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PRESS RELEASE

BPA calls for trade facilitation to be central pillar of Brexit agreement

Responding to the UK Government's Article 50 notification the British Ports Association's Chief Executive, Richard Ballantyne, said:

"As the UK moves towards beginning negotiations on the terms of Brexit, it is vital that trade facilitation is given the highest priority.

Ports provide vital economic gateways and from the point of view of trade and freight flows, probably the lead concern from the ports sector is facilitation, with potential major challenges dealing with HGVs on Ro-Ro and ferry routes."

Currently freight on Ro-Ro routes, (which exclusively serves EU routes) is not subject to the customs declaration requirements. The short, efficient and 'turn up and go' nature of the haulage industry means that unlike other parts of the maritime sector (such as bulk and deep sea), ferry operators and freight hauliers do not have easily available load details. Ports are by their nature are bottlenecks so any customs requirements or checks at the border could easily lead to costly delays for freight operators.

Specifically on Roll-on Roll-off/ferry port operations Mr Ballantyne continued:

"Through extensive stakeholder consultation undertaken since the Referendum, the UK Government fully understands the challenges and potential costs which could be created if frontier controls are reintroduced at the UK's Ro-Ro ferry ports.

The Government has it in its power to design a customs strategy which does not make declarations a condition of entry at port gates or require high numbers of checks on European routes."

The UK Government will of course need to negotiate a deal which satisfies all European member states but the UK's closest geographical neighbours in Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Spain will have a vested interest in ensuring that potential border requirements and that checks at ports do not cause to congestion and transport delays.

Mr Ballantyne added:

"The British Ports Association has held useful discussions with ports in neighbour EU states and also constructive briefings with the Belgium and French Ambassadors who have been very receptive to understanding the challenges."

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The BPA Chief Executive also highlighted that Brexit is not only about trade:

"There could be extensive changes in terms of the regulatory framework under which ports operate, spanning transport, environment, planning, maritime, fisheries and a range of other policy areas."

There are of course a number of opportunities and the BPA has already put a marker down with Ministers to consider a new 'Port Zones' concept which could see ports classified as areas for economic growth with streamlined planning arrangements and reduced restrictive conditions.

Mr Ballantyne added:

"Infrastructure investment and hinterland port connectivity will be options for the Government post-Brexit and the UK ports industry is well placed to provide the vital international gateways for goods, passengers and economic growth".

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General notes

- The BPA is not a political body and did not take a view in the run up to the referendum.
- The British Ports Association represents the interests of 100 port members, covering over 350 ports, terminal operators and port facilities
- The UK ports industry plays a fundamentally important role in the country's economy. 96% of the UK's international trade – imports and exports – is carried through UK ports which also handle 60 million passenger journeys each year
- UK ports directly employ around 120,000 people,
- The UK port industry is the second largest in Europe, handling almost 500 million tonnes of freight each year

Contact the BPA

If you would like any more information on the above briefing or to discuss any of the issues raised please contact:

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