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Subject: Council Conclusions on the EU Ports Strategy

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on the EU Ports Strategy, as approved by the Council at its meeting held on 8 June 2026.

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 "Inland Waterway Transport – see its potential and promote it!"⁴
- the Council Conclusions on the EU Industrial Maritime Strategy⁵;
- 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"⁶;
- the Council Conclusions on the European Ocean Pact⁷;
- The Council Conclusions on Maritime Security⁸;
- the Lefkosia Declaration of the European Union Ministers responsible for Maritime Affairs on Enhancing Seafarers' Education and Training and Promoting Equal Participation of Women in the Shipping Industry;

¹ Doc. ST 6926/26

² Doc. ST 6987/26

³ Doc. ST 8648/20

⁴ Doc. ST 15144/18

⁵ Doc. ST 10350/26

⁶ Doc. ST 9976/17

⁷ Doc. ST 15807/25

⁸ Doc. ST 9946/21

1. WELCOMES the Communication from the Commission on the EU Port Strategy as a comprehensive framework addressing the key challenges facing European ports, both sea and inland ports, in relation to competitiveness, sustainability, resilience, security, digitalisation governance and social aspects, building on the 2013 Ports Policy; STRESSES the importance of proportionate and efficient implementation and of avoiding unnecessary administrative and financial burdens in line with better regulation principles.
2. CALLS ON the Commission to assess the efficiency of existing EU-level fora for the implementation of this strategy and, if necessary, to create new ones.
3. 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 the strategic role of ports has expanded to encompass energy transition, offshore renewable energy, industrial clusters, military mobility and security, including exposure to organised crime, hybrid threats and illicit trafficking affecting the resilience and integrity of supply chains; EMPHASISES the diversity of port ecosystems, including geographical, climatic and operational characteristics.
4. RECOGNISES that there are seaports which, due to their unique location, are particularly exposed to external threats, of a military and geopolitical nature, that originate from outside the EU; RECOGNISES, accordingly, that seaports have specific needs determined by these external factors; CALLS FOR EU instruments to support seaports.
5. RECOGNISES the specific role of inland ports as integral components of the TEN-T network, in contributing to multimodal logistics, decarbonization of transport and resilience of supply chains; CALLS FOR a differentiated and proportionate policy approach reflecting their specific characteristics.
6. RECOGNISES that ports in islands (as the main institutional proponents of the Union's policy on insularity), coastal, outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories have a strategic role for their territories; RECOGNISES that these ports are particularly exposed to competitive pressure, climate-related and security risks and additional costs, and that small and medium-sized ports, including in sparsely populated regions, face similar challenges.

7. INVITES targeted and flexible support within relevant EU instruments, taking into account the specific characteristics of these ports, including their role in security of supply and military mobility, while continuing to recognize and support the key driving and strategic role of Europe's TEN-T maritime and inland ports, ensuring territorial continuity and addressing challenges of ports near non-EU hubs. UNDERLINES the need for a proportionate approach for outermost regions by systematically conducting impact assessments of the effects of EU legislative proposals on these regions, in particular on the functioning of their ports.
8. NOTES that regional conditions across the Union vary considerably and may influence the implementation of the strategy in different ways, including winter conditions affecting operations; STRESSES the fact that winter conditions in certain regions can significantly affect port operations and maritime activities for extended periods each year; UNDERLINES that specific equipment and operational arrangements are required to ensure safe and efficient winter operations. EMPHASIZES the value of taking these different regional prerequisites into account when developing and applying relevant measures, to support efficient and resilient implementation throughout the Union.

II. STRENGTHEN COMPETITIVENESS, INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. RECOGNISES the central role of ports in the competitiveness and resilience of logistics chains and their exposure to international competition, ensuring that EU-backed projects in third countries take into account the potential impact on the competitive position of EU ports.
12. UNDERLINES the importance of actively reducing red tape and simplifying processes and CALLS on the Commission and Member States to identify and implement simplification measures.
13. 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.

