

Towards New Scenarios for the Integration of Europe and the Mediterranean: Prospects and Strategies for Trieste and the Upper Adriatic Region

GABRIELLA PULTRONE

Università Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria, Italy

GLOBAL ECONOMIC DYNAMICS crucially affect territorial transformations and the relations between towns, leading them to better define their functions and to internationalize their image to enhance international competitiveness. Coastal areas equipped with berths for ocean-going vessels have gained a strategic importance thanks to the progressive reduction of maritime transport costs, compared to those of land transport. Since the early '90s, the role of the Mediterranean has been increasingly strengthening within the context of the main routes and today, after a critical period, signs of recovery, above all in relation to the growth of the emerging economies of North African and Far Eastern Countries, may be foreseen. In this scenario, the Upper Adriatic region and its port cities, among which Trieste stands out for its historical vocation to internationalization and for its modern infrastructures, have the opportunity to create a system to reassert their strategic role within the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Key Words: maritime transport; Trieste; Upper Adriatic

INTRODUCTION

Global economic dynamics crucially affect territorial transformations and the relations between towns, leading them to better define their functions and to internationalize their image to enhance international competitiveness. Coastal areas equipped with berths for ocean-going vessels have gained a strategic importance thanks to the progressive reduction of maritime transport costs, compared to those of land transport. Since the early '90s, the role of the Mediterranean has been in-

[82] creasingly strengthening within the context of the main routes; new large transshipment hubs have been developing and many existing docks have been modernized/extended. This phenomenon is due to the following factors: extension of the ship size, which has led to transporters prefer the Trans-Mediterranean route for the traffics with the Far East because the Suez Canal, unlike the Panama Canal, has the suitable structural characteristics for the transit of large container ships; the economic performance of the Far East and of the North African emerging countries, which has significantly increased the sea transport interchange on the commercial routes from/to Europe and between the two Mediterranean shores. In this regard, certain field studies, like those carried out by Drewry Shipping Consultants and by Fearnleys, highlight that the recovery of the world's economy and the performance of Asian economies will continue to be the main drivers of a demand for sea transport services that will be further strengthened by the economic growth of North African Countries.

Therefore, adequate infrastructures are necessary to integrate hub ports effectively in the logistic chain of transport and to intercept the growing traffic flows. In line with the prospects of recovery of the international macroeconomic context, the world's sea transport is soon expected to revive; in particular, container traffic is expected to grow by 4.2% on the Asia–North America route (−14.9% in 2009) and by 2.2% on the Asia–Europe route (−14.8% in 2009). Undoubtedly, the last mentioned data will significantly affect the internal dynamics of the Mediterranean region. In the next few years, the ports, which are located on the intersections between sea and land routes, will be destined to become increasingly important for the implementation of an effective European multimodal transport system, especially in view of the estimated upturn in traffic development. In this scenario, the ports with the best geographical location are Valencia, Barcelona and Genoa, for the southwestern axis, and Trieste, Brindisi and Patras, for the south-eastern axis.

The eastern Mediterranean appears to be one of the areas with the highest potential for development, with an increase in the supply by stakeholders (shipping companies and national and international multimodal transport operators), which aim at exploiting the potentials



of growth of the Adriatic-Mediterranean system following the EU enlargement to the East. Particularly, the Adriatic-Ionian corridor is a strategic route for international trade, since it is a privileged link with the emerging markets of Central-Eastern Europe.

