



**EUROPEAN
TRANSPORT
WORKERS'
FEDERATION**

**ETF Dockers Position
on the INI-REPORT on
“Building a comprehensive European Port
Strategy”**



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Today, during its plenary session in Strasbourg, the European Parliament endorsed the own-initiative report titled "[Building a Comprehensive European Port Strategy](#)", which had previously received unanimous support from the TRAN Committee in December.

The primary focus of the TRAN Committee was to encourage the EU Commission to establish a Port Strategy, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding the economic independence of EU ports in light of increasing Chinese investments in strategic European port infrastructure.

The ETF has actively followed this initiative and collaborated closely with several MEPs and shadow rapporteurs. This collaboration was crucial, as the [initial draft report](#) failed to address any of the issues related to the workforce.

Our perspective is that for a Port Strategy to be genuinely "comprehensive", it should encompass references to working conditions, safety, just transition for greening, and digitalization.

We therefore welcome with enthusiasm the endorsement of the final text by the European Parliament, incorporating a substantial portion of the amendments supported by the ETF.

Chinese state-owned companies are trying to own a big part of several European ports, controlling around 14 in the European Union and 10% of European shipping.

The warning is that this is not just about money; it's also part of China's plan to control global sea routes, like their Belt and Road Initiative. This is a big deal for Europe's safety and competitiveness in global politics.

Although the EU-China trade relationship is crucial, it needs clear rules and fairness.

Therefore, the ETF agrees on the fact that the EU should take strong action against unfair Chinese practices, and the EU and its Member States should work together to keep European ports competitive with new technology and skills.

A good plan for European ports should be stable, protect the workers and help European businesses grow, together with a healthy and fair maritime and logistics environment for ports.



As the increasing market power of a small number of stakeholders – in particular shipping lines – risks affecting the level playing field and fair power balance between the different actors in the port system, it is extremely important to ensure an effective and timely dialogue between ports and other logistics stakeholders in order to have well-functioning supply chains and avoid a race to the bottom for the workers in the sector.

The Comprehensive European Port Strategy KEY POINTS

1. Call for a Comprehensive European Port Strategy:

- Recognition of the strategic importance of ports to the European transport sector and economy.
- European Commission to propose a comprehensive European Port Strategy.
- Safeguard of the future competitiveness and resilience of European ports and prevent foreign dependency.

2. Concerns about Foreign Dependency and Influence:

- Highlighting the risks of foreign investments in European ports, particularly by state-owned players from autocratic regimes like China.
- Commission required to conduct a study on the effects of vertical integration in maritime logistics, the Consortia Block Exemption Regulation set to expire in 2024, and the establishment of container shipping alliances on the influence of non-EU countries in EU ports.
- Emphasis on preventing foreign influence to safeguard the security, economic independence, and resilience of both individual Member States and the European Union as a whole.

3. Security Risks and Espionage:

- Foreign influence in critical infrastructure increases the risk of espionage and undermines national and European security.
- Warning about the economic vulnerability and susceptibility to illegitimate pressure faced by the EU due to foreign influence.

4. Need for a Joint European Approach:

- Necessity of a joint European approach, as vulnerabilities in one Member State affect the entire EU.
- Acknowledgement of the challenge of individual Member States turning away investments, necessitating a collective strategy.

5. Balancing Economic Openness and Security:

- Need to limit and monitor foreign state-owned or influenced entities' access to port operations and information, as complex digital logistics make entire supply chains more vulnerable to disruptions.
- Careful balance between economic openness and preventing abuse to ensure strategic independence.

- Measures to address the misuse of EU ports by criminal organizations for illegal drug trafficking, emphasizing the compromised safety of ports, nearby cities, and their residents.

6. Strengthening Economic Position and Competitiveness:

- Need for increased European cooperation, regulation, and enforcement to address security risks.
- Importance of strengthening the economic position of EU ports and improving their global competitiveness through investments, innovation, and digitalization.

7. Proposed Actions:

- Revision of the TEN-T Regulation and the upcoming revision of the FDI Regulation.
- EU Commission to propose a comprehensive European Port Strategy with limits on foreign investment.
- Set up of a framework for European public and private investors to strengthen critical port infrastructure and ensure economic resilience.

