

Working together

EuropeAid

ENPI SPECIAL: MEDA Motorways of Seas

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Everyone who has anything to do with ports and shipping around the Mediterranean gathered in Brussels on 17 July to present their future development plans. How to improve port reception capacities, speed-up the handling of paperwork, improve IT-systems, develop further transport infrastructure or -very topical these days- how to grow in a CO2-friendly way; it was all discussed in the frame of DG EuropeAid's regional programme 'MEDA 'Motorways of the Seas'.

Potential

The economic potential of the southern Mediterranean region is enormous. The growth rates outnumber the ones in the EU already for years, the work force is young and eager and with the right development strategies -experts agree- the economies have the potential to boost for years. A specific attraction is the proximity to one of the most important transport routes in the world. Approximately thirty percent of the world wide container traffic goes through the Mediterranean. Harbours like Tanger, Port Said, Aqaba and Haifa have already proved to be an attraction to foreign investors, but there are many others that yet have to explore their enormous potential as generators of economic growth.

Ferrari with two gears

In order to make trans-Mediterranean transport routes more attractive, many different actors need to be on board. One can for example reduce the cargo handling time with investments in modern equipment, but when administrative (customs) procedures still take weeks the added value remains limited. And an efficient port without appropriate inland road or rail connections is like a Ferrari with only two gears. The challenge, prior to raising funds, is to assemble all the stakeholders around the table and reach a widely supported agreement on how to take development further. DG EuropeAid's 'MEDA Motorways of the Seas' programme worked as a catalyst in this respect. It encouraged actors in the partner countries, together with EU partners, to engage in the preparation of development plans to strengthen their maritime connections.



Investments in the port of Tanger already pay off now that Renault/Nissan has established a production plant.

Ideas

Marc Abeille is the team leader of the project. Over the last three years he has been on the road, bringing together different actors all around the Mediterranean, and once arrived at that point, convincing them to translate their ideas into bankable proposals. And indeed, the respective presentations in Brussels showed that a lot of thinking had taken place. Syria for example wants to economise on the proximity to Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia by improving the overseas connections between Tartous, Venice, Livorno and Marseille: "We have a strategic position in view of the reconstruction of Iraq. Around thirty million tons of a total of eighty million goes through Syria already", the representative of the Syrian Ministry of Transport explains. Also Jordan thinks the reconstruction work in Iraq can bring benefits to its transport sector. Their connection between Aqaba and Genova, known as the 'Messina line' generates lots of traffic already. Lebanon puts its cards on improvement of the port performance, a.o. by making use of modern technology.

Trieste: CO2 friendly block trains

Israel has a well established cooperation with Trieste. Further cooperation between both ports aims at increasing intermodal connections on both sides. The Israeli delegate illustrates: "A truck produces fifty grams of CO2 per kilometre. A round trip Trieste-Rotterdam adds up to 3,3 tons of CO2. If you multiply that with the current 300.000 trucks a year they produce almost one million tons. That's why it is good that Alpe Adria has introduced the weekly block trains that take the trucks further to Central- and Western Europe. This will also be used by Israeli shippers."

Fragile chain of supply

Listening to the presentations, it became clear that all partner countries prepared themselves well. Marc Abeille explained how they got to this point: "The investments we talk about are complex and need a lot of different input. In 2006 we started by analysing the bottlenecks in the maritime connections and identifying possible solutions. This analysis became the cornerstone of the MEDA Motorways of the Seas project. After launching a call for pilot projects last year we realised that some improvements are generally needed in most countries. Others are more specific, related to the particularity of the projects. The challenge ahead is to make the needs crystal clear, adapted to the objectives. Then we will further precise them and translate them into an action plan." One of hardest tasks was to mobilise the partnerships which are very complex, consisting of port operators, transport companies, customs administrations and freight handlers. They are all part of - what we call- a collaborative supply chain, but a very fragile one.

Palestinian-Israelian cooperation

Many projects were presented, but the available funding for further technical assistance is limited. Nevertheless the project hopes to identify five to six different types of services which can be provided to the pilot projects financed by the programme. But what has been established already is remarkable. Some of these countries do normally not have a lot of contact among each other, but some Palestinian exporters have signed up to the Israelian consortium. Establishing such contacts is perhaps only a first step, but nevertheless a great achievement

Future assistance: Maturity and impact

"Unfortunately we will not be able to fund each and every initiative in the way the consortia would like", says the DG AIDCO official in charge of the project, Leonidas Kioussis. We want to assure what we call 'horizontal assistance' to every project. But when it comes to more 'in-depth' assistance we will have to gear our resources to a limited number of pilot projects, namely those with the highest maturity, quality, relevance and impact."

Homework

At the end of the day there were not only happy faces. For some consortia it became clear that there is still a lot of homework to do. "We agreed to give everyone until September 15th to finalise their plans. Then we establish a detailed support and assistance plan, together with performance indicators and milestones." "But what is of utmost importance", Kioussis continues, "is that we line up with the other financing instruments that are potentially available, like the Marco Polo Programme, the newly established Neighbourhood Investment Facility and of course the European Investment Bank. Because after the planning we would like to see the results."

More information on the European Neighbourhood Policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm

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