14. 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, applying existing frameworks, avoiding duplication and ensuring legal certainty while safeguarding economic security and aiming to avoid undue foreign ownership or control of critical port infrastructures and operations, including risks related to organised crime infiltration, especially those relevant for military mobility and the Union's economic security; UNDERLINES in this regard the need to safeguard an attractive investment environment for European ports and to avoid deterring trustworthy investors; NOTES the need to ensure access to financial resources for the implementation of investment projects in EU ports.
15. UNDERLINES the need to promote the interests of the EU in respect to port standardisation in relevant international fora. CALLS on Member States to effectively apply existing screening mechanisms and share relevant information at EU level.
16. RECALLS the diversity of port governance models and UNDERLINES that this diversity must be fully respected.
17. RECOGNISES the role of concession and land-lease agreements in attracting investment and CALLS for a continuation of a balanced policy approach which respects existing port governance models, while ensuring flexibility, resilience, security, sustainability and a good functioning of the Internal Market, and at the same time promoting continued development of ports, through the implementation of a wide range of investments.
18. REAFFIRMS that national competence over port governance, as well as concessions and land-use frameworks in ports should not be affected by future Union initiatives.
19. RECOGNISES the evolving role of port authorities and other managing bodies of ports as strategic coordinators and ENCOURAGES their further development, cooperation and effective performance in line with national governance and ownership structures.
20. UNDERLINES the importance of financing for basic port infrastructure open to general use (such as breakwaters, dredging of access channels, offshore renewable energy, alternative fuel infrastructure, publicly accessible quays and common road and rail access within the port area) that has high public added value and INVITES the Commission, in the context of the review of the State aid framework, to take these elements into account in order to support the economic viability and competitiveness of ports; Particular consideration should be given to inland ports and smaller ports, peripheral and island port systems, which often face structural investment gaps and limited revenue-generating capacity.

21. INVITES the Commission, when revising the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), to adapt the scope (aid categories), thresholds and aid intensity percentage of block-exempted port aid to better reflect the actual inflation-adjusted costs of investments needed for digitalisation, cybersecurity, energy transition, safety, security, modal shift and dual-use mobility; INVITES the Commission to ensure simplification and legal certainty, while avoiding additional administrative burden; INVITES the Commission to ensure higher aid intensities and simplified procedures for ports.
22. WELCOMES the Commission's commitment to simplify the regulatory burden while safeguarding, environmental protection, including revising the Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act to improve usability and the proposed Regulation on speeding-up environmental assessments, which accelerate assessments through digitalization, reduced timelines and combined procedures.
23. TAKES NOTE of 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 or contractual arrangements, in order to respect the diversity of national systems, while ensuring equitable access to funding opportunities for ports of different sizes and geographical situation.
24. REAFFIRMS the need to make use of diverse sources of funding for investments benefiting EU ports. Such sources of funding include EU, national and private sources, as well as funding raise through cooperation with national promotional banks and financial institutions. In this respect, the aim is to support their development across various functional areas such as security, cybersecurity, defence, the energy transition, decarbonisation, green shipping corridors and modern technologies, while emphasising the importance of taking local conditions into account when providing financial support to individual ports and recognising their specific characteristics arising, inter alia, from their unique locations, including insularity constraints or high exposure to external threats of a military and geopolitical nature, which may determine particular investment needs.
25. INVITES improved coordination and transparency across EU funding instruments, ensuring flexibility, coherence, accessibility and alignment with strategic priorities for EU ports.

26. UNDERLINES the need to strengthen institutional cooperation in the design and implementation of EU port policy. This applies in particular in areas such as control of foreign direct investment, monitoring of market concentration and coordination of Global Gateway, taking into account mutually beneficial initiatives with third countries and INVITES the Commission to explore options to strengthen EU-level port cooperation, including by building on and, where appropriate, enhancing existing fora, including with the involvement of internal security and law enforcement authorities, where appropriate. In this regard, the aim is to create a dedicated space for mutual understanding and joint action in defence of the common European port interest, without prejudice to fair competition between ports and without imposing new burdens on Member States or the Commission.
27. UNDERLINES the growing strategic importance of monitoring foreign direct investment in ports located in third countries, particularly those in the Union's neighbourhood, in light of their potential impact on the competitiveness of Union ports, the development of transshipment hubs, the military mobility, and the resilience and security of supply chains.
28. 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, which can enhance the predictability of traffic development and provide support for long-term investment strategies.
29. STRESSES the importance of further integrating ports into TEN-T through strengthened hinterland connections of seaports, including in outermost regions, as well as through the multimodal integration of inland ports, and CALLS for prioritisation of rail, dual-use road and inland waterway connectivity, including safeguarding navigability, fairway reliability and port basin operability on core inland waterways, as well as resilient and efficient last mile connections, where geographically feasible. The promotion of modal shift should be a priority, but where road is the only available mode of transport connectivity to the road network must also be ensured, particularly for smaller ports.
30. UNDERLINES the importance of adequate infrastructure capacity and quality and INVITES reinforced development of port-related infrastructure, including multimodal links and dry ports, as appropriate, in addition to infrastructural investment activities directly targeted at ports.

