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Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas
on behalf of the European Commission
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The Commission recognises the importance of EU ports as hubs for global trade. When EU resources support third-country ports, this is creating new opportunities and markets, ensuring their development is aligned with EU interests, rather than leaving these opportunities to other players like China, the Middle East or the United States.

Economic development in North Africa contributes to job creation and regional stability, indirectly supporting EU economic security.

Investments are embedded in a broader strategy aimed at sustainable growth, climate resilience and convergence with EU standards. This can open investment opportunities for EU firms supporting EU jobs and indirectly supporting EU economic security.

The Commission closely monitors these investments to ensure coherence with EU industrial policy and competitiveness of EU ports.

In this context, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank (EIB) invest resources in line with their mandates, which include furthering global investment and cooperation and supporting developing countries. EU companies can apply for such funding, and many port authorities have received EIB loans, including in Spain (e.g. Malaga in 2024).

The EU Ports Strategy¹ has a strong focus on strengthening the competitiveness of EU ports and addresses the need to consider the impact on their competitiveness when deciding on the allocation of resources from EU or Member States budgets to third countries.

The risk of evasion from Emissions Trading System (ETS) or Fuel EU rules is being monitored by the Commission². The upcoming ETS review will also assess what other measures may be taken in this regard³.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - EU Ports Strategy, COM/2026/112 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52026DC0112>.

² The first report on the implementation of ETS in maritime transport of March 2025 covered the potential risk of evasion, including diversion of transshipment activity from EU to neighbouring non-EU ports. It did not identify evasive behaviour attributable to the implementation of EU rules. The Commission welcomes similar efforts by Member States, in particular Spain's ETS observatory, set up by Puertos del Estado.

³ The ETS Directive (Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 2003 establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC, as amended, consolidated version available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02003L0087-20240301>) and FuelEU Maritime Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2023/1805 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 September 2023 on the use of renewable and low-carbon fuels in maritime transport, and amending Directive 2009/16/EC, available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2023/1805/oj/eng>) address the potential risk of evasion in transshipment activity, by providing for the identification of neighbouring ports where stops by container ships are not counted as the start or end of an in-scope voyage. Tanger Med (Morocco) and East Port Said (Egypt) have been designated as such ports. The list will be updated regularly.

EU State aid rules allow Member States to support ports under the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)⁴, provided the applicable conditions are met. Projects non eligible under GBER can be notified to the Commission for State aid assessment.

⁴ Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, as amended, consolidated version accessible at : <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02014R0651-20230701>.