EUROPEAN UNION

Committee of the Regions

Ports Package: Early Warning System file – Analysis of local and regional authorities subsidiarity scrutiny of legislative proposal COM(2013)296 (“Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework on market access to port services and financial transparency of ports”)

This note was written by Metis GmbH (Jürgen Pucher, Holger Eiletz, Sabine Langer, Wolfgang Schausberger, and Klaus-Jürgen Uhl). It does not represent the official views of the Committee of the Regions.

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Catalogue number: QG-04-13-028-EN-N
ISBN: 978-92-895-0756-1
DOI: 10.2863/92845

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Glossary of terms

CoR	Committee of the Regions
EC	European Commission
ESPO	European Sea Ports Organisation
EU	European Union
MS	Member State
TEN-T	Trans-European Transport Networks
TEU	Treaty on European Union

1 Summary

The **legal basis** of the Proposal in Primary Law as stated by the EC (Art. 58, 90, 100 TFEU) seems to be sufficient.

Need for action: Main arguments of the EC are the importance of ports for TEN-T corridors, the lack of influence of MS on ports that are crucial for their transport corridors but located in another MS and the fact that MS alone cannot ensure a level playing field. Especially the fact that landlocked regions are economically dependent on the ports of their transport corridors makes a strong argument for action on EU level.

Added value: The exemption of cargo and passenger handling services from the market opening seriously weakens the potential cost reductions. The impact assessment forecasts a reduction of port costs of 4 %. Experience from other transport sectors (air, rail) rather seems to support the position of the EC that cost reductions and efficiency gains are to be expected.

The EC restricts the scope of the Proposal to TEN-T seaports and therefore sees **proportionality** respected. However, the criteria of the selection of the ports falling under the scope should be checked. Important criteria are the role of the ports for landlocked regions and their market share.

Choice of instrument: The EC argues for a regulation for reasons of level playing field, the wide variety of actors in the port sector and lower administrative costs. Many opinions received point out that a "softer" legal instrument like a directive would be more suitable since it would allow for more flexibility in preparing ports for competition. However, at least the implementation history of the rail directives proves that directives are a relatively inefficient legal instrument for improving competitiveness and implementing a European single market in the transport sector.

The arguments are closely connected with numerous opinions criticizing the loss of **room for national (central, regional, local) decisions**. Major objections raised concentrated on safeguarding best practice of successful ports, differing national rules for services of general interest, wide-ranging power vested in the EC for adopting delegated acts (port infrastructure charges), extremely tight implementation deadlines leaving no time for preparation and the formally correct involvement of regions in the legislative process. The arguments clearly show a strong uneasiness of TEN-T ports regions with yielding decision-making power to the EU level.

The estimations of **additional administrative cost** given by the impact assessment seem unrealistically low. However, experience with other sectors has shown that a successful market opening is not possible without a strong supervisory body (market regulator).

2 Analysis of compliance with the subsidiarity principle and positions of the different actors involved

2.1 Subsidiarity

Article 5.3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states: "*Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level*."

In order to justify action on EU level, the main assessment criteria are:

- Legal basis in the Primary Law
- Need for community action
- Added value

2.2 Position of the European Commission

The European Commission argues that:

- Articles 58, 90 and 100 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union extend the objectives of a genuine internal market to ports (legal basis)

- Actions by Member States alone cannot ensure a level-playing field within the EU internal market (need for action)

- Member States alone cannot take actions to improve the performance of ports located on the same trans-European corridor but in other Member States (need for action)

- Ports have a European and a global function and are hence of importance for the intra- European and global competitiveness of the EU, since a major part of seaborne trade handled in TEN-T ports is intra-EU transport but most of the international trade with other non-European regions uses the TEN-T ports as well (need for action).

- The EC estimates that this initiative can save the EU economy up to 10 billion Euros by 2030 and reduce port costs by almost 7%. (added value)

Therefore, the initiative complies with the subsidiarity principle.
However, the EC recognises "*the specific nature of the port sector and its long-lasting local history and culture*".

