

Ports in the Mediterranean

Christian Reynaud

Director

Nouveaux Espaces de Transport
en Europe-Application
de Recherche (NESTEAR),
Gentilly

The ports have always been the «lungs» of trade across the Mediterranean, and meeting points for culture, diaspora and crossbreeding.

At a time when «internationalisation» and «globalisation» are becoming the key terms in the development of the economy and modern civilisation, it has become appropriate to examine the way in which these Mediterranean ports are evolving, and to see whether they still preserve the quality that is peculiar to the Mediterranean, as sites not only of a rich medley of encounters, but also of conflicts that have often been hard to smooth over. The ports of the Mediterranean are areas of trade between the countries along its coasts, but they also play an increasingly important role extending toward the continents that surround the Mediterranean basin, or even on an international scale, and their significance is particularly emphasised in the trade between Europe and Asia.

For a brief presentation that focuses on transportation, different levels of the organisation of the region must therefore be distinguished, which correspond to the roles of the actors and to specific political contributions. Three points will be discussed: the current role of ports in the trade between the countries of the Mediterranean, their part in the handling of world commerce, and lastly the importance of ports within the definition of a policy of

sustainable development. These three levels form the subject of an entire body of study and research works, within the framework of the European programme for the policy of the opening of Europe to the Mediterranean; and also in the context of UN programmes, in particular the Blue Plan, as well as in the framework of regional programmes following the example of the UMA transport programme which plans to extend East-West connections southwards in conjunction with the extension of North-South routes to the African countries.

The Mediterranean Ports in Mediterranean Trade

For a long time the ports of the Mediterranean have had an almost complete monopoly of reciprocal trade in the Mediterranean region, even though the networks constructed by the Romans traced out alternative overland routes.

Today this monopoly of Mediterranean trade seems to be increasingly disputed: in the countries of Southern Europe, trade between France, Spain and Italy is generally overland, which contributes to making the crossing of the Alps and the Pyrenees even more difficult. Trade with Greece has also developed a great deal by road, although the period of the war in Yugoslavia led to the successful promotion of a veritable sea «thoroughfare» across the Adriatic Sea, particularly active between Patras and Igoumenitsa on one side, and Bari, Brindisi, Ancona, Venice and Trieste on the other.

The truth is that it we must distinguish between different types of Mediter-

anean trade, to which different ports are suited to a greater or lesser degree.

- The trade in bulk goods and in particular of oil products and base chemicals, which are increasingly requiring specialised terminals: the ports of the Mediterranean form a vast petrochemical complex, with all the consequences that this entails for environmental protection. In addition to this traffic of bulk goods, there is also bulk agricultural freight and minerals intended for use in base chemistry and construction.
- The trade in miscellaneous products, known as general cargo, which are not necessarily finished goods. The globalisation and internationalisation of commerce goes hand in hand with a redistribution of activity, of an extension and division of the production and distribution processes. There is a completely new approach to trade between the more specialised production units within the same branch, which is helping to speed up the process of exchanges between countries, and in particular between countries at different economic stages. For transport this signifies greater demands with regard to regularity, reliability and transit.

From this point of view the Mediterranean ports have not always managed their transformation successfully, and the results have often had the effect of creating disadvantages for trading due to the time and cost of transit. Various types of reasons could be cited, including accessibility, the location of ports in the centre of historical towns, or the multiplicity of intervening parties in the

port. In short, the history of such ports does not at times facilitate adaptation.

- Trade in «unit» loads. This refers to a transport technique rather than to an economic approach to trade. Between countries of the Mediterranean this particularly refers to the traffic of mobile bodies, trailers, or even of lorries. This type of exchange offers the advantage of simplifying port transit operations, and often in the Mediterranean of facilitating the pre and post-handling in the port by providing part or full-vehicle freight along with the merchandise: the continuity from beginning to end is ensured under the control of a consignor or universal carrier. In the Mediterranean, along the coasts of Italy and Spain, in the Adriatic, and also between Southern Europe and North Africa, there are good examples of successful roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) routes that are no doubt the promise of great things to come in the Mediterranean.