8. Focus on Energy Transition and Global Level Playing Field:

- Vital role of ports in the energy transition.
- Acknowledgement of the crucial role played by the dockers during recent crises and their importance as front-line workers.
- Workers need to be put at the centre of the green transition.
- Need to safeguard safe and good working conditions for all port workers.
- Risk of cargo diversion in transshipment activities to non-EU ports with the aim of evading the ETS. Need for strict monitoring detect and prohibit evasive behaviour to the detriment of both the environment and of growth and jobs in Europe.

9. Conclusion:

- Call for a **European Port Summit** to further develop the aforementioned issues and to explore the possibilities for enhanced cooperation between European ports.
- EU Commission is required to present a **comprehensive European Port Strategy** addressing the aforementioned issues **by the end of 2024**.

List of ETF proposed/supported amendments

incorporated into the final text and endorsed by the European Parliament:

I.

whereas European ports are often competing with third-countries ports where third-countries foreign investments are exacerbating a competitive advantage, already created by a lack of level playing field when it comes to the respect of sustainability standards, workers' rights and fiscal burdens;

J.	whereas particular attention should be paid to the negative effects of evasive behaviours via the relocation of transshipment activities to ports outside the EU, both in terms of undermining the competitiveness of EU ports and increasing carbon leakages;	ETS
K.	whereas ports have played an indispensable role in EU crisis management, by ensuring the continuance of supply chains and setting up of alternative routes;	
11.	Calls on the Commission to research and assess the impact of vertical integration in maritime logistics, the Consortia Block Exemption Regulation, which is due to expire in 2024, and the formation of container shipping alliances on non-EU country influence in EU ports; calls on the Commission to intervene when necessary, in order to ensure fair competition, a fair power balance and a level playing field for all actors in the port ecosystem;	CBER
13.	Calls on the Commission and the Member States to urgently carry out a risk assessment of China's involvement in maritime infrastructures that includes its impact on labour and the environment, dependencies and an assessment of bottlenecks in the shipping of goods from China to the EU and transshipment and that this assessment should also include other non-EU countries;	
24.	Deplores the fact that EU ports are misused by criminal organisations as key entry points for illicit drugs, which has an effect on society as a whole and undermines the safety of ports, nearby cities and their residents; calls on the Commission to present measures for effective European cooperation to combat drug trafficking, extraction and criminal subversion; welcomes in this respect the Commission's 18 October 2023 roadmap to fight Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime and underlines the need for a coordinated EU approach to combat all kinds of transnational organised crime;	
33.	Underlines that an energy transition in ports, in the shipbuilding industry as well as the maritime sector, will not be possible without a skilled workforce and adequate public and private funding; urges the Commission to provide future-proof training, education and life-long learning opportunities, and to promote social dialogue, to put port workers in the centre of the digital and green transition, and to make the industry more attractive to women; reiterates the important societal role of ports in providing many direct and indirect jobs and stresses the need to safeguard fair and safe working conditions for all port and maritime workers; highlights that recent crises have shown that seafarers, crew members, fishers and port workers are essential 'front line' workers and their well-being is vital to keep the world moving;	GREEN SAFETY WOMEN RIGHTS

36.	Underlines the risks of delocalisation of container transshipment activities to non-EU ports with the aim of evading the requirements of the EU emission trading system (ETS) Directive[15] and the FuelEU Maritime Regulation[16]; calls for the strict application of the transshipment monitoring provisions of these two pieces of legislation to detect and prohibit such behaviour as well as for an assessment as to whether these provisions are sufficient to effectively deter evasive behaviour to the detriment of both the environment and of growth and jobs in Europe and whether additional measures are necessary;	}	ETS
48.	Underlines the importance of maritime manufacturing, such as shipbuilding and its supply-chain, in the EU as a foundation for maintaining a thriving waterborne sector; calls on the Commission to research and assess the impact of Europe's dependence on foreign maritime manufacturing, to urgently define an ambitious European industrial maritime strategy and take adequate measures to enhance the competitiveness and resilience of Europe's shipyards and their entire supply chains;		

You can find the [full text here](#)

The ETF will continue monitoring the future developments of this initiative.

Bruxelles, 17 January 2024