

Targeted review of the General Block Exemption Regulation (State aid): extension to national funds combined with certain Union programmes

The Bulgarian Ports Infrastructure Company (BPICo) is the managing body of the ports in Bulgaria, manages the port infrastructure of the national public transport ports and provides traffic management and shipping information services.

1) BPICo supports and welcomes the proposal by the European Commission to extend the application of the GBER to national funds combined with InvestEU, Horizon Europe, and European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) projects. As in the consultation document stipulated, combined public funding of national and Union centrally managed resources, can contribute to improving the European competitiveness. The Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) is the essential means for ports development projects and for meeting the TEN-T objectives. Funds under CEF are also centrally managed by INEA. BPICo strongly believes that the extending application of GBER should cover also national funds granted to projects under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

The combination of funds will contribute to reduce the administrative burden for port infrastructure development and to shorten timeframes for project implementation.

2) The selection procedure of a TEN-T project application for CEF funding is currently a separate procedure from the process of state aid notification. In order to ensure efficient use of the grants in accordance with the applicable requirements of the GBER a harmonised and transparent evaluation method should be applied. In the context of GBER BPICo supports that the financial contribution made by Member States as co-funding to an approved CEF project should be considered compatible with the internal market and exempted from the notification requirement.

In addition, the notification process for projects that could be considered to receive funding eligible according to the state aid rules should be streamlined and simplified. Currently projects supported by CEF still have to justify its compliance with state aid rules leading to more notifications being required.