

Building the Motorways of the Sea

■ Smooth maritime traffic is the key to Mediterranean trade.

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Opening up great maritime highways linking the shores of the Mediterranean is a key challenge for the EU's cooperation with its southern partners. But to build the motorways of the sea, it's the small details that make a big difference.

Text by **ENPI Info Centre**

Photos by **Motorways of the sea/ENPI Info Centre**

'Motorways of the Sea' is a project with a magical name, evoking visions of major sea routes cutting across the waters of the Mediterranean, a sea no longer the obstacle but the engine room of trade.

Marc Abeille is nevertheless keen to correct a popular misconception. The manager of this ambitious project, financed since 2006 with €4.8 million by the European Commission, does not like the way it is often reduced to a simple solution: "too many lorries on the road, let's put them on boats."

He prefers to stress the need to transfer goods onto ships and the need for flexibility to achieve this aim through the interconnection of modes of transport in line with local realities – "a combination of small things throughout the chain as part of a long-term vision." In any event, Mediterranean routes are inevitably maritime: bar a few exceptions, it is not a matter of easing the burden on land motorways to transfer it to the sea, but rather of improving existing maritime links or creating new ones better suited to the logic of trade between partners in the south and north, east and west.

This can of course translate into placing trucks, trailers and often containers onto ships, or even into providing a rail link at the port of arrival. "We are seeking to apply motorways of the sea solutions for all the links in the chain – identifying bottlenecks, working on in-

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■ Marc Abeille
team leader of the Motorways
of the Sea project

infrastructure, equipment and organisations, facilitating partnerships, the exchange of experience between professions, developing and emulating good practice..." notes Marc Abeille, aiming for a genuine impact on transport efficiency and the development of economic ties.

The first stage of the project, financed by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and managed by EuropeAid, ends in November 2009. Despite the obstacles encountered along the way, Marc Abeille is proud of the results: several pilot projects have been adopted that illustrate the benefits of the concept, others are being finalised. All are integrated solutions acting as a reference for the future motorways of the sea.

Agadir-Perpignan: cutting 3,000 km of road

In Morocco, the project is focused on the Atlantic port of Agadir whose hinterland is one of the country's most important agricultural production areas. This is moreover the only case of a conventional transfer of freight from land to sea. Instead of a round trip of over 3,000 kilometres by lorry, up to the northernmost point of Morocco and the Straits of Gibraltar and then right across the Iberian peninsula to reach southern France, a "motorway of the sea" running from Agadir to Perpignan now provides a

direct link.

Marc Abeille is enthusiastic: "It is a very successful pilot project, a great success; the frequency of departures doubled during the last early fruit and vegetable season."

"A test was carried out in Agadir recently to simulate the optimum stop-over. All the parties were involved: the port, handling personnel, security, customs, the phytosanitary inspection service, together with an expert sent out by the project. We found we were able to save several hours on a stopover that normally takes all day."

He is looking forward to the next step: "One of the main challenges is to switch to computing solutions, a paperless system, electronic signatures, the easing of procedures."

Achieving this will involve a combination of technical assistance, partnership between all the actors, support, training, "and then bringing together all the parties involved who do not always speak directly, such as customs, phytosanitary inspectors, and others involved in port transit on both sides of the sea. That is very important," stresses Marc Abeille, citing the example of another pilot project, between Tunis-Radès and the Port of Genoa. "This project has created closer ties between the Italian and Tunisian customs authorities and the results will continue to be felt after our assistance has come to an end. Customs clearance in Italy is now completed in under two hours and long-term undertakings have been given to this effect."

Meetings essential for dialogue

It is not always easy. Apart from the red tape and disparities in infrastructure or technical conditions, the project sometimes comes up against a certain paradox. While the aim is to facilitate freight movement, difficulties are encountered in the movement of persons between the south and north of the Mediterranean. These can be an obstacle to the meetings which are essential for dia-

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logue, the exchange of good practice and partnership – all keys to success. But Marc Abeille refuses to give up, stressing the value of the slightest contribution, particularly at human level. He notes that in Algeria, a country awaiting improvements to its port infrastructures, the project has received strong support from the actors on the ground in external trade, and the workshops organised have proved very successful.

He pauses to reflect for a moment: “What we are doing is not always visible.” In a way, it is this invisible work which represents the real success of the project, tracing the path of a collaboration which will ultimately make it possible to bring closer the two shores of the Mediterranean.

■ Ports play an essential role in the chain.



Mediterranean Motorways of the Sea

Promotes the Motorways of the Sea concept and the creation of better maritime transport connections in the Mediterranean through support to Ministries, port authorities, customs and relevant private sector stakeholders

www.euromedtransport.org

Participating countries

Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey

Objective

It aims at improving transport connections between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbours and to promote the Motorways of the Sea (MoS) concept and assisting the partner countries in further implementing the maritime transport and port operations actions as adopted in the Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP), a road map for transport cooperation adopted in 2007 (covering 2007-2013).

Acting as a catalyst for economic and social development, the MoS project seeks to make maritime transport connections connecting the north and the south of the Mediterranean more efficient and more reliable by improving and integrating intermodal and integrated port and transport services.

Timeframe

2007-2012

Find out more

Mediterranean Motorways of the Sea fiche > www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=41&id_type=10
ENPI Info Centre – Transport thematic portal > www.enpi-info.eu/indexmed.php?lang_id=450

Budget

€ 9 million

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