One of the problems, which are set to become increasingly important, is certainly related to the links between the European Union and the neighbouring countries overlooking the Mediterranean and the Adriatic Sea, which is considered as a 'multimodal corridor' for the combined transport within the trans-European connections envisaged by the Treaty of Maastricht. Its upper coasts, with the ports of Trieste, Venice, Koper and Rijeka, are the channel of the south of the Community, which is most projected towards the centre, north and east of Europe. Nevertheless, it must always be taken into account that the competitiveness of the port nodes for the transportation of passengers or goods is strongly influenced by both the functionality of the connections with the port hinterland and the levels of spatial integration between the port and the surrounding town. Recent researches aim at verifying that the projects of development and rationalization of port facilities, which must consider the functional and economic aspects of the planned investments, can trigger actual widespread processes of urban and land regeneration. As a matter of fact, the infrastructural flows resulting from linear infrastructures, combined with different speeds and functions, and from their intersections, materialize into new urban and territorial poles, such as dock stations, public squares, well-equipped urban pathways and waterfronts related to tourist, cultural and leisure activities (Di Venosa 2006). These are themes which must be tackled at the different territorial and institutional levels, in a perspective of governance implying an increasing participation of different local public and private actors to prefigure shared scenarios, as well as the search for a delicate equilibrium between local and global dimensions.

Port cities must face the continuous evolutions in the field of vessel traffic, the demand for larger and larger areas and the loss of a strong port identity in favour of intermodal port facilities. All these factors increase interdependences and the needs of innovation. Therefore, it is extremely advisable to define strategies for the port system of the Up-

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[84] per Adriatic region, which are consistent with tradition yet projected into the future. Moreover, they should be aimed at integrating the area, both inside the single administrative regions and inside the macroregion including Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Slovenia, Croatia, Lower Austria and Lower Germany, in a system based on the values of fair collaboration and efficiency, supported by services of general interest and regulated by common rules of behaviour (Honsell, Malinconico and Maresca 2006).

In short, since the development of transportation directly depends on the quality of port facilities, on the use of new technologies, on the strengthening of multimodality and on the capacity of innovation, only a wide and multidisciplinary approach to the problem of traffic and transportation can lead to a prospect of growth for the Adriatic region and its most northern ports.

In the light of what has been mentioned above, this paper examines the following aspects: connecting infrastructures within the EU cohesion and integration policies; the Upper Adriatic region in the framework of the south–north routes between Europe and the Mediterranean; the role of Trieste between its historic vocation for internationalization and future scenarios, as well as the complex issue of the relations between city and port, which is a topical subject for those who deal with territorial themes (geographers, town planners, economists, historians, etc.); finally, prospects and strategies in a common scenario of integration and cooperation between port cities, which keep track of the questions related to sustainable development.

PROSPECTS FOR THE UPPER ADRIATIC REGION IN THE EU INFRASTRUCTURAL POLICIES

The transport sector is international by its nature. Therefore, on the one hand, its external dimension must be well integrated in the general EU transport policy and, on the other hand, the transport policy must be part of wider relations with third countries and external organizations (Commission of the European Communities 2006).

It is common knowledge that the EU transport policy aims at the creation of a multimodal transport system that effectively integrates land and sea transport networks. In particular, the White Paper on



Transport (Commission of the European Communities 2001) highlights how the double objective of enlargement and sustainable development demands actions to improve the transport system in order to make it economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The risks deriving from traffic congestion problems might undermine the competitiveness of the European economy if they are not adequately managed.

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In 2007, the European Commission launched a series of initiatives, concerning ports and logistics, through the following communications: 'Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union,' 'The EU's Freight Transport Agenda,' 'An EU Port Policy' and 'Freight Transport Action Plan.' Furthermore, a Communication of 21 January 2009 fixed the 'Strategic Goals and Recommendations for the EU Maritime Transport Policy until 2018' to support the EU maritime transport in the globalized markets through the development of human resources, skills and maritime know-how so that Europe could become a world leader in maritime research and innovation (Commission of the European Communities 2009).