This last point leads us directly on to examine the impact of technological developments. These effects concern all the links in the door-to-door chain, most often linking a mode of land transport with a mode of sea transport within the context of new logistical organisation.

Other essential aspects relate to the exchange of information, the facilitation of document transmission, which can be done more quickly and efficiently by electronic means, and which represents a huge task of synchronisation and organisation in order to facilitate the interface between the port and the ship, or between the lorry or train and the port. From this point of view of there is still a great deal of progress that remains to be made in the Mediterranean region. The work that has been done between European countries on this matter may serve as a useful example.

The Mediterranean Ports in World Trade

Along with the Suez Canal, the Straits of Gibraltar and the Bosphorus Straits, the

Mediterranean once again occupies a centre position in world trade. The rise of the countries of Asia has further strengthened its strategic position on the route between Asia, Europe and America.

Ship-owning companies drew their own conclusions long ago, and made the Mediterranean region a transit zone that has world-scale importance. But the location of their hubs was often outside the Mediterranean, in the «northern area» of Europe, in regard to the organisation of their services.

Over the past ten years or so there has been a rapid turnaround in this trend, in favour of the Mediterranean. If we leave aside the trafficking of bulk goods, for which it is only possible to observe the existence of very specific port centres linked to «specialised» maritime and port chains, and concentrate on the new trade in miscellaneous products and in particular in completed goods, we have no choice but to observe how widespread container transport has reached a worldwide level. These containers are transported by increasingly large vessels with a modern capacity of up to seventy thousand containers, and maybe in the near future this capacity will be as many as a hundred thousand. The result is the slashing of shipping costs and the encouraging of ultra-long distance trade for transport charges, along with a degree of reliability that is often comparable to that of medium-range transport of five hundred to a thousand kilometres. Economic geography has been turned on its head.

However one limitation of this success will be the implantation of hubs from which the containers are redistributed regionally – this region might consist of a whole group of countries – by using either large capacity modes of land transport (rail services with direct trains to «veritable inland ports»), or once again with sea transport (using smaller capacity feeders).

The Mediterranean has therefore seen the emergence of several hubs of this type which in the future will be experiencing growth rates in excess of those of the distant «northern area» of Europe, in the growth of ports such as Rotterdam, Antwerp, Felixstowe, Hamburg and Le Havre. The Mediterranean ports are located at the furthest extremes,

close to the Straits of Gibraltar (in Algeciras), and at the entrance to the Suez Canal, as well as at the very centre of the Mediterranean with the particularly impressive success of Malta and Gioia Tauro.

From this point of view the Mediterranean has managed easily to demonstrate its ability for adaptation, in the knowledge that many of these hubs are located either close to much older ports, where specific areas have been equipped for them, or at new sites (such as Gioia Tauro and Marsaxlokk in Malta). Manoeuvres with feeder vessels, at extremely low prices to serve the whole of the Mediterranean, has also for the most part proved successful, thus allowing the hubs to be connected with medium-sized ports or even larger harbours such as Marseille, Genoa, Barcelona or Valencia, which will no longer necessarily be hubs for large shipping lines, but will nevertheless maintain a quality maritime service; it will then be the task of each port to link this shipping service to further services of equally high quality with the hinterland.

Mediterranean Ports and Sustainable Development

Having briefly mentioned the general trends that have characterised the development of Mediterranean ports, it is important to describe the new challenges in connection with sustainable development.

It has been shown how essential this aspect is in the Mediterranean, not only for the preservation of the fragile natural environment, the marine environment and coasts, but also to preserve the whole cultural and social dimension of the Mediterranean port. This issue of sustainable development, which has become an objective labelled as being of primary importance for any transport policy may also be broken down into several levels, though not without entailing a certain number of contradictory elements.

