2018-10-08

PRESS RELEASE

The economic importance of the Belgian ports - Flash estimate 2017

VALUE ADDED IN THE BELGIAN PORTS RISES WITH 7 % IN 2017

Brussels, 8 October 2018 - Value added generated by the Belgian ports increased by just over 7 % in 2017, thanks to a sharp rise of almost 10 % registered in the non-maritime cluster. This strong growth was evident in all the ports, except for the Liège port complex.

To meet the demand for rapidly available indicators signalling developments in value added and employment at Belgian ports, the National Bank of Belgium has since 2006 published a yearly flash estimate.

The figures for 2017 are estimates produced by means of statistical techniques – pending the final figures to be published in the working paper within a few months.

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TABLE 1 DIRECT VALUE ADDED AT FLEMISH PORTS, THE LIEGE PORT COMPLEX AND THE PORT OF BRUSSELS

(millions of euros - current prices)

	Maritime cluster[1]		Non-maritime cluster		**Total**	
	2016 *	*2017 e*	2016 *	*2017 e*	**2016 ***	***2017 e***
Antwerp	3,665	*3,609*	7,136	*7,858*	**10,802**	***11,468***
Ghent	333	*352*	3,599	*4,032*	**3,932**	***4,384***
Ostend	174	*164*	332	*361*	**506**	***525***
Zeebrugge	590	*598*	419	*453*	**1,010**	***1,051***
Liège port complex	27	*28*	1,143	*1,112*	**1,170**	***1,139***
Brussels	22	*23*	697	*835*	**719**	***858***
DIRECT VALUE ADDED	4,812	*4,775*	13,325	*14,651*	**18,137**	***19,426***

Source: NBB.

TABLE 2 DIRECT EMPLOYMENT AT FLEMISH PORTS, THE LIEGE PORT COMPLEX AND THE PORT OF BRUSSELS

(full-time equivalents)

	Maritime cluster		Non-maritime cluster		**Total**	
	2016 *	*2017 e*	2016 *	*2017 e*	**2016 ***	***2017 e***
Antwerp	27,612	*28,607*	33,341	*33,815*	**60,953**	***62,421***
Ghent	2,836	*3,004*	25,178	*25,286*	**28,013**	***28,290***
Ostend	1,815	*1,799*	3,113	*3,078*	**4,928**	***4,877***
Zeebrugge	6,127	*6,261*	3,492	*3,436*	**9,620**	***9,698***
Liège port complex	318	*339*	7,502	*7,496*	**7,820**	***7,834***
Brussels	372	*333*	3,657	*3,598*	**4,030**	***3,931***
DIRECT EMPLOYMENT	39,081	*40,343*	76,283	*76,708*	**115,363**	***117,051***

Source: NBB.

e = estimates

* the minor differences compared with the figures previously published are due to additional improvements.

[1] Two clusters are considered: the maritime cluster and the non-maritime cluster. The maritime cluster, which includes branches of the ports themselves, and whose existence is essential to them (management and maintenance, shipping, transhipment, affreightment, storage, dredging, fishing, maritime services, etc.). The segments that do not have an immediate economic link with port activity which exhibit a close interdependence with it are known as "non-maritime" and include the segments of industry, wholesale trade, transport and logistic services.

Value added

Value added generated by the Belgian ports increased by just over 7 % in 2017, thanks to a sharp rise of almost 10 % registered in the non-maritime cluster. This strong growth was evident in all the ports, except for the Liège port complex.

There was an increase of more than 10% in Ghent's metalworking industry and a growth rate as high as 20 % was even recorded in the other logistic services branch in Brussels. However, it should be noted that these last two exceptionally high percentages are due to the small number of large international enterprises located in the port zones in question. In the port of Antwerp, the chemicals sector, which had contracted in 2016, picked up again last year. This branch of activity pushed up value added in the non-maritime cluster by more than 10 %, even exceeding the figures for 2015. The increase in value added in the port of Zeebrugge is principally attributable to developments in the non-maritime branches of road transport, trade and energy. Value added in the port of Ostend firmed up on the whole but, because of the drop in the port construction and dredging sector, the maritime cluster posted a decline. The fall in the value added in the Liège port complex is largely down to one big energy sector company and it was too much to be offset by the slight improvement recorded in the maritime cluster.