2.3 Subsidiarity assessment

The following sub-chapter shall comment the arguments put forward by the EC by taking into consideration objections submitted by the LRA and the national parliaments and the structure proposed in the "External Subsidiarity Evaluation Grid" published by the CoR.

In their first reactions, the Regional Assembly of Abruzzo, the British House of Commons, the Belgian Chambre des Représentants and the Portuguese Assembleia da República see the Proposal in line with the subsidiarity principle. The Flemish Parliament, the position of the European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO), sent by the Port of Rotterdam, and the Assemblea Legislativa Marche consider the Proposal as basically compliant with the principle of subsidiarity. However, they raise some objections.

2.3.1 Legal basis

The Italian Parliament points out that there are legal problems with the Articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union cited by the EC. Articles 58, 90 and 100 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union cited by the EC refer to maritime transport services (seagoing vessels) and not port operators. In addition, the Italian Parliament cites Article 59 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: *"In order to achieve the liberalisation of a specific service, the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee, shall issue directives."*

Assessment by the Consultant

Concerning Primary Law, an in-depth assessment would need would go beyond the scope of the Study. Art. 58 says that "*Freedom to provide services in the field of transport shall be governed by the provisions of the Title relating to transport*", i.e. Art. 90-100. This can be considered that Art. 90-100 are lex specialis inside the TFEU and therefore the application of Art. 59 is questionable. Art. 90 stipulates that "*The objectives of the Treaties shall, in*

matters governed by this title, be pursued within the framework of a common transport policy". Art. 100.2 says that *"The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, may lay down appropriate provisions for sea and air transport. They shall act after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions."* It does not seem plausible that the term "sea transport" does not include ports, since airports are already subject to Community legislation ("Groundhandling Directive" 96/67) and therefore obviously considered as a part of "air transport".

2.3.2 Need for action

Positions submitted

The National Assembly of France considers the proposed Regulation contrary to the subsidiarity principle since the EC does not justify that the definition of a single European status for ports helps to better reach the goals of developing the internal market, as it does not prove the reality of a size effect and does not clearly and precisely determine the expected effects.

The Cortes Generales of Spain see a breach of subsidiarity since due to a complex set of historical, geopolitical, economic and labour factors, European ports show a wide variety of ownership and management models. Therefore, it is difficult to harmonise the ports. Furthermore, the integration of the ports into the TEN-T does not require the abolishment of peculiarities or a uniform model The application of the principles of the Treaty and the general directives and regulations in force to the port sector are sufficient. The major argument is that other modes of transport, for example the railways forming an integral part of the TEN-T, are not subject to the legal instrument of regulation. Furthermore, no uniformisation of the management and ownership is stipulated in the proposal. Why would it be therefore necessary to pursue the integration of the ports by means of a regulation?

According to the Assemblea Legislativa Marche EU legislation should not replace national legislation concerning the legal nature of those responsible for the management of ports.

Assessment by the Consultant

The majority of opinions came from regions with ports. However, the land-locked regions have to be taken into consideration in the issue. They form the majority of regions in the EU. Their competitive performance (logistics costs) also depends on the competitiveness of the ports. This collision of interest

between regions with ports (or states responsible for ports) affected by the Proposal and landlocked regions is reflected in the differing opinions of the Italian State, the Italian regions with TEN-T ports and the Italian regions without TEN-T ports. Especially since the land-locked part of the EU cannot influence port development at the moment, an action at EU level in principle seems justified.

2.3.3 Added value

Positions submitted

The Saeima states that, according to the Impact Assessment of the Proposal, it is proposed to regulate charges for services (pilotage and towage) that account for only 20% of total port operation costs, while cargo handling constitutes the largest part of the costs (45%–60%). Since the largest part of the cost is not covered by the Regulation, the objective of cost reduction cannot be achieved. In general, the Saeima sees no reason to believe that MS are not able to ensure appropriate regulation in the sector, and that a regulation at EU level is necessary.

The Italian Parliament sees subsidiarity violated since the heterogeneous European port sector cannot be subjected to one single organisational model. The added value is doubtful since a uniform model without adjustments could widen existing differences between ports or cause uncalled-for competitive advantages benefiting certain countries or certain ports. Normative instruments such as guidelines or directives offer greater flexibility to the MS, albeit within certain limits, to adjust the operational structures, and attain the objectives of ensuring greater competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in TEN-T ports.