The rebalancing of transport modes is one of the main goals of a transport policy pursuing a sustainable development. To that end, one of the suggested measures is the promotion of maritime traffic, particularly short sea shipping, able to make up for the congestion of certain road infrastructures and for the lack of rail infrastructures. Over the last ten years, the EU planning has been related to the 'Trans European Network' (TEN), which includes the fundamental corridors and hubs of the whole EU and non-EU transport system that must be considered as invariants for the strategic planning choices. Hence the need to create real 'sea highways' in the framework of TEN guidelines, envisaging better connections between ports and railway and waterway networks as well as the improvement of the quality of port services. The strategy of European corridors pursues the goal to identify transnational routes and infrastructures, which can boost the material circulation of people and goods, besides the mobility of capitals, services and ideas, and to help overcome the traditional national physical and organizational barriers. Thus, the question does not imply only transport and infrastructural aspects but also prefigures the medium-

[86] and long-term evolution of the economic and spatial relations of the continent and the consequent development of eastern and southern peripheral areas (Migliorini 2004). Therefore, it is indispensable to build and strengthen a network of corridors (among which the Adriatic and Danubian Corridors and, transversally, Corridors 5 and 8) conceived as the fundamentals of a strategy for the development of the territories they run through and as permeable pathways able to establish relations with the space surrounding them.

The main specific measures of the EU transport policy refer to the two essential European principles of 'subsidiarity' and 'non discrimination:' the former assumes that the European Union can act only if interests, which are higher than those of the single countries, prevail; the latter presupposes that national policies do not damage or favour specific businesses on the basis of their nationality.

Considering the expected development of the Mediterranean traffic and the completion of the great European transport networks, the Adriatic side might become a strategic hub in the international maritime trade. In particular, the port system of the Upper Adriatic region might provide a privileged access to the Central and Eastern European markets for the goods coming from the Far East and take market shares away from the Northern Range area (with the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg, Antwerp, Bremen and Le Havre), since it would allow for cut navigation times to be cut by 5 days. At present, the Northern Range absorbs over 67% of the European container traffic (44 mln/TEU compared to 22 mln/TEU of the European ports in the Mediterranean) and, in 2008, the ports of Rotterdam and Hamburg alone managed 31% of the European container traffic (10.7 mln/TEU and 9.7 mln/TEU respectively). Even Italian businesses are turning to the big Northern European ports, and over 40% of the goods from/to the Italian market are projected to transit through foreign ports.

Since the Upper Adriatic region, which has always been strongly integrated in the service of a richer market area (Bavaria and Central Europe), has not yet shown its capacity to be a crucial connection between that area and the Far East through the Suez Canal, there is a great need for conditions of competitiveness, port and railway services and infrastructures that can lead primary shipping companies to trans-



fer their traffic from the ports in Northern Europe to the Mediterranean, bearing in mind that any form of inefficiency penalizes even the areas with an excellent geographical location. At the same time, it is indispensable to make precise and high-profile choices of transport policy and to adopt all the organizational measures that can promote the efficiency of rail freight transport within a solid framework of integrated logistics.

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The EU transport policy is generally aimed at facilitating trade in the internal market and between the internal market and the neighbouring countries of the European Union. Therefore, it is a support policy for two key EU competences: internal market and external trade. The idea underlying the creation of the Trans-European Networks of Transport TEN-T is that the planning and investments of the Member States in this field should be made in a framework which should be shared and agreed upon and eventually give rise to a real common European network envisaging two levels of planning: the global network and priority projects. The infrastructural projects for the construction of specific road and rail corridors, which directly concern the Adriatic region, are: Corridor 5 (railway axis Lyons–Milan–Trieste–Divača–Ljubljana–Kiev), which connects the European western quadrant to Kiev; the Adriatic–Baltic Axis, which connects the Adriatic Sea with the Baltic Sea through Italy, Austria, Czech Republic and Poland. These intermodal axes are supported to the south by the Mediterranean ports and by the Adriatic port systems.