Employment

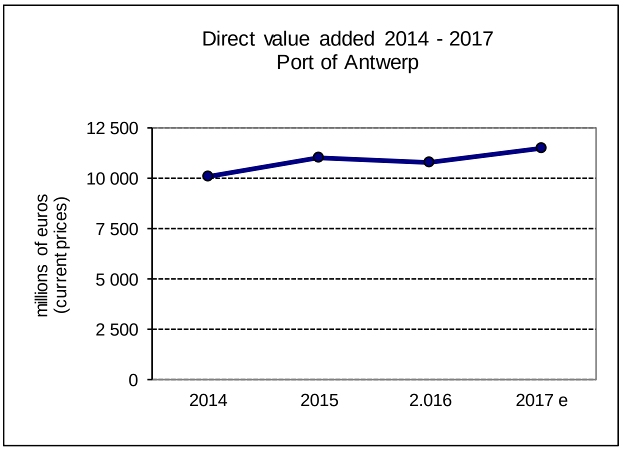
The downward trend in employment that has been observed over the last few years in the Belgian ports seems to have been halted in the ports of Ghent, Antwerp and Liège, especially in the maritime sectors. Total employment in the port of Zeebrugge has also improved, but the downward tendency has nevertheless continued there in the non-maritime cluster owing to job cuts in the trade sector. The port of Antwerp registered the biggest upturn in employment in the maritime sector of cargo handling. The highest rise in percentage terms was observed in the cargo handlers, shipping agents and forwarders sectors in the ports of Ghent and Liège. The Brussels port is the only one to have suffered a reduction in jobs, of around 10 %, in the maritime sectors, due to the closure or relocation of several firms in the shipping agents and forwarders, and cargo handlers' sectors. The limited number of job losses in the port of Ostend is mainly attributable to the public sector and fisheries, as well as some smaller-scale non-maritime sectors.

