (84%) than those recorded for other ports in the Mediterranean and ports of the Northern range.

The good condition of both passengers and goods, compared to the rest of Europe, is evident in another recent survey by Eurostat: with minimal differences, compared to the results of the 1999 Censis, Italian ports are in first place among Eu ports. Additionally, Italy is at the head of classification for general cargo. The significant growth of maritime traffic sustains a very prosperous economy, especially in comparison to other national economy sectors.

This phase of development of Italian ports exists together with the favourable economic situation which has allowed a significant increase in maritime traffic. At an international level: the globalisation of the economy and the growth of commercial trade between Asian countries and Europe; the intensification of traffic within the Mediterranean sea, in particular, the relationships between Italy and north Africa; the growth of short sea shipping and

supportive political communities of sea 'highways'. At the national level: the resumption of industrial production and exportation; the positive effects of Law 84/94 which, despite its limits, has contributed to creating conditions for improving port performance.

A further phase of evolution in this current cycle risks, in any case, to put the national productivity of the port sector into crisis. In coming years, this accelerated process of growth will create a dramatic increase on the demands of transport (goods and passengers) for the entire global port system, but in particular for the cluster of ports found in the Mediterranean. In Italian ports, which are already at saturation point, such processes will amplify the split between actual capacity and predicted demand, caused by the substantial absence of relief projects and the length of time predicted for the implementation of projects. Naturally, the relationship between the infrastructural capacity and potential demand will be verified with respect to the estimations for single typologies of port traffic. The main criteria which create obstacles for the development of maritime ports and which influence their competitive capacity will be assessed one by one. The ability to respond quickly to necessity and opportunity will emerge in this study and will determine the perspective taken for the development of the Italian port system. This means that every single port will develop a 'systems' point of view in meeting requirements at different territorial levels, offering a total service, which is of particular importance when discussing the 'competitive capacity' of a port system.

The infrastructure of ports facilitates a number of services (public and private) which involve different

factors, but which need to be planned in a coordinated way. The efficiency of these services cannot be measured only by the technical needs of the port community, but also by the values of the local community in which it exists.

From this perspective, the port-city relationship could be understood in terms of cooperation, rather than reciprocal limitation. The compatibility of services in different port sectors with urban 'fabric' depends also on the quality of the spatial interrelationship which they are able to create with the city and its system of public spaces.

The coordinated solution to such problems requires strategy and action on different scales. At the local level, port planning tackles the task of a challenging solution: on the one hand, to guarantee the autonomy of operations and efficient services for some functional sectors of the port; on the other hand, to encourage a more compatible integration of the city's cultural resources and the port's activities with the life of the local community.