Worth-mentioning is a study (Honsell, Malinconico, and Maresca 2006) which aims at defining a reference conceptual diagram that can be used to adopt specific and consistent measures and to revert to a system that directs traffic from the south towards Europe and favours the Adriatic port facilities, for their railway network and integrated logistics, and port/railway systems strictly coordinated with the main corridors. Therefore, a maritime policy supporting the routes, which extend from the north-east and the north-west to the north, is necessary to focus attention on certain ports-corridors (meant as strategic port systems at the root of the corridors), such as Trieste, Monfalcone, Koper and Venice, in order to take up the challenge of Pontebbana (axis of Tarvisio) and of Corridor 5 (axis of Ljubljana). The latter

[88] is an important dare since it implies the transfer of the goods transit from its traditional pathway north of the Alps to a new one to the south; it is a strategic intergenerational infrastructure aimed at achieving goals of cohesion and integration. The great railway and highway infrastructural axis plays a crucial role both for the countries it crosses (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, Bosnia, Ukraine, Hungary) and for the surrounding areas, which will indirectly benefit from the improvement of the transit routes, in particular of the connection with the other corridors going to the south (corridors 4, 7 and 10), through the Balkan peninsula, and assuring the access to the East.

Nevertheless, this prospect may become much more significant if, instead of being meant only as a transversal work – within the horizontal traffic to the south of the Alps, in a Lyons-Kiev market dimension –, it will be also considered within the vertical traffic from the Mediterranean to Europe. Certain parts of Corridor 5 are not important only in the long term for the traffic to the south of the Alps, but they are also urgent in order to link the Mediterranean to Europe through the Loetschberg, Gotthard, Brenner and Pontebbana passes. Such a corridor is of crucial importance for Trieste-Koper-Monfalcone area, for Friuli, Veneto and Slovenia. Its flow includes the infrastructural actions aimed at supporting the ports of Trieste and Koper, such as the 6-kilometre link that will unify them, as well as the actions to connect the port system of the Upper Adriatic region with Pontebbana (Tarvisio pass) and the industrial districts of Friuli with the Brenner Pass and Slovenia. In any case, these port systems must direct traffic towards southern Europe and implement effective forms of intermodality.

As regards the ‘Baltic-Adriatic corridor’ (EU Priority Project no. 23), which is considered as one of the priority corridors and will link the Baltic Sea with Vienna, an ongoing study (for which 3.7 million Euros have been allocated, 2.9 of them coming from EU funds), called the Baltic-Adriatic Transport Cooperation (Batco), is dealing with the extension of its route from Vienna to Graz, Klagenfurt and Udine, with branches leading to Trieste, on one side, and to Venice-Bologna-Ravenna, on the other. 19 regions of the 5 countries concerned by the ‘corridor’ are participating in the project: not only Austria and Italy,



but also Poland, Slovakia and Czech Republic. The basic idea is to create a corridor which links the two seas of new Europe, thus laying the foundations for a socio-economic development of the territories crossed by this railway axis; favouring the rail transport solution for heavy bulk traffic; developing new trade routes through the Friuli Venezia Giulia port system (a fundamental element of the Baltic-Adriatic route); and connecting with new markets in Poland, Russia and Finland. From an infrastructural point of view, its implementation would focus European and national investments on the double-tracking of the Ronchi-Cervignano-Udine railway line, which would allow for exploitation of the potentials of the ports of Trieste, Monfalcone and Porto Nogaro.

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Always regarding the north-south route, the EU transport policy is perfectly in line with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), established at the Paris Summit of the Euro-Mediterranean Heads of State and Government on 13 July 2008, as a logical development and consolidation of the Barcelona Process (1995). It encompasses the 27 EU Member States and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Albania, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Monaco and Mauritania, while the Arab League and Libya are observer members. 'Maritime and land highways' are among the six UfM priority projects: they should integrate the Euro-Mediterranean transport system with the Trans-European network and improve the relations between states and regional trade by developing waterways, port and land infrastructures and by increasing marine safety (De Andreis 2010).

Therefore, the competitiveness of the port system of the Upper Adriatic region necessarily depends on a choice of transport policy which involves connecting infrastructures (the European corridors), port terminals and Central European reference markets.