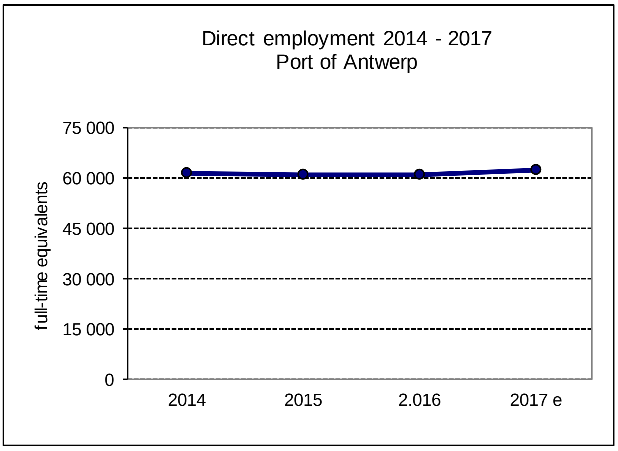
Cargo traffic

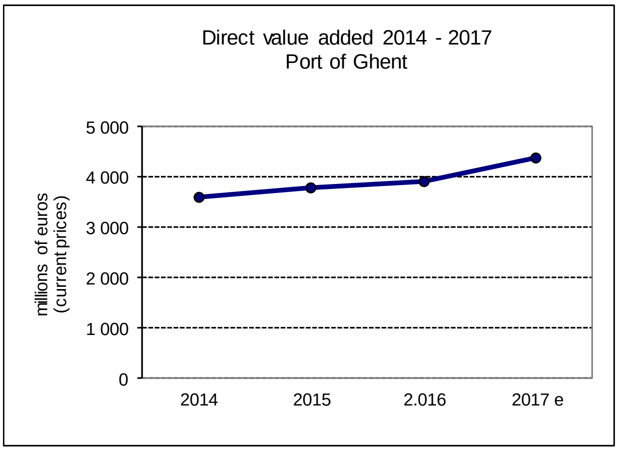
Goods traffic grew by 4.3 % in 2017. The port of Ghent recorded a very strong growth rate of more than 10 % for the second year in a row, while growth at its Brussels counterpart also increased significantly. The ports of Antwerp and Liège once again enjoyed growth of around 4 %, while Zeebrugge, like last year, saw traffic fall back by 2 %. Ostend brings up the rear, with a decline of more than 6 %, due to weaker liquid bulk figures. It is worth noting that the expansion of liquid bulk cargo in Antwerp mainly concerns petroleum and chemical products, while the contraction in all the other Flemish ports can be explained by lower transshipments of bulk cargoes of fruit juice. In Zeebrugge's case, this reduction is notably to do with a slowdown in liquid natural gas transshipments. The port of Ghent is the only one where transshipment of dry bulk cargo has expanded, and by almost 19 % too. Container transshipment grew by roughly 5 % in the three biggest Flemish ports (there has been no transshipment of containers at Ostend since 2008). The port of Zeebrugge has managed to partly reverse the downward trend of the last two years.

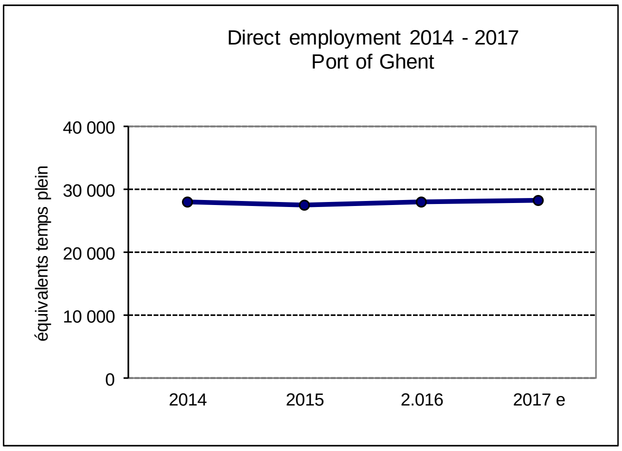
Impact Brexit

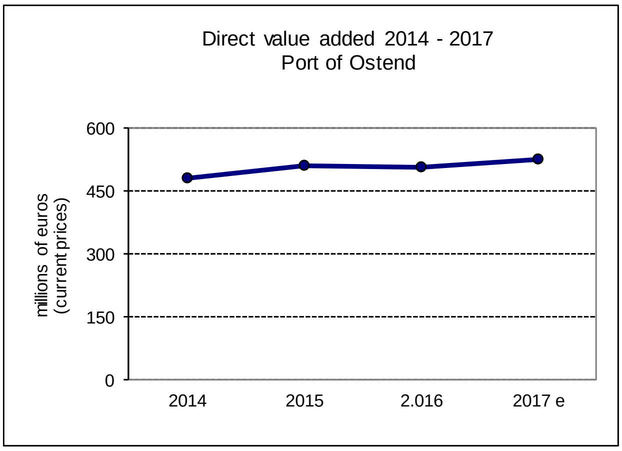
Economic developments in this port in 2017 have no doubt already been affected by negative fallout from the long-drawn-out and difficult negotiations on Brexit. Zeebrugge is actually *the* port *par excellence* for traffic to and from the UK. This awkward political situation is creating uncertainty in trade relations to the detriment of economic growth.