31. UNDERLINES the importance of strengthening multimodality and the integration of ports into logistics chains, as well as ensuring the development and effective deployment of digital and technological innovation, as essential factors for the efficiency, resilience and competitiveness of the European port system.
32. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to enhance the efficiency and digitalization of port operations and logistics chains, as well as to further support modal shift, and CALLS for particular attention to be paid to the status of port areas in view of the rail operations carried out therein, with the aim of simplifying and enhancing the flexibility of intraport rail operations, thereby reducing waiting times and optimizing operational capacity, while fully respecting safety and security requirements, and prioritising the green transition; INVITES the Commission to assess the adequacy of the existing regulatory framework in this regard.
33. RECOGNISES that public inland and maritime ports located on the TEN-T network contribute significantly to multimodal connectivity, supply chain resilience, energy transition, regional cohesion and, where relevant, military mobility, and INVITES the Commission and Member States to take these functions into account, where appropriate, in the implementation of relevant existing EU instruments and policy frameworks.
34. WELCOMES the proposal for a Military Mobility Regulation and CALLS for its swift implementation, ensuring appropriate and flexible support for dual-use port infrastructure and related equipment, including efficient funding reflecting current realities and the growing demand for adequately prepared seaport infrastructure capable of handling strategic supplies, military transports and other related operations. RECALLS the importance of implementing the actions set out in the Military Mobility Pledge 2024⁹.
35. WELCOMES efforts to strengthen technological leadership and support innovation deployment and CALLS FOR clearer pathways for scaling up digital and technological solutions across ports.
36. ENCOURAGES the development of EU digital initiatives and CALLS for their effective and harmonised implementation, avoiding fragmentation and unnecessary additional requirements.

⁹ Doc. ST 9225/24

37. WELCOMES the development of data-sharing guidelines and STRESSES the importance of interoperability, data protection and efficient logistics chains, while UNDERLINING the need to ensure that such future guidelines do not undermine progress already achieved by operators and competent authorities.
38. UNDERLINES the need to ensure coherence between EU policies and legislation affecting ports and hinterland connections, including climate, energy and transport policies, with the aim to avoid cumulative regulatory and financial burdens likely to affect the competitiveness of EU ports.

III. ENERGY TRANSITION, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLEAN INDUSTRIES

39. RECOGNISES that ports are becoming strategic energy and industrial hubs and play a key role in decarbonization and in the energy transition of Europe's economy and society.
40. WELCOMES support for onshore power supply and UNDERLINES that deployment should aim for economic viability, competitiveness and alignment with demand, ensuring price transparency and avoiding stranded assets, considering as well the challenges related to TEN-T ports' grid connectivity, and recognizing that for inland ports, alternative solutions such as shore-side charging infrastructure may be more appropriate.
41. NOTES that the OPEX¹⁰ costs of OPS¹¹ vary in function of the differences in electricity pricing and diverging operational complexities; SUPPORTS initiatives to incentivise the use of OPS; invites Members States to recognize OPS electricity as a strategic component of the energy transition by fully integrating it into national targets, support schemes and planning under the Renewable Energy Directive¹² (RED).
42. CALLS for the EU Electrification Action Plan to support EU ports' leadership on maritime electrification, including strengthened grid integration.
43. CALLS for the promotion of smart-grid solutions, demand management and efficient use of existing infrastructure.