Furthermore, the Italian Parliament argues that the added value is doubtful since a uniform model without adjustments could widen existing differences between ports or cause uncalled-for competitive advantages benefiting certain countries or certain ports.

The Riksdag claims that it is doubtful if this type of regulation helps improving the efficiency of the European port system at all.

Assessment by the Consultant

Concerning the exemption of cargo handling and passenger services, the EC argues that these services will partly be covered by the future directive on the award of concession contracts since these services are often organised by means of concessions. Furthermore, the EC states that it does not want to undermine

efforts being made to initiate a Social Dialogue on EU level. However, “hiding” the exemption of the commercially most important types of services at the end of the concerned Chapter of the Proposal is highly confusing and requires a more transparent formulation. The figures cited by the EC in the Proposal are also partly misleading since, according to the impact assessment, exempting cargo handling from the preferred option PP2a “Regulated competition and port autonomy” actually reduces the expected change in total port costs from 6.8 % to 4 %.

The arguments against a uniform port model and the choice of instrument are discussed in the next Chapter.

The discussion on the actual efficiency of liberalisation measures for the improvement of transport sectors is highly politicised and subject to ideological debates and diverging economic interests. In the passenger air sector, liberalisation seems to have brought about sinking prices and higher efficiency. For the (generally less successful) freight rail sector, the countries with a long history of liberalisation (Sweden, Great Britain, also Germany) seem to fare better than countries with late market opening. As mentioned above, the impact assessment study predicts lower costs and increase in transport induced by the proposed measures.

3 Analysis of compliance with the proportionality principle and positions of the different actors involved

3.1 Proportionality analysis and main objections raised

Article 5.4 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) states: *"Under the principle of proportionality, the content and form of Union action shall not exceed what is necessary to achieve the objectives of the Treaties."*

3.2 Position of the European Commission

The EC considers proportionality ensured since the proposed regulation only covers TEN-T seaports which are:

- Dealing with the overwhelming majority of traffic
- By definition essential for international and intra-EU trade
- Eligible to EU funding.

It therefore avoids imposing unnecessary rules on very small ports which do not have a significant role for the European transport system.

The EC has not further limited the scope to core ports since:

- This could distort competition between core ports and other TEN-T ports
- *"an efficient functioning of the network requires both core ports (typically hub) and non-core TEN-T ports for the regional distribution."*

The chosen instrument is a regulation since:

- Legislation on market access of port services and financial transparency should be generally applicable because: while traditionally MS, regional and local public authorities have been the main actors involved in port infrastructure development and management, nowadays transport operators, autonomous public bodies and entities and other private and public entities have also become key actors.

- Legislation should be directly binding in its entirety in order to *"ensure a uniform implementation, enforcement and a level playing field in the internal market."*

It also prevents additional administrative burden for MS and EC.

3.3 Proportionality assessment

The following sub-chapter shall follow the structure proposed in the "External Subsidiarity Evaluation Grid" published by the CoR and comment the arguments put forward by the EC by taking into consideration objections submitted by the LRA and the national parliaments.

The Assemblea Legislativa Marche sees compliance with the principle of proportionality because a regulation ensures a more uniform application in the Member States. The Abruzzo Regional Assembly considers the Proposal consistent with the principle of proportionality since it only concerns TEN-T ports. According to the Portuguese Assembleia da República, the proposed Regulation is in line with the principle of proportionality.

3.3.1 Proportionality

Positions submitted

According to the Italian Parliament, there are significant differences between the TEN-T ports. For the smaller TEN-T ports with a less significant role in competition, the proposed measure could be excessive.

According to the Senate of the Republic of Poland, the Proposal interferes too much in the system of functioning of seaports.

Assessment by the Consultant: With the limitation of scope to TEN-T seaports, the Proposal tries to avoid overloading small ports with administrative work. However, the criteria of the selection of the ports shall be checked. Important criteria are the role of the ports for landlocked regions and their market share.