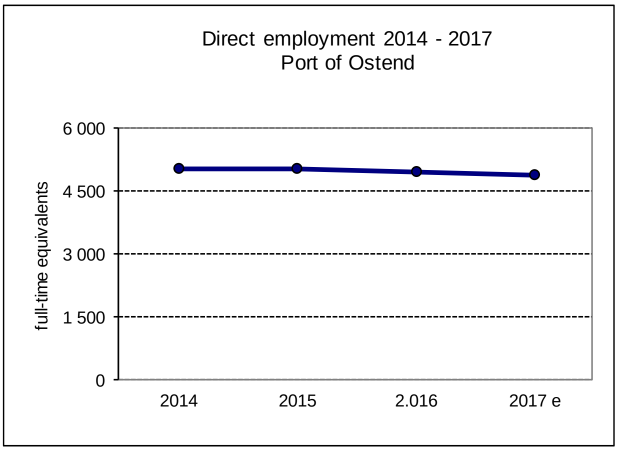

Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Port of Antwerp
millions of euros (current prices)
12 500
10 000
7 500
5 000
2 500
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

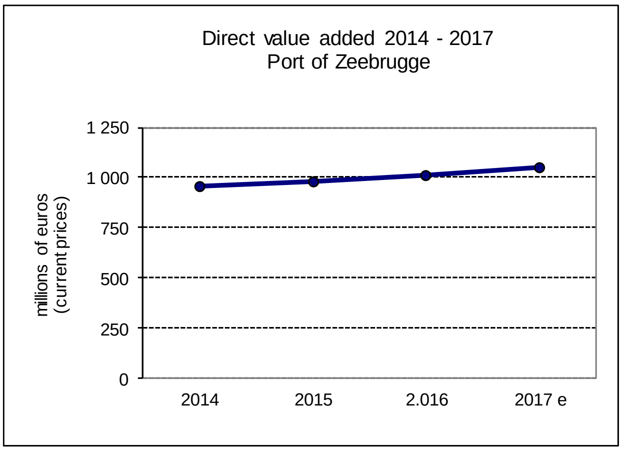

Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Port of Antwerp
full-time equivalents
75 000
60 000
45 000
30 000
15 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

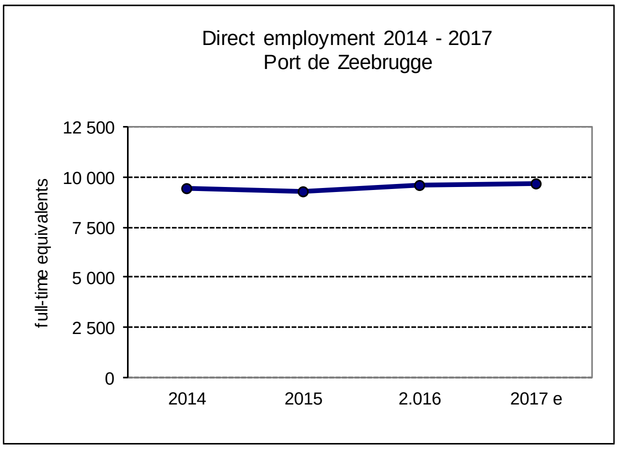

Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Port of Ghent
millions of euros (current prices)
5 000
4 000
3 000
2 000
1 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

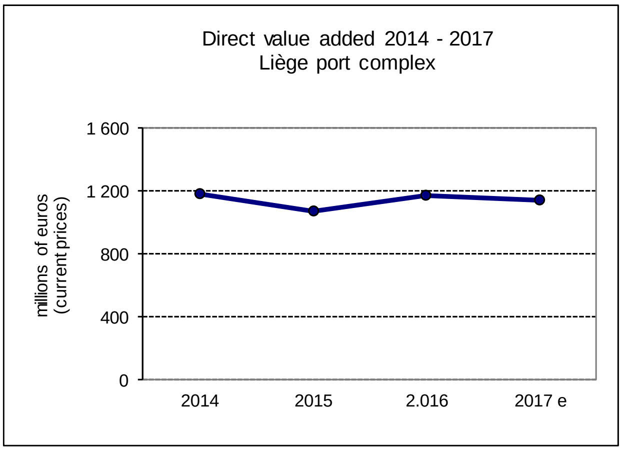

Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Port of Ghent
équivalents temps plein
40 000
30 000
20 000
10 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

