Baltic port leaders convene in Brussels to shape future EU maritime policy

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The Baltic Ports Organization (BPO) held its annual debate at the European Parliament on 24 March 2026, bringing together policymakers and port executives to address the critical challenges and opportunities facing the Baltic Sea region. Against the backdrop of a shifting geopolitical landscape, the meeting served as a vital platform for aligning regional interests with upcoming EU strategic frameworks.

Under the patronage of Merja Kyllönen, Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and Finland's former Minister of Transport, the event emphasized the ports' role as frontrunners in maritime innovation, shaping the future of Europe's transport infrastructure. Torsten Klimke, Head of Unit at DG MOVE, provided key perspectives from the European Commission and engaged in direct dialogue with port representatives regarding the integration of Baltic interests into EU-wide transport policy. A strong Baltic line-up further underlined the meeting's significance, with participants from Esbjerg, Gdańsk, Gdynia, HaminaKotka, Kemi, Riga, Rostock, Rønne, Stockholm, and Södertälje demonstrating the unified commitment of the region to driving the European maritime agenda forward.

Strategic – funding and security

The debate focused on three pillars essential to the future of maritime infrastructure. Foremost, the EU Ports Strategy. Here, discussions centered on the evolving role of ports as hubs for energy and modern logistics, underscoring the need for effective implementation and sustainable funding models. While the BPO welcomes the initiative, recognizing its importance for adapting the European port sector to evolving geopolitical, economic, and environmental landscapes, the Organization highlights that its success will depend on practical implementation. This sentiment was also reflected in Kyllönen's opening speech, "The European Commission has sent a clear signal: ports are central to Europe's green and digital transition. They are essential for trade, regional development, and sustainable mobility. The strategy emphasizes three key areas: modernizing infrastructure, supporting digitalization, and promoting environmental sustainability. But vision alone is not enough; it must be matched by effective implementation and adequate funding."

The EU Budget 2028-34 was the next topic in line for scrutiny. Participants analyzed the upcoming financial perspective, specifically focusing on investments in the TEN-T network, the Connecting Europe Facility, and the prioritization of strategic port projects. Lastly, the debate tilted into the theme of military mobility. In light of regional security concerns, the debaters explored the dual-use implications for port infrastructure and its role in European defense readiness.

Practical and market-driven

A smart and industry-conscious approach is key to maintaining the overall competitiveness of the Baltic and broader European port sector. Onshore power supply systems, for instance, represent very costly investments for ports, offering no immediate direct revenue advantage, and are coupled with limited access to appropriate financing opportunities, making their timely and widespread implementation challenging.

Similarly, in the context of the development of alternative fuels infrastructure, ports should not be obliged to ensure their availability based solely on theoretical projections. Shipowners should be the principal driving force behind the demand for such infrastructure, as the real demand remains largely unknown and should emerge from natural market growth. As with investing, a practical, market-driven 'line of attack' should always precede any regulation. ■

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