3.3.2 Choice of instrument

Positions submitted

The Italian Parliament considers a regulation excessive since the same purposes could be achieved using soft law (guidelines or directives). Actually, what the proposed Regulation lays down are mostly general principles as would be suited for a directive.

The Riksdag states that the legal form of a directive would be more appropriate than a regulation.

The Regional Assembly of Sicily sees a breach of the principle of subsidiarity since the instrument of a regulation does not allow for a sufficient graduation of regulatory intervention in order to take account of the considerable differences between the various port systems in Europe, within the country and among the regional ports. This could aggravate the structural and operational differences that existed between some Sicilian ports and the ports of Northern Europe.

According to the Senate of the Republic of Poland, a directive should be sufficient to harmonise the rules for providing port services. MS would have more flexibility while at the same time harmonisation of methods of selecting port service providers is ensured and could preserve the currently applicable rules of port management.

Assessment by the Consultant

A "softer" legal instrument like a directive is regarded by some of the contributions as more suitable since it would allow for more flexibility in preparing ports for competition. However, the implementation history of the rail directives proves that directives are a legal instrument which requires long time periods for improving competitiveness and implementing a European single market in the transport sector. At least in rail sector, more than 20 years have not been sufficient to prepare some state-owned railways for competition.

3.3.3 Room for national (central, regional, local) decisions

Many opinions dealt with the appropriate "division of labour" between national/regional/local and EU level. To make the overview more reader-friendly, the feedback is clustered along the major topics raised.

Topic: Levelling endangers best practice

According to the Flemish Parliament, which sees the proposal in compliance with the subsidiarity principle, the 'good practice' of the Flemish port administration, already legitimised by the European Commission, has to remain intact.

Flexibility of port authorities in their economic strategies, especially concerning tariff policies, must be safeguarded. (Flanders). Similar issues were raised by the Port of Rotterdam - fearing damaging interference of the attribution of potentially wide-ranging competencies to other authorities and some of the proposed procedures with the commercial freedom of ports - and the Rijksdag (Netherlands) – opposing the idea of common charging principles for port infrastructure.

The Saeima argues that the port sector is the main element of Latvia's competitiveness in cargo transit, so losing the ability to regulate the basic port operations at the national level would result in Latvia losing its competitiveness to rival countries within the Baltic, thus leaving a negative impact on such transit-related sectors as transport, logistics and other services.

Assessment by the Consultant

These concerns were mainly raised by regions and countries with ports with a strong competitive position that fear losing their competitive advantages with a unified port organisation structure and a unified tariff model.

Topic: Services of general interest

The issue was raised by the regions of Flanders and Marche. Some of the services falling into the scope of the Proposal are considered as services of general interest in some Member States, e.g. due to their relevance for safety (e.g. piloting).

Assessment by the Consultant

Concerning safety, Art. 4 of the Proposal enables the managing bodies of the ports to set up minimum requirements for service providers. At least in other transport sectors, experience has shown that there is a danger that "services of general interest" hide monopolistic and other interests that hamper market access and lead to market distortions.

Topic: Delegated acts

According to the Senate of the Republic of Poland, the EC receives too wide powers to adopt delegated acts concerning the establishment of common rules for the classification of vessels, fuels and types of operations according to which the infrastructure charges can vary and common charging principles for port infrastructure charges (Article 14 of the proposed Regulation).The harmonisation is not necessary to achieve the objectives established in the proposed act.

According to the Italian Parliament, the authority vested in the EC to adopt delegated acts might be excessively broad and might concentrate on tasks falling into MS sovereignty in the hands of the EC.

The Riksdag sees a lack of clarity what is meant by delegating the power to the EC to adopt acts in respect of common classifications of vessels, fuels and similar operations.

Assessment by the Consultant

The proposed Regulation vests wide-ranging powers for adopting delegated acts in the EC, requiring close monitoring since the EC might concentrate tasks falling into MS sovereignty in its hands. Especially the transfer of rule-making power from the legislative bodies to the executive body concerning an issue of significant importance like port infrastructure charges has to be closely monitored.