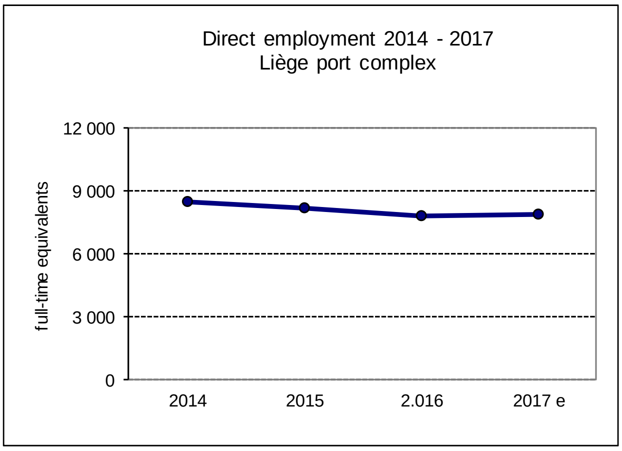

Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Port of Ostend
millions of euros (current prices)
600
450
300
150
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

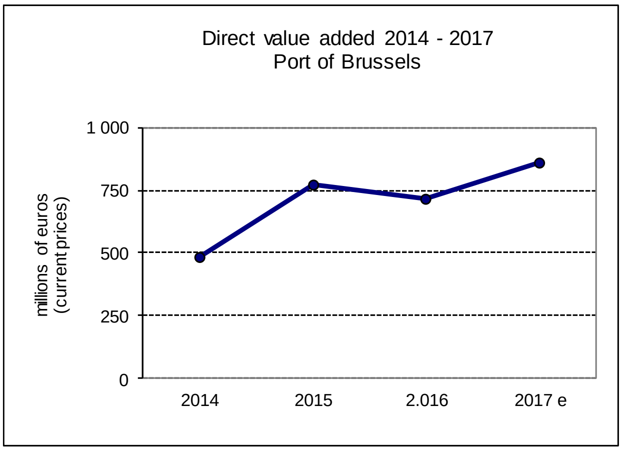

Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Port of Ostend
full-time equivalents
6 000
4 500
3 000
1 500
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

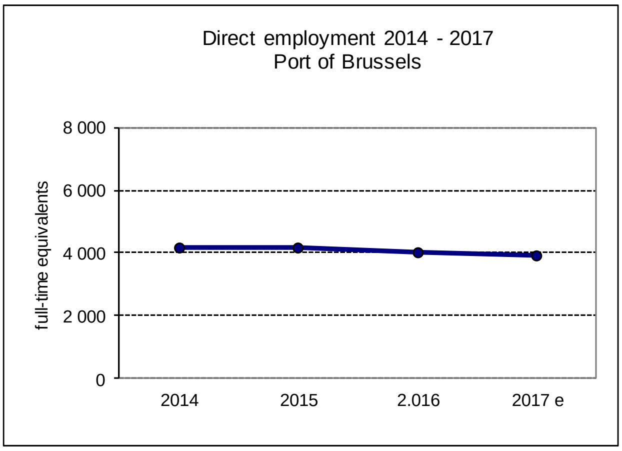

Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Port of Zeebrugge
millions of euros (current prices)
1 250
1 000
750
500
250
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

