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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON PORT CARGO DISTRIBUTION BUSINESS

The *International Federation of Port Cargo Distributors (IFPCD)* had the pleasure of holding the 6th Regular Conference (24-26 September) in Antwerp, one of the most dynamic and reputed gateway ports in Europe. More than 175 delegates from all over the world participated to this very successful conference. In the working sessions, keynote speakers such as Mr. Shokichi Yasukawa (Director of Toyota Motor Corporation), Mr. Anton van der Lande (Vice President of Public Affairs International at UPS), Mr. Yuji Hirano (Executive Vice President of NYK Line), Mr. Bruno L.J.A. Valkeniers (AGHA), Dr. Hans Ludwig Beth (Professor at the World Maritime University of Malmo, Sweden), Mr. Robert Yap Min Choy (Executive Vice-President PSA), Mr. Jean-Arnold Vinois (Head of the Unit "Railway transport and interoperability", Directorate General Energy and Transport, European Commission) and, last but not least, Mr. Mutsumi Ozaki (President of IFPCD) gathered to discuss the current trends that are changing the port industry on a daily basis and encouraged all operators involved in global logistics and cargo transportation businesses to keep up with changes that might affect or influence the port industry.

In the field of international transportation and logistics, the wave of information technology (IT) is rapidly and deeply changing port cargo distribution and port industry, boosting efficiency and regional and national economic development.

The impact of IT on port cargo distribution shall be analysed under the point of view of:

a) the *manufacturers*: in the era of global logistics, supply chains tend to be longer, thinner and broader, yet the minimization of the supply chain lead-time has been a must for companies like Toyota in order to optimise their global production. For example, Toyota has improved the "Just-in-Time" system through various efforts such as cross docks and parts centres;

b) the *logistics service providers*: in the internet economy the "three B's" need to be set together: Box (cargo), Bite (information) and Bucks (funding). The globalisation has led to a qualitative change of the supply chains which combine now the three B's under the catalyst of electronic commerce. Today, international logistics require smaller shipments and more frequent shipping in order to adapt to consumers' needs. Indeed, companies like UPS has weaved the commerce channels of the three B's together to enable companies to be reached into by consumers directly and with no need of establishing distribution channels and significant infrastructure like in the past;

c) the *ocean carriers*: along with the globalisation, most of the big ocean carriers like NYK Line have restructured their companies and management into being a globally integrated logistics service providers offering integrated solutions to their customers by combining sea, air and land services into one.

In the era of global logistics and information technology, ports are facing dynamic developments and related industries have to develop their own individual strategies in order to remain key players in the global transportation chain: in the port sector, investments in IT and human resources are becoming today more important than those in berths and terminals construction.

Besides, security and security precautions must be incorporated into IT development: security in ports is very important, yet difficult today, as no one can stop the movement of containers

and cargo into ports. However, after September 11th the security environment in the USA has dramatically changed, seriously influencing the export/import business throughout the world. Therefore, measures like scanning technologies are going to become more and more important together with the use of electronic seals on containers.

In the panel discussion, four IT experts presented their line of business and introduced their sophisticated, state-of-the-art technologies which are impacting the port business today: Mr. John Cushing presented his company's product called "eModal", which was launched in 2000 and is today used in 46 marine terminals (including Pier VII of the Port of Trieste) in 16 ports in the U.S., Europe and Central America; Mr. Robert Yap Min Choy introduced "PORTNET", also established in 2000 to provide a platform for web-based global container business; Mr. Cor Schagen shared the experience of the Port of Rotterdam, which has opted for "Connekt", a knowledge centre for traffic and transport; and finally Mr. Rudy Martens who explained the advantages and the disadvantages of "making" your own IT system for cargo terminals using state-of-the-art development tools and "buying" an existing package doing some minor adaptations to make it fit.

In conclusion, the IT revolution has dynamised the port cargo business: up-to-date software is needed to optimise operations such as vessel loading, yard planning, equipment flow, gate handling, administration and invoicing and it is also essential for vessel tracking, electronic declaration of cargo and passengers and as a communication platform to all port users.