Topic: Formally correct participation in the regional consultation process

The Regional Government of Trentino-South Tyrol (a land-locked region) points out that the responsibility for the communication and exchange of information with the European Commission concerning regional issues belongs to the Regional Government of Trentino-South Tyrol and to the Governments of the two provinces of Bolzano and Trento.

The Regional Government of the Basque Country notes that local and regional authorities have not been properly consulted in the process leading to the EU initiative.

Assessment by the Consultant

The issue has been raised by Trentino-South Tyrol and the Basque Country, regions with a political history of contested autonomy.

Topic: Deadline for implementation

The Italian Parliament and the Senate of the Republic of Poland raised the objection that the deadline for implementation of 01.07.2015 is rather tight. According to the latter, MS will need more time to adapt to the new rules and to select port service providers according to the procedure specified in the future Directive on the award of concession contracts.

Assessment by the Consultant

Experience with PSO contracts in rail services has shown that contracts had been prolonged shortly before the regulation came into force in order to undermine the regulation. As mentioned above, 20 years of railway market opening have not been enough time for many state railways to adapt to a competitive market. However, since the legislative process will probably last into 2015, the proposed deadline indeed seems very tight for setting up new institutions and procedures.

Overall assessment by the Consultant

The feedback clearly reflects a strong uneasiness of TEN-T ports regions with yielding decision-making power to the EU level. However, although the Proposal interferes in some critical points with the commercial freedom of ports (e.g. setting of port infrastructure charges, principal freedom of provision of port services, PSO services), it still leaves considerable freedom concerning the detailed organisation model and business decisions of ports.

3.3.4 Better law-making (impact assessment, additional cost)

Especially the stipulated supervisory body is regarded with scepticism concerning additional cost for establishment, operation and a "bureaucratic complaints culture" (Flemish Parliament). The Latvian Saeima states that, contrary to the indication of the EC that the proposed Regulation will avoid additional administrative burden, the port sector "would suffer from a significant administrative burden, namely, the obligation for Member States to establish two administrative and supervision institutions without clearly defined objectives and principles."

Assessment by the Consultant

Experience from other sectors (rail, airports, energy, telecommunication) has shown that the fear of additional bureaucratic cost is to some extent justified. The impact assessment of the EC estimates recurrent administrative costs for the public at EUR 2.1 million and for business EUR 1.7 million (which seems much too low with the new supervisory bodies in view; perhaps an error in decimal power used?). One-off costs are estimated at EUR 24.4 million for the public sector and EUR 0.8 million for the businesses. However, for a successful market opening the existence of a supervisory body (market regulator) is crucial to achieve the overall objective of the EU policy.

4 Recommendations

Recommendations derived from the analysis

- For reasons of proportionality, the selection criteria for the TEN-T ports should be checked since the role of the ports in local, regional and international transport (market share) is more important for the purposes of the Proposal than the sheer handling figures forming the basis for the inclusion of ports into the TEN-T.

- In order to safeguard room for national (central, regional, local) decisions, CoR shall closely monitor the proposed delegated acts on port infrastructure charges.

- Considering the legislative process, the proposed deadline of 01.07.2015 seems very tight for setting up new institutions and procedures and should probably be prolonged.

- The figures given by the impact assessment study for additional administrative cost of implementation seem implausibly low, especially considering the set-up of new supervisory bodies and new tendering procedures, and should therefore be recalculated.

Recommendations concerning the procedure

- CoR received relatively few opinions from LRA. A large majority of land-locked regions did not react. An evaluation should take place why feedback has been so sparse and how land-locked regions could be better involved in the process. Opinions from port regions only do not reflect the opinion of European regions.

- The opinions submitted are rather political comments. There is a lack of focus on the topics of subsidiarity and proportionality. The CoR should recommend use of the External Subsidiarity Evaluation Grid with more insistence.

- The opinions submitted by the LRA and national parliaments were written, among others, in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Maltese. The Consultant's staff is fluent in almost all of these languages, however it proposes that all opinions submitted should include a translation into at least one of the major EU languages.

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6 Appendix: all contributions received from local and regional authorities