On a European scale, this objective is mainly articulated as the promotion of sea transport, as an alternative mode to overland haulage, which has greater overall effects on the environment, as much in terms of local pollution and ac-

THE PORTS OF BARCELONA AND TARRAGONA IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The Port of Barcelona is the largest port in the Mediterranean for general container handling and cruises. With 313 regular lines, it is connected to 423 ports throughout the world. The future Delta Plan will dou-

ble the port's land area and its berthing line, and will triple the current area of the Logistics Activities Zone. The Port of Tarragona, the fourth largest in Spain, has become a major goods distribution centre, particularly

for the petrochemical industry. For further information:

www.puertos.es

www.apb.es

www.porttarragona.es

Goods by country of origin and destination in Barcelona and Tarragona (metric tons)

COUNTRY	BARCELONA			TARRAGONA		
	Loaded (Tn)	Unloaded (Tn)	Total (Tn)	Loaded (Tn)	Unloaded (Tn)	Total (Tn)
Algeria	3,833,897	303,995	4,137,892	2,377,923	63,969	2,441,892
Egypt	182,843	165,652	348,496	225,535	1,227	226,762
Turkey	455,492	349,294	804,786	900,934	62,570	963,504
Libya	398,512	8,434	406,945	3,105,256	4,208	3,109,464
Morocco	95,907	362,216	458,123	146,972	20,318	167,290
Tunisia	42,574	196,312	238,886	217,848	140,646	358,494
Israel	171,537	310,614	482,151	27,016	9,464	36,479
Syria	17,056	63,159	80,215	247,573	-	247,573

Source: *Anuario Estadístico 2002*, Puertos del Estado.

Evolution of traffic (thousands of Tn)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Barcelona	18,830	18,119	20,856	23,293	24,148	25,489	25,339	28,509	30,160	31,863	32,998
Tarragona	24,901	23,814	23,760	28,705	31,071	31,126	25,831	25,419	25,573	26,898	29,736

Source: *Anuario Estadístico 2002*, Puertos del Estado.

cidents as in widespread pollution (in the form of carbon dioxide) per transported tonne.

This transport policy, combined with a commitment to opening up to Mediterranean transportation, has led the European Commission to propose the development of veritable «sea thoroughfares» across the Mediterranean with a view to relieving road transport and improving connections between Mediterranean countries. Beyond the competition in which the ports are engaged, the implementation of these «motorways of the sea» calls for cooperation between countries, between port authorities, between public bodies and between haulage carriers. For these «authorities», it is quite clear that either roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) or lift-on/lift-off (lo-lo) transport by unit loads will be favoured, which often entails work to synchronise the crate standards.

Once these principles have been adopted the Mediterranean ports will maintain the positions of essential points in a vast network of communications that acts as the extension of overland networks. Within Europe it is general knowledge that the development of transport networks is a condition for the effective cohesion of territories. These networks are inter-modal and include interchange points such as ports, airports, or combined transport centres. The cohesion researched within the project MEDA-TEN-T, in conjunction with all the Mediterranean partners, is to connect the European networks to a Mediterranean network, very often by pinpointing ports at the centre of the system. In a first phase the priority steps of the agenda are being defined through the Mediterranean to facilitate the North-South exchanges in equal force as the South-South ex-

changes, and these steps will eventually form the backbone of Euro-Mediterranean networks; they will be the favoured areas of cooperation and of project financing.

The other territorial aspect is much more related to the issue of local planning, and of the insertion of ports in a regional or even urban context. From this viewpoint it is difficult to produce general rules, since the solutions will be high relative to very specific contexts. Nevertheless, bearing in mind what has been said regarding the role of the Mediterranean ports on a wider scale, it will still be difficult to draw a distinction between these two levels of approach to the ports. An example of the permanent combination of these two scales is the responsibility attributed to the ports to ensure the control of shipping so that they do not represent a pollution risk for the Mediterranean Sea.