

## Asiatic Container-Transshipment-Base in Timbaki? Important information

Dear fellow residents and holidaymakers in the Timbaki region, dear friends of Crete,

Greece is aiming to become the largest centre for container transshipment in the Mediterranean. To this end, it is trying to find investors in order to renovate old ports, build new ones and manage all of them. To date, China Shipping, Cosco, Dubai Ports World (DPW) and Hanshin (Korea) have noted their interest.

**The construction of a new container transshipment hub is now being planned on Crete. For Greece, this is a matter of political reputation, and the geographically suitable Bay of Mesara and Timbaki are in danger of falling victim, mainly to foreign investors. On 1 September 2006, an agreement was signed by the Greek and Korean governments with the aim of undertaking viability studies and planning the project. The new port is expected to be the size of Piraeus for ships of up to 10,000 TEU <sup>1</sup> and for 1-2 million containers per annum.**

A container transshipment port is not like other merchant or tourist ports, open to everyone and raising revenue for the community. Instead, it is a hub where containers from the large container ships are transferred onto smaller “feeder” boats. It is a free merchant zone where ships will dock for a few hours only. For investors and managers of the port this means big business and profits, as the holding company will charge up to €130.00 per container load. In 2004, Cosco increased its takings by 80% <sup>2</sup>. However, investors and management are not interested in the development of the area surrounding the port. The creation of relevant infrastructure does not fall to the investors but to the host country, Greece. Container ports are operated according to the “landlord model” where the host country only makes the site available to investors.

<b>A container transshipment investors base would not result in revenue and development for the Cretan population.</b>
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The official promises are, however:

- Economic and cultural development, including new roads, schools, hospitals etc;
- Investment in the area by large companies; and
- several thousands of new jobs.

### **But what would really happen?**

- Contemporary Container terminals are fully automated. There will be only very few new jobs – and only for highly specialised workers. Rotterdam, one of the largest container ports in the world, employed 10,000 people 50 years ago. Today this number is much reduced: three specialists run the technical central unit of the port, and 6-8 workers are necessary for the transfer of containers from a ship of 8,000 TEU. According to 2 Mill container/year there will be at the most 80 portworking places.
- It is doubtful whether even the construction of a new port will bring jobs to the area. Prefabricated units for the port can be delivered via containers and specialists are needed for their assembly.
- Investment by large companies and the creation of new factories is being promised. But Greece is not a cheap labour country, which means that local workers are too expensive for large companies.
- Korea has expressed interest in extra land for factory buildings. However, the Koreans are most likely either to bring their own workers with them or to employ even cheaper labour from other countries. Instead of new jobs for the region, this would mean new problems! The Italian city of Prato, formerly textile capital of Italy, is a sad example: Chinese workers have taken over the production of textiles at €2.50 per hour, 14-16 hours a day. And “Chinatown” is growing!<sup>3</sup>
- **BUT: with the construction and management of a large container transshipment port, tourism will decline and vanish. Over time, the existing jobs in the tourist industry in the Timbaki region will be lost and, in particular, many jobs for women will disappear forever!**

<sup>1</sup> TEU = standard container size: Twenty feet Equivalent Unit

<sup>2</sup> source: DIE ZEIT, number 51, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Der Spiegel, 36, 2006

Furthermore, a general decline in tourism-related jobs in the whole of southern Crete is to be expected and such a development would be irreversible.

**The promises that circulate in the newspapers and non-official speeches are simply empty propaganda. They cannot be kept!**

**Other economic arguments against the container port are:**

- **Such a port would not be Greece's "gateway to the south", instead, it would be China's or Asia's "gateway to Europe" – a base for Asian commerce.**
- **The container boom is dependent on many factors, most notably price of oil. This boom could be over in 10-20 years and Crete would be left with the monstrous ruins of a port and a financially ruined south.**
- A port would not even lead to an advantage for the transport of the agricultural products of the region. Transport by ship would take too long. Also, the annual produce of the region is not enough to warrant the reactivation of the former military airport. In general, it would be too expensive to transfer goods from containers onto planes: 1kg of shipping freight costs €0.10 while 1kg of air freight costs €1.40. Nobody would consider such high freight costs; therefore an airport would be useless.
- **But tourism and income from it would come to an end in large areas of southern Crete. For ever.**

