

Full steam ahead

Dutch seaports contribution to realization of the EU Ports Strategy

Dutch seaports perform a crucial function in the import and export of goods for Europe. A significant share of the Netherlands' industry, logistics and energy sector is based in our ports. The five Dutch seaports working together in the Dutch Ports Authority Association (BOZ) would like to emphasize the need for a strong Europe that contributes to sustainable and resilient ports and industry and vice versa.

On 4 March 2026, the European Commission published its long-awaited EU Ports Strategy, which explicitly recognises ports as strategic nodes for trade, energy, defence and industry all at once. On 8 June 2026, the Council endorsed this direction with its own conclusions. For the Dutch ports, together accounting for roughly 372.000 direct and indirect jobs and 4% of the Netherlands' Gross Domestic Product¹, this is an important recognition. But the Strategy is a roadmap, not legislation: the real work now begins in translating it into concrete actions over the next months and years.

The port authorities of Amsterdam, Groningen, Moerdijk, Rotterdam and North Sea Port work daily on the sustainable development of their ports and industrial clusters. Given our shared interests, we as Dutch seaports cooperate more and more at the European level.

1. Stable investment climate in a global playing field

Fostering a stable investment climate in a global playing field will require a strong European industrial policy in the years ahead. Countries outside Europe increasingly outpace European industries in terms of competitiveness and innovation. If Europe does not respond with an equally strong industrial policy, our continent risks losing important business activity and with it: a source of prosperity and employment, and a growing dependence on third countries, including for energy and raw materials.

We therefore welcome that the EU Ports Strategy explicitly recognises the importance of attracting long-term investment. Delivering Europe's ambitions on competitiveness, resilience and the energy transition requires substantial private investment in strategic infrastructure, industrial clusters and clean energy value chains. Attracting capital at this scale depends on a stable and predictable investment environment. Publicly owned ports must therefore retain sufficient flexibility to structure long-term arrangements that reflect the duration, risk profile and capital intensity of these investments. This flexibility is a key factor in mobilising private capital and enabling investment decisions. Limiting this flexibility risks reducing investment in strategic infrastructure and clean energy value chains, thereby slowing progress towards Europe's competitiveness, resilience and energy transition objectives.

As critical gateways, ports are indispensable partners in supporting a competitive and secure Europe. Public support through key EU funding instruments, including the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF), and the Innovation Fund, is crucial to unlocking the investments

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needed in ports. Such support will enable the development of future-proof port infrastructure, thereby contributing to Europe's ambitions for resilience, competitiveness, decarbonisation, and economic growth.

2. The energy and raw materials transition: from ambition to delivery

The Dutch seaports are fully engaged in the energy and raw materials transition. The shift from fossil to renewable energy and the circular economy is nonetheless hampered by several persistent challenges: grid congestion, rising operational costs and slow permitting continue to have a delaying effect. We therefore welcome the Commission's intention to introduce the principle of "overriding public interest" for electricity and energy infrastructure (including shore power), to speed up permitting procedures. This acceleration now needs to become visible in practice in our ports.

Our ports are also strongly committed to enabling a hydrogen economy. Realising these ambitions requires a healthy market for low-carbon and renewable hydrogen. The EU should better match supply and demand through lead markets and targeted financial instruments, supporting not only domestic production but also the import, storage and distribution infrastructure needed to decarbonise industries that cannot be fully electrified. European regulatory and investment certainty is also crucial for the development and further scaling up of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) projects in ports.

Our ports also play an important role in the further build-out and landing of offshore wind energy in the North Sea. The ambitions and growing scale of the offshore wind industry require major upgrades and expansions of port and grid infrastructure. Without swift action, the EU 2030 offshore wind targets are unlikely to be met. Continued financial involvement from European and national governments to expand the capacity of offshore wind ports remains necessary.

As the starting and end point of raw material value chains, seaports play a central role in enabling the transition to a European circular economy. A European level playing field and policy framework is needed to stimulate innovation in recycling technologies and to encourage the shift towards recycled and renewable materials. Including addressing administrative hurdles and national discrepancies such as end of waste status. Circularity is not only a story about scarce materials, but also about efficiency and reduced dependence on foreign suppliers.