¹⁰ Operating expenses (OPEX)

¹¹ Onshore Power Supply (OPS)

¹² Directive (EU) 2018/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources (recast)
<http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/2001/2024-07-16>

44. RECOGNISES the role of ports in alternative fuels and clean and low carbon energy as well as TEN-T ports' contribution to advance green shipping corridors with third countries; INVITES stronger alignment between TEN-T, TEN-E and national planning frameworks, explicitly reflecting onshore electricity and gas network needs linked to port decarbonization and fuel supply, including for multi-fuel and hydrogen-ready port infrastructures.
45. RECALLS the importance of facilitating and prioritizing grid deployment for ports and of ensuring timely and efficient connections for port-related projects.
46. RECOGNISES the role of ports in terms of defining the appropriate conditions under which alternative low- and zero-carbon fuels can be practically and safely stored, bunkered and handled in the different port areas, taking into account their operational and spatial constraints, as well as their respective roles in facilitating and trying to attract investments that correspond to the demand (for example through collaborations in green corridors, hubs and cross-sectoral public-private platforms). RECOGNISES the crucial role of the market in developing a clean fuel supply chain in port areas and WELCOMES further measures to incentivise the demand for sustainable fuels that leads to ensuring their availability, scalability and affordability.
47. CALLS for strengthened cooperation between ports, industrial clusters and their hinterlands to support energy transition, clean industries and circular economy solutions and CALLS for active support on accelerated permitting and grid connectivity to facilitate the development of these industrial clusters within or connected to port areas.
48. RECALLS the importance of using ETS revenues for climate-related purposes and ENCOURAGES Member States, in accordance with national priorities, to support the decarbonisation of the maritime sector across the value chain, including shipping companies, shipyards, retrofitting projects, equipment manufacturers, technology providers, fuel suppliers and ports, and ENCOURAGES Member States to make use of revenues generated from the inclusion of shipping in the EU ETS to support the energy transition of the sector, including fleet renewal, green retrofitting, island maritime transportation services, alternative fuels and port energy infrastructure.
49. NOTES upcoming updates and reviews of relevant legislation including EU ETS and the FuelEU Maritime Regulation and their importance for port competitiveness and contribution to the achievement of the Union's climate-neutrality objective and its climate targets; CALLS for a coordinated approach and assessment of the accumulated impact of any new or revised rules.

50. NOTES concerns expressed by several Member States regarding the impact of ETS on competitiveness of EU ports, in particular as regards traffic diversion, carbon leakage and investments relocation, and RECALLS the obligation of the Commission according to the ETS Directive to monitor the implementation of the ETS for maritime transport activities to detect evasive behaviour in order to prevent such behaviour at an early stage; HIGHLIGHTS the need for appropriate measures to mitigate such risks, giving special consideration to outermost regions, taking into account the exposure of EU ports to international competition and their role in global logistics chains, as well as island and peripheral regions; INVITES the Commission to step up its monitoring and propose targeted corrective measures, especially on transshipment activities, while preserving environmental ambition and ensuring coherence with international frameworks, such as the IMO framework. INVITES the Commission to give all its support in view of reaching a global agreement that delivers on all the emission reduction goals and objectives of the 2023 IMO GHG Strategy, followed by appropriate adaptations to the relevant EU legislation in order to effectively avoid double financial payments and administrative burdens.
51. RECALLS the importance of supporting investments in decarbonization and energy transition technologies and infrastructure in ports in a technologically neutral manner. Therefore, ports should have access to support to enable them to meet the challenges of deploying clean energy technologies, such as floating wind, solar and wave infrastructures for the generation of clean and renewable energy, thereby assisting Member States and stakeholders in building genuine European expertise, strengthening its energy independence and boosting employment.
52. SUPPORTS efforts to simplify the implementation of the regulatory framework, while safeguarding environmental protection. In this regard, the aim should be to avoid duplication and ensure a coherent, cross-sectoral approach in order to facilitate port development, in particular in relation to permitting procedures and in line with the principle of subsidiarity.
53. WELCOMES the development of a climate resilience framework, including tools for the assessment of climate risks; STRESSES the need for climate-proofing of port infrastructure while avoiding shifting of risks to nearby cities, industry or infrastructure; STRESSES the need to develop a Union-wide framework for assessing climate risks in ports, including drought, low-water levels, flooding and river hydromorphological volatility affecting inland ports, and for identifying priority adaptation measures, building on existing climate, taxonomy and resilience policies and tools.