TRIESTE AND ITS PORT BETWEEN HISTORY AND FUTURE

Within the framework of an enlarged EU, which envisages the development and construction of maritime and land infrastructural networks, as well as a new central role of the Adriatic ports as vital points of

[90] trade between Europe and the Mediterranean, Trieste enjoys a crucial position: its name appears on all the studies and documents concerning the EU enlargement to the east; on the infrastructural network plans, particularly those concerning Corridor 5 and the development of maritime and port infrastructures. The ongoing changes, which are related to both the European political and institutional evolution and the global economic and territorial processes, are showing, once again, the important strategic location of the city as the 'gateway-bridge' of Western Europe towards the eastern and Balkan area and the Mediterranean. In this context, it is evident that Trieste has the opportunity to play a geopolitical role of 'linking area,' not only in the territorial and economic field, but also in the cultural and social sphere, by creating a system with the neighbouring ports and reasserting the crucial role of the Adriatic region in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Outlining the salient points of the history of Trieste in the Euro-Mediterranean context can be a useful starting point to reflect upon the future. Since the 18th century, the already existing nature of the Adriatic region as a link between Europe and the Mediterranean has found its highest expression in the city-emporium of Trieste. In fact, its free port was established in 1719 after the will of Emperor Charles VI, with the purpose of creating a free area to the benefit of businesses. The following creation of adequate infrastructural connections, which had been lacking until then, enabled the nascent port city to slowly replace Venice in the Mediterranean traffic network. In this regard, particularly worth mentioning is the construction of the road to Ljubljana, which allowed traffic to reach Crainburg and Neumarkt and, from here, Vilalco and Klagenfurt; while the road to Cilli continued towards Graz, Bruck and Vienna and allowed traffic to reach the eastern markets and Hungary as far as Temesvár. The trade with the Empire was then followed by the opening to Hungary and Croatia, the strengthening of trade with the Turkish Bosnia and the Ottoman gateway and the new agreements with Spain.

The idea of the city-emporium was originally inspired to develop the conception of the port as a place of storage and exposition: the destiny of port facilities was much influenced by the possibility of the goods remaining in the warehouses to be exposed and sold. It was a



great market with absolute free access and able to enhance the birth of a lively heterogeneous urban merchant community, made up of different religious and social communities, which could live together respectful of their respective traditions (Pultrone 2007). It is particularly noteworthy, also considering modern society, that international trade was exactly the unifying element of different religious and social communities.

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There existed other aspects making of the Trieste port system the real factor of diversity and characterization of the whole region and almost the prerequisite for the construction of an intermodal system and for the promotion of an international traffic flow. Such aspects were: its strategic position in relation to Central Europe; a special legal status, which dated back to the 17th century and obliged nation-states to guarantee access according to the principle of non-discrimination. As long ago as in the late 19th century, the function of city-emporium failed and the idea of a transit/industrial port emerged, owing to a greater interest of the Habsburg administration in the promotion of international trade and logistics. In particular, railway systems were modernized and the relations with the Far East were strengthened; new regulations allowed any carrier to reach the port of Trieste both from the sea and from land infrastructures, without any discrimination and any cost, unless they were justified by services actually rendered to goods. The construction of the New Port (today's Old Port) was the most modern logistic achievement of the time. It was served by an internal railway infrastructure, which is still the most important in Italy (with a 70-km total internal network of service reaching all terminals and a connection with the dry port areas of Carso, from Ferretti to Opicina), connected with Vienna by the Southern Railway (Südbahn), which linked Trieste with the Empire through Slovenia. The effectiveness of a transit port is evaluated not so much by its capacity to stock goods for long periods as by the low costs, by the yields and by its capacity to forward an increasingly large quantity of goods. Thus, in the late 19th century, the conditions for modern international logistics, which would develop between the '60s and the '70s with the advent of containerization, had already been created (Honsell, Malinconico, and Maresca 2006).