3. Ports as critical infrastructure: resilience, security and digital sovereignty

The EU Ports Strategy recognises that ports are simultaneously logistics hubs, energy hubs, industrial hubs and part of Europe's security and defence architecture. For the Dutch ports, this is not an abstract question but daily practice. While Groningen Seaports (Eemshaven) and North Sea Port act as host-nation ports, Rotterdam serves as a key link in European defence corridors. In a supporting role, the ports of Amsterdam and Moerdijk contribute to energy security through the storage of strategic fuel reserves, while also ensuring the resilience and continuity of logistics and supply chains of critical raw materials and consumer goods. We support the Strategy's commitment to update guidance on

maritime security legislation, an EU framework for background checks on port workers and a coordinated European cybersecurity risk assessment for ports.

At the same time, we ask for swift clarity on how responsibilities and costs will be divided between Member States, port authorities and port operators once ports are designated as "Strategic Dual-Use Infrastructure" (SDI). We welcome this designation as an important step, but it must be accompanied by a clear allocation of competences, developed together with the sector, to guarantee effective implementation, legal certainty and a fair distribution of obligations and costs. Ports need clarity on the role they are expected to play in military preparedness as soon as possible, so that this can be properly factored into investment planning.

On economic security, we support the revised Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation as the right instrument for assessing risks from foreign control over strategic port infrastructure. We ask the Commission to keep the announced guidance and monitoring framework for foreign investment in ports proportionate and workable, with clear safeguards for handling commercially sensitive data so that Europe remains attractive for the investment it urgently needs.

Alongside the opportunities it brings, digitalisation also makes our ports more vulnerable to cyberattacks. We support the Strategy's ambition on digital autonomy, provided this sovereignty over data does not come at the expense of interoperability with our international trading partners. In the Netherlands the Dutch seaports have been able to set up a cooperation to improve cybersecurity in our ports (FERM). Such initiatives exist in other Member States as well. The experience and best practices from these platforms could provide a useful source of information to improve cybersecurity in European seaports throughout Europe.

4. Sustainable transport and hinterland connections

As seaports, we have an important role in optimising infrastructure and supporting decarbonisation of the entire supply chain: from facilitating to offering sustainable shipping fuels and shore power within our ports and supporting infrastructure to cater for resilient multi-modal connectivity.

Further steps are still needed to use all transport modes equally efficiently. Modal shift remains important to serve the hinterland efficiently, including connections towards Germany, France and Central Europe. Expanding rail and inland-waterway capacity as well as ensuring climate resiliency must be central to this. It is important that Europe genuinely delivers, in the coming mandate, a single European market for rail freight, well-performing services, the removal of technical bottlenecks and further harmonisation between Member States.

These developments require continued resources from Europe. Financing mechanisms such as the CEF remain valuable and necessary to keep Europe's infrastructure network at a high level of quality. This also to guarantee the smooth flow of both civilian and military goods through our ports and hinterland corridors (dual-use transport infrastructure and mobility).

5. Investment needs: recognition alone is not enough

The Dutch ports work to realise the ambitions as stated in the European Ports Strategy, but more investment is expected to be needed in the coming years to make our ports future-proof. This ranges from typical infrastructure investments such as quay walls to digital tools and investments linked to the industrial, energy and raw-materials transition. According to ESPO's investment study, European ports require at least EUR 80 billion for the period 2024-2034, a figure that does not yet account for investment in military preparedness and dual-use infrastructure. Many of these developments happen in the Dutch ports and investments needs keep growing.

The Dutch seaports welcome the prioritisation of shore power in the 2026 CEF call, the announced EIB capacity-building support for small and medium-sized TEN-T ports and the dedicated maritime call under the Innovation Fund from 2027. At the same time, we explicitly ask for simplicity: new reporting and mapping obligations must not add a further administrative burden on top of the frameworks already agreed.

In conclusion

Cross-border cooperation is strongly embedded in European DNA just as it is part of the way of working within the Dutch Ports Authority Association (BOZ). A coordinated and networked region in which the Dutch ports operate is an asset Europe should nurture, not constrain. We ask the European institutions to take this cross-border reality as their starting point when elaborating the EU Ports Strategy: whether the subject is energy infrastructure, hinterland corridors, military mobility or economic security, policy designed solely through a national lens fails to reflect how our ports and industrial clusters actually function.

As Dutch port authorities, we stand ready to work with our partners to deliver on Europe's goals and ambitions. The EU Ports Strategy provides a good starting point, the next months and years will determine whether that starting point is translated into workable, proportionate and adequately financed legislation.

We look forward to close cooperation with the European institutions in shaping this next phase.

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