

2016-06-16

PRESS RELEASE

Economic importance of the Belgian ports: Flemish maritime ports, Liège port complex and the port of Brussels - Report 2014

by George van Gastel

NBB Working Paper No 299 - Document Series

Every year the National Bank of Belgium publishes an update of the study on the economic importance of the Flemish maritime ports - Antwerp, Ghent, Ostend and Zeebrugge - the Liège port complex and the port of Brussels.

Each port's contribution to the national economy is estimated by examining the economic, social and financial situation of the port over the period 2009-2014. The three principal variables considered are value added, employment and investment. This study also highlights the indirect effects regarding value added and employment, as well as the main social balance sheet data. The analysis of the financial results is based on the study of the return on equity, liquidity and solvency ratios and the financial health model developed by the Bank.

The traffic growth recorded in 2013 continued strongly in 2014 (+2.7 %). Those increases are due solely to developments in the port of Antwerp. In all other ports, traffic declined, though in Ghent and Zeebrugge the decrease was modest overall.

Despite the declining traffic in the port of Ghent, that port together with the port of Antwerp represented the driving force behind the growth of **value added** (respectively +4.9 % and 1.4 %). In the port of Zeebrugge, the maritime cluster also saw an increase in value added, but in the overall figures that was negated by the departure of one industrial company from the electronics branch. In the port of Ostend, growth figures were generally positive except for trade. In recent years the ports of Liège and Brussels have suffered significant falls. Restructuring in certain industrial sectors (including the steel industry) is a factor here. In regard to indirect value added, the downward trend which had begun in 2010 was reversed (+2.2 %).

In contrast to value added, direct **employment** in the Belgian ports declined by 1.5 %, maintaining the downward trend of recent years. Only the ports of Ghent and Ostend have managed to stabilise or improve their employment level since 2009. The steepest falls were recorded in Zeebrugge and Liège. As already mentioned, in Zeebrugge that was due mainly to the departure of an industrial company from the electronics branch. In the maritime cluster, employment actually expanded. In Liège, as in the case of value added, employment pursued a predominantly downward trend in both clusters owing to the metalworking industry. Total indirect employment has displayed a downward trend since 2011. Although that fall can be attributed to developments in various branches, it is the metalworking industry that has had a particularly adverse impact on indirect employment.

Taking all ports together, **investment** was up by more than 25 %, but that increase is due solely to developments in most of the Flemish ports. Owing to the highly volatile nature of investment expenditure, the figures need to be interpreted with caution.

Ports		Value added (current prices)		Employment		Investment (current prices)		Cargo traffic	
		€ million	Change 2013-2014 (in p.c.)	FTE	Change 2013-2014 (in p.c.)	€ million	Change 2013-2014 (in p.c.)	x 1,000 tonnes	Change 2013-2014 (in p.c.)
ANTWERP	Direct	9,923.8	+ 1.4	60,586	- 1.2	3,229.0	+ 37.0		
	Indirect	9,035.7	+ 2.7	82,068	- 0.7				
	TOTAL	18,959.5	+ 2.0	142,654	- 0.9	3,229.0	+ 37.0	199,012	+ 4.2
GHENT	Direct	3,575.4	+ 4.9	27,602	+ 0.6	403.6	- 4.3		
	Indirect	3,898.2	+ 6.8	34,443	+ 0.4				
	TOTAL	7,473.6	+ 5.9	62,044	+ 0.5	403.6	- 4.3	25,889	- 0.3
OSTEND	Direct	492.4	+ 1.4	4,957	- 1.7	118.9	+ 56.1		
	Indirect	355.2	- 0.4	4,275	- 0.4				
	TOTAL	847.6	+ 0.7	9,232	- 1.1	118.9	+ 56.1	1,431	- 21.3
ZEEBRUGGE	Direct	935.8	- 4.5	9,365	- 3.7	220.1	+ 0.2		
	Indirect	767.4	- 2.6	10,192	- 0.8				
	TOTAL	1,703.2	- 3.7	19,557	- 2.2	220.1	+ 0.2	42,548	- 0.7
FLEMISH	Direct	14,927.4	+ 1.9	102,510	- 1.0	3,971.6	+ 29.2		
MARITIME	Indirect	13,040.2	+ 3.0	123,917	- 0.5				
PORTS	TOTAL	27,967.6	+ 2.4	226,427	- 0.7	3,971.6	+ 29.2	268,880	+ 2.8
LIÈGE	Direct	1,130.9	- 5.9	8,165	- 7.9	195.7	- 8.4		
	Indirect	1,186.0	- 7.8	11,773	- 8.2				
	TOTAL	2,316.9	- 6.9	19,937	- 8.1	195.7	- 8.4	15,001	+ 0.4
BRUSSELS	Direct	473.8	- 2.2	4,032	- 1.3	53.0	- 22.6		
	Indirect	342.2	- 3.4	3,706	- 3.8				
	TOTAL	816.0	- 2.7	7,738	- 2.5	53.0	- 22.6	4,439	+ 2.7
BELGIAN	Direct	16,532.0	+ 1.2	114,706	- 1.5	4,220.3	+ 25.7		
PORTS	Indirect	14,089.9	+ 2.2	135,736	- 1.1				
	TOTAL	30,622.0	+ 1.6	250,442	- 1.3	4,220.3	+ 25.7	288,320	+ 2.7

Source: NBB (calculations based on the Belgian accounts filed with the Central Balance Sheet Office, and the Belgian IOTs). For ports with economic linkages between them, a portion of the indirect effect calculated by port is cancelled out when the calculation is done at a more aggregate level, i.e. for a group of ports. The sum of the indirect effects by port is thus greater than the total indirect effects calculated for the ports as a whole.