The foregoing shows that, as it has happened in other Mediterranean cities, the port is the main factor of development of Trieste and gives origin to deep changes, both in the spatial organization and in the management of the different activities (Pultrone 2004). As regards the general physical and functional aspects of the complex city-port relation, Rinio Bruttomesso (2002) has carefully analysed current trends in order to identify scenarios for a sustainable development compatible with the different needs. The changes in the transport sector inevitably imply a new layout of the urban structure that may lead to a new configuration of port cities, which would become interesting workshops, due to their high number of infrastructures for the transportation of goods and people. Since the introduction of containers demands increasingly larger spaces, it is necessary to evaluate the aspects that concern the urban dimension of the port and lead to the inevitable confrontation between port and city resulting from the search for adequate solutions to the problems of development. Those aspects are: the search for new spaces to extend the activity; the tendency to locate the new facilities in fringe areas; the effort to improve the accessibility to port areas; the choice of intermodality for goods handling and the redevelopment of derelict port areas. An action concerted between the port authority and the local authority is necessary to clearly define the criteria and rules for a harmonious coexistence in the same urban and territorial framework.

In this city, which is of great interest from a town planning point of view, the areas of contact between port and city show special morphological characteristics and different composition and geometries in comparison with other urban areas. Two types of physical planning converge on these spaces: the town planning of local authorities and the port planning of the managers of infrastructures. Over the last decades, the port has undergone important processes of transformation, and the coexistence of the two types of planning has not been easy. The Port Master Plan, provided for by the national law 84/94, should be the occasion of a positive exchange of ideas. It should not limit itself to listing the works to be carried out, following an exclusively port-oriented logic, but it should seek the possible connections with the global development of the city and of the territory as a whole,



particularly taking into account the following aspects: the accessibility to port areas; the organization of the infrastructural transport network; environmental issues affecting both the specific port area and the stretch of sea in front of it. That is also the purpose of the Port Master Plan of Trieste, which has been recently approved (2010). In any case, it is important to be aware that the quality of port areas and buildings is a primary objective and that the port can be an opportunity for urban regeneration. All the more so because, when the redefinition of the city-port relation becomes a topical subject, it is necessary to pursue the double objective to favour the development of the economic system and to safeguard the identity of the urban system.

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Over the last fifteen years, in Trieste, general and sectoral programmes, plans and projects have alternated with feasibility studies and design contests with the common will of local authorities to reassert the central role of the city as a territorial and economic, but also cultural and social 'linking area' between Europe and the Mediterranean. The following are the most significant themes: maritime and land transport infrastructures; the regeneration of the waterfront and of derelict areas; the redevelopment of the whole urban area and of its surroundings (e. g. karst villages); the extension of the port areas, due to the expected increase in traffic following the completion of Corridor 5, the extension of Pier 7, the construction of the Logistic Centre in the area between the Timber terminal and the former Italsider steelworks and of the consequent road and rail connections (Pultrone 2004). The need to include the single projects of transformation in a shared strategic vision, the capacity to elaborate innovative forms of management of plans, projects and partnerships with a strong local character and the decisive importance of time as a crucial variable in a rapidly evolving context must lead to an immediate action to start the engine of development, so that Trieste can be projected into the future with a new Euro-Mediterranean role.

ONGOING EXPERIENCES OF INTEGRATION
IN THE UPPER ADRIATIC REGION

The strategic role of the Adriatic region, as a transboundary area whose port cities are the nodes of a complex set of relations focussed

[94] on its northern coasts, is best highlighted in the transport and communication sector. Frequent references have been made to the function/vocation of port cities as intermodal poles linking sea and land transport, as hinges between the Mediterranean and continental Europe. The guidelines of the EU transport policy relaunch the idea of the Adriatic area as a transboundary region, as a basin of culture and trade meant as a channel of communication between the parties of a wide geopolitical system. In the past, the advantage gained from the position of its ports, cutting navigation times by four to five days compared to North European ports, was lost due to a number of difficulties, such as the lack of an adequate railway and road infrastructural network, which could optimize the integration and multimodality of the transport systems, as well as political, economic and legal impediments. Then, it is indispensable to implement the most suitable strategies to overcome the problems, e. g. activities of cooperation between ports, avoiding local competitions and defining a single port system, with specific specializations in the different ports, able to compete with north European ports.