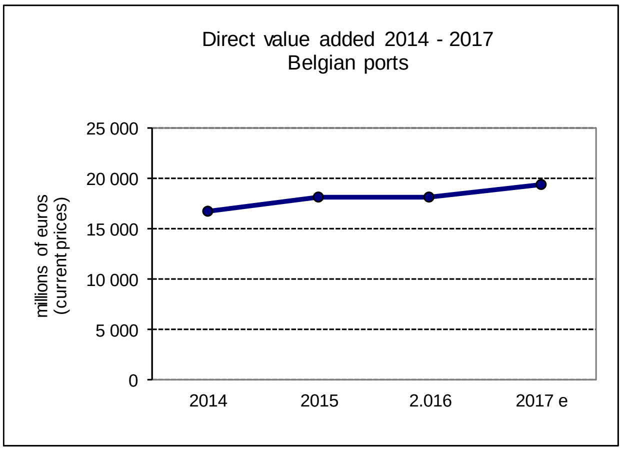

Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Port de Zeebrugge
full-time equivalents
12 500
10 000
7 500
5 000
2 500
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e


Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Liège port complex
millions of euros (current prices)
1 600
1 200
800
400
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e


Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Liège port complex
full-time equivalents
12 000
9 000
6 000
3 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e


Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Port of Brussels
millions of euros (current prices)
1 000
750
500
250
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e


Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Port of Brussels
full-time equivalents
8 000
6 000
4 000
2 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e


Direct value added 2014 - 2017
Belgian ports
millions of euros (current prices)
25 000
20 000
15 000
10 000
5 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

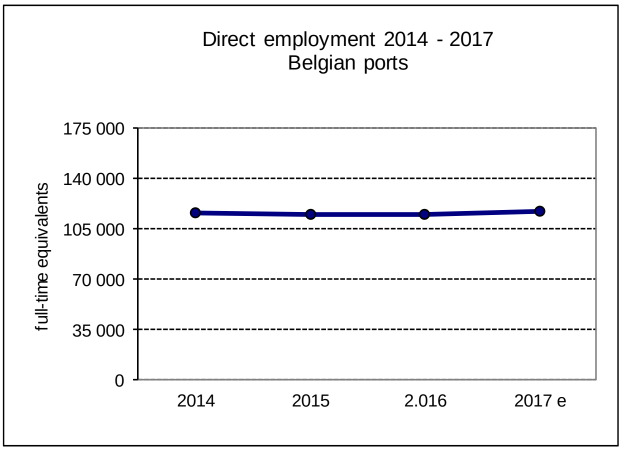

Direct employment 2014 - 2017
Belgian ports
full-time equivalents
175 000
140 000
105 000
70 000
35 000
0
2014
2015
2.016
2017 e

TABLE 3 CARGO TRAFFIC IN THE BELGIAN PORTS

(in thousands of tonnes; change is expressed as a percentage)

	Antwerp		Ghent		Ostend		Zeebrugge		**Flemish ports**		**Change from**
	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	2016	2017	**2016**	**2017**	**2016 - 2017**
Containers	117,910	122,969	133	138	0	0	14,445	15,379	132,488	138,486	+4.5
Roll-on/roll-off	4,573	5,053	2,114	2,355	0	0	14,352	14,963	21,039	22,371	+6.3
Conventional general cargo	9,804	10,273	3,701	3,608	29	34	1,496	1,326	15,030	15,241	+1.4
Liquid bulk	69,215	73,168	5,429	5,335	91	29	6,032	4,134	80,767	82,666	+2.4
Dry bulk	12,642	12,192	17,733	21,073	1,344	1,311	1,488	1,312	33,207	35,888	+8.1
CARGO TRAFFIC	**214,144**	**223,655**	**29,110**	**32,509**	**1,464**	**1,374**	**37,813**	**37,114**	**282,531**	**294,652**	**+4.3**
Change from 2016 to 2017		+4.4		+11.7		-6.1		-1.8		+4.3	

Liège	15,462	15,941	+3.1
Brussels	4,456	4,848	+8.8
Belgian ports	**302,449**	**315,442**	**+4.3**

Source: Port authorities, Flemish Port Commission.

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