**Ecological arguments against the port are equally obvious:**

- **Water pollution on an unprecedented scale** (due to continuous dredging of the shipping lanes, since the current water depth near Timbaki is nowhere near the necessary depth for large freighters), as well as **pollution with tar, oil and sewage**, would render the quality of the water unsuitable for **fishing** and bathing.
- Disruption and destruction of the nesting beach of Kommos, one of the largest nesting areas for loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) in Crete, and more generally, destruction of the marine fauna and flora along the coast near Timbaki and further afield.
- High use of drinking water and increasing problems with sewage and waste in the area.
- **Container ships in particular are polluters of the worst kind:** they burn sulphur-rich heavy oil and the chimney fumes are rich in sulphur dioxide and soot. This leads to significant pollution of the air near the port, increased cloud formation and acid rain, which can worsen the olive oils quality. Ships are not subject to environmental and chimney-filter laws.<sup>4</sup>
- The heavy oil usage of a container ship is equivalent to the amount of oil on a tanker.
- The electricity usage of a container port is enormous. Current capacity in the region is not enough. Investors might build their own power plant, leading to additional pollution.
- Risk of a greater ecological disaster from accidents (oils spills, no access to what the containers have can mean that even nuclear waste can be carried)

**The area of Timbaki represents the rich cultural history of Crete. The world-famous excavations in the region would be in danger of being destroyed by acid rain. Container ports and cultural wasteland go hand-in-hand. The environmental costs are going to be paid by the region and these costs are going to be higher than any benefits.**

**Most importantly, there will be a drastic decrease in quality of life for all villages in the area and their inhabitants:**

- The regional markets will be swamped by cheap products from the Far East, leading to a serious decline in local businesses.
- Security in the villages around the port can become an issue, as crime and prostitution will spread in the area.
- A container port would be incredibly noisy. Heavy containers will be bumping against each other continuously and the noise – similar to that of an explosion in a quarry – will still be heard from a distance of 10 km. Also, the constant use of cranes and other heavy vehicles will cause noise pollution around the clock.

<sup>4</sup> DIE ZEIT Nr.35 24.08.2006, S. 27 "Schwefel" v. Hans Schuh

- The use of floodlights is normal for container ports and will illuminate the region of Timbaki day and night.
- **For years during the constructing period, the landscape (better environment?) will be blighted with its dust, noise and dirt, and later with soot-polluted fumes.**
- Without its individual, family-based, eco- and people-friendly tourism, the region around Timbaki, the little villages, restaurants, tavernas, guesthouses and rooms for rent will decline and wither away. Without any guests and holidaymakers, there will be less interest in the upkeep and conservation of the area, too.
- **Holidaymakers who came to the south of Crete for its beauty and its individual touristic qualities will no longer come once a container port is being built. Thousands of signatures against the port project are proof of that. Who in their right mind would want to spend their holidays next to a container port and, possibly, an airport?**

**The only winners of a container port are: foreign investors and management companies that stand to gain huge profits; decision makers within Greece who stand to gain personal and/or political advantages; and a few landowners in the area.**

**The alternative:**

The alternative lies in the conservation, increase and further improvement of the current quality-based tourism. Mass tourism with its "all inclusive" or "luxury" uniformity is every where, but such kind of tourism is by no competition. The whole island of Corsica, as now a model of very successful individual tourism, or Milia, in Chania prefecture, or most parts of the South Coast of Crete are proof that such development strategies work! Political and governmental support as well as better controls of cost/benefit ratios and environmental care would create trust and keep attractiveness on. This would be a much more sensible use of the €3 billion loan from the European Investment Bank. With improved work structures and care for the environment (e.g. through recycling) a lot of new jobs could be created.

The beginning agricultural changes towards eco-friendly production and, therefore, higher quality foods could be another possibility of economic development, as could be the use of the still-available rich fishing grounds near the coast.

Then, tourism in southern Crete could stand out as the **jewel in the crown of tourism on Crete**, leading to ever-higher international demand and high stability. This would be far more appropriate in view of the beauty of the area and its significant cultural traditions than a gigantic monster of a port could ever be.

And it would lead to a better reputation for Greece, Crete and the region of Timbaki!

The citizens' initiative against a transshipment Port in Timbaki says:

**NO! OXI!**

And we need your help!

If you would like to do something against the Container Transshipment Project, please sign the petition available via the web address below and forward the address to all your friends, acquaintances and colleagues:

International version

<http://www.petitiononline.com/forcrete/petition.html>

and/or Greek version

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/168535142>

Thank you!

For more information

<http://www.no-container-port-in-timbaki.net>