When ports demand large areas to stock incoming and outgoing goods, when intermodal railway terminals must be constructed and when the railway plays a crucial role, then the elements of interdependence increase. The debate about port facilities concerns also dry port areas and railway services and, in particular, the integration between ports and dry ports situated on the corridors. In order to promote the traffic on the corridor and to be competitive with north European ports, it is necessary to create a single port system, with one or more dry port terminals, able to support the traffic from the south and to direct it to central Europe. The presence of growing traffic flows, above all from the Far East, to be redirected to the strategic south-north routes, leads to the indispensable extension of the port areas of Venice, Trieste, Monfalcone and Koper to one or more dry port terminals, between Ferneti and Sežana, on the one hand, and Cervignano, on the other. The proposal envisages a system that provides container terminals supported by two large dry port terminals, as well as the establishment of an international Port Authority of the Upper Adriatic region whose competence encompasses also dry



port areas and connecting infrastructures (Honsell, Malinconico and Maresca 2006).

Considering that the homogeneity of the Adriatic region was historically based precisely on a network of port cities, for which actual favourable conditions of growth and development are expected today, only the integration of transport systems and intermodality can lead to positive results and to the closure of the gap with north European port facilities – which are highly competitive, have high traffic volumes and have been able so far to attract a considerable part of the hinterland of Mediterranean ports, thanks to the presence of adequate organizational systems, logistic facilities and proper infrastructures (Pultrone 2004).

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Recent initiatives inspire great hopes of integration and Adriatic cooperation. Among them, in May 2010, the start-up of a project of the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) for the creation of a macroregion within 2014. The AII includes three EU Member States (Italy, Slovenia and Greece) and five accession and pre-accession countries (Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania). The strategy aims at involving more the western Balkans by strengthening the *governance* and the economic capacity of these countries. At the same time, it will be intended to consolidate the strategy of cooperation with the Balkan area favouring the interaction with the strongest shores of the Middle and Upper Adriatic region.

The establishment of the North Adriatic Port Association (NAPA) with the ports of Trieste, Venice, Ravenna and Koper, in March 2010, is of particular importance for the ports of the Northern Adriatic region. In fact, it is an alternative to the north European ports for the goods directed to Central and Eastern Europe. The overall estimated investments (about 3,4 billion Euros) will be earmarked to improve the competitiveness of the port system of the Upper Adriatic region. The planning guidelines and the already strengthened services are arousing the strong interest of the administrations of the neighbouring European regions, among which Carinthia and Bavaria, and of the different operators of international markets. The strategy is based on the development of existing competences and infrastructures, which should be introduced in the logic of a system, by channelling international trade

flows from and to Europe, developing intermodality through connections with the hinterland, through the switch from road transport to rail transport and through the extension of terminals. Thus, the main purpose is to harmonize regulations, times and procedures of port operations.

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Therefore, the most important port cities of the Upper Adriatic region (Trieste, Venice, Ravenna, Koper in Slovenia and Rijeka in Croatia) are thinking together of the possibility of creating a system, of the great opportunities of trade, of which they can become the protagonists, within an area, rich in innumerable historical, cultural, environmental and economic resources, that can assert its central role in the Euro-Mediterranean context.

In this scenario, ports become not only intermodal elements, but also engines of a possible geopolitical transformation, beyond the administrative borders of the single states and regions, aimed at creating an Adriatic Euro-region that, starting from the principle of an economic development obtained through virtuous transport, enables a sustainable environmental, economic and social development.

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