
Slowdown signs - Rotterdam and Antwerp throughput hit

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It is reported that the global slowdown in shipping has hit two of Europe's leading ports. Both the Dutch port of Rotterdam and the Belgian port of Antwerp have recorded sharp year on year falls in cargo throughput in 2009.

Provisional figures from the Port of Rotterdam Authority show that the port's overall throughput volumes fell by 8.5% YoY in 2009 to 385 million tonnes. Imports shrank by 13% YoY to 272 million tonnes, while exports increased by 5% YoY to 113 million tonnes.

Bulk was 29% down on the previous year and general cargo fell by 9%. Trade in agri bulk shrank 22%, ores and scrap throughput dropped 47%, coal slumped by 12% and other dry bulk throughput was 13% lower than in 2008.

Crude oil trans shipment also fell by 6% and other liquid bulk was 16% lower. Roll on roll off was 11% down, other general cargo 16% down. Container volumes fell by 6%, but actual units declined by 10% to 9.8 million twenty foot equivalent units. Only the handling of mineral oil products showed a positive trend, actually achieving the biggest absolute increase ever. A 13 million tonnes increase saw overall throughput rise 23% from 2008.

Mr Hans Smits CEO of Port of Rotterdam Authority said that "Considering the circumstances, we cannot be dissatisfied. After hitting rock bottom in the second quarter, throughput has been improving slightly every month and virtually all the investments are going ahead. Moreover, Rotterdam is doing better than its main rivals."

He added that "But I am not unconcerned. Many of our clients are having a difficult time and that will not be much different in 2010. The best medicine for this is growth, partly through an increase in our market shares. We therefore intend to continue with our active commercial policy."

According to preliminary figures from the Belgian port of Antwerp, total trans shipments fell by 31.5 million tonnes to 158 million tonnes in 2009, a near 20% decline from 2008.

The Antwerp Port Authority said in a press release that "After seven record years in a row the port of Antwerp experienced a drop in freight volume due to the economic recession."

Antwerp's container volumes stabilised after the first quarter, with the final figure being estimated at 87 million tonnes, down 14.1% from 2008.

Reports said that Antwerp, Europe's second-largest container port, lost business to Rotterdam.

The Port of Antwerp said that "There was a significant shift in trade in this segment in particular, with shipping companies cutting entire loops and using fewer and, above all, larger vessels. Rotterdam is almost never skipped by Asian traffic, while Hamburg has the advantage of housing 80% of European head offices of shipping companies."

(Sourced from www.bunkerworld.com)

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