IV. PROTECT AND SECURE PORTS

54. RECOGNISES the increasing range of security threats affecting ports and the need to increase the security and resilience of ports infrastructures.
55. UNDERLINES the importance that the Strategy be seamlessly synchronized with activities in the field of military mobility to improve, facilitate and accelerate large deployments of troops and resources from EU Member States and third countries , ensuring coherence with efforts undertaken in the framework of NATO. It also stresses the need to ensure resources for infrastructure works in ports situated on the EU military mobility corridors.
56. THEREFORE, CONSIDERS VALUABLE to reflect on ownership relations of ports infrastructure elements to ensure quick access to port areas, taking into account inspections and audits as well as the movement of military equipment and other issues important from the point of view of ensuring EU security.
57. UNDERLINES the importance that the Port Strategy highlights new and increasing threats to ports, including terrorism, sabotage, organised crime, corruption, cyber and hybrid attacks and drones and other unmanned systems.
58. WELCOMES efforts to enhance maritime security frameworks and address emerging threats. NOTES the upcoming proposal for an EU framework to facilitate cooperation between Member States concerning background checks for port workers, as a risk-based tool to prevent and counter organised crime and illicit activities. REITERATES the need for developing guidelines to clarify the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code as the foundational international framework to address the growing threats posed by organized crime and illicit trade.
59. WELCOMES initiatives to combat organized crime and corruption, as well as terrorism, sabotage, cyber and hybrid attacks and drones, UNDERLINES the importance of the European Ports Alliance in combating organised crime and drug trafficking; SUPPORTS proportionate and effective security measures, that take into account operational realities and avoiding unnecessary burdens. New and improved tools for law enforcement authorities and enhanced cooperation with countries outside the EU are important.
60. WELCOMES strengthened cooperation with third countries and international partners to enhance port security, including in inland ports.

61. CALLS for the EU-wide implementation of relevant cybersecurity legislation and enhanced cooperation between the competent authorities. This needs to include a mutual exchange of data among the relevant (security) authorities, in particular information sharing between police, customs, port and maritime authorities to enhance the prevention, detection and effective countering of organized crime and other potential hostile actors in ports. WELCOMES the envisaged establishment of the EU Customs Data Hub, for collecting, processing and exchanging data with and between customs authorities, as well as the existing European Maritime Single Window environment (EMSWe) that ensure advanced cargo risk management.
62. RECOGNISES the vital role ports play in both military mobility and resilience, being essential enablers of the movement of military troops and equipment, while simultaneously serving as vital civilian gateways for trade, energy supply and connectivity across Europe.
63. UNDERLINES that any future initiatives to protect and secure ports, including the upcoming framework for military mobility, must carefully balance security and military requirements with the continuity of civilian and commercial activities, and ensure priority access to port areas, if necessary; RECOGNISES that ports need sufficient capacity and financial resources to respond to geopolitical shocks and just-in-case situations.

V. SOCIAL COHESION, SKILLS AND QUALITY JOBS

64. 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 in this respect, including those on islands, in remote and outermost regions, in sparsely populated areas, and those underpinning strategic and logistical resilience.
65. WELCOMES the fact that the European Ports Strategy explicitly applies to inland ports; HIGHLIGHTS the contribution made by inland ports to intra-European cross-border logistics and the maintenance of supply chains; STRESSES that many requirements (e.g. regarding onshore power supply) are primarily tailored to maritime shipping and that the specific technical and economic parameters of inland ports should have been given even greater consideration; UNDERLINES the importance of access to funding instruments for Inland ports; CALLS FOR an appropriate representation of all ports in the planned high-level Maritime Industries and Ports Board.

66. WELCOMES the EU Ports Strategy's recognition of seaports as key gateways for import and export of EU goods, thereby a strong prioritisation of the Union's global connectivity and competitiveness.
 67. 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.
 68. UNDERLINES the importance of ensuring a secure working environment for port workers, particularly in view of increasing security risks and the key role of ports in military mobility and CALLS for regular training and exercises.
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