

## The Port of Vaasa

# The Bothnian shortcut



Photo: The Port of Vaasa

**Where the northernmost arm of the Baltic Sea drives a wedge between Sweden and Finland you can find Vaasa – the port, which draws forward the shores of the Bothnian Gulf.**

**T**he Port of Vaasa belongs in its entirety to the Municipality of Vaasa. The city placed on the west coast of Finland, the regional capital of Ostrobothnia is a crossroads of two European routes. E12 begins in Norwegian Mo i Rana, run across Sweden to Umeå, then by ferry to Vaasa, from where it leads straight to Helsinki. E8 from Norwegian Tromsø to Turku in Finland follows the Bothnian coast and crosses with E12 in Vaasa. This location determines the port's offer, aiming at ro-ro and passenger transport. However, liquid and bulk cargo facilities are in the port's catalogue, too. A direct railway and its closeness to the city's airport makes the Port of Vaasa an intermodal junction, playing an important role in the region.

### The conditions and infrastructure

Two fairways, with a draught of 9 m enter the Port of Vaasa. They join south of the Vaasa Lighthouse, however the northern fairway passes to the north of Swedish Norrskär to Umeå. Ice occurs between January and April. There is no tide in the port, but the water level varies between +110 cm and -60 cm depending on the weather conditions. The gross under-keel clearance is 0.9 m in the harbour basin and at

the piers, where the allowed draught is maximum 9 m. Speaking of the harbour, the port has seven quays and one pier, with a joint length of 1,343 m. There are three ro-ro passenger harbour quays, an oil quay with three oil discharging arms, a coal quay with a conveyor belt for discharging coal, Lasse's quay with two shore cranes lifting 5 tons each, the Southern pier with the same type of crane and Rein's quay. What is more, the coal transshipment capacity is 1 200 tons per hour and the oil refuelling capacity is 1,000 tons per hour. Apart from the three, mentioned above, 5-ton shore cranes, the port disposes numerous mobile cargo handling facilities, which can cope with any kind of general and bulk cargo. In the near future the Port of Vaasa is going to invest in a new crane with a lift capacity of 300 tons per hour. The port owns 15 warehouses with 40,000 m<sup>2</sup> of total storage space, which are in majority leased to Blomberg Stevedoring company. There are also oil and gas leasehold facilities by Shell, Esso and Teboil.

### On the way to Sweden

Vaasa is one of the fastest ways to or from Sweden, if you don't want to go round the Gulf of Bothnia. Furthermore, it is located only 100 km away from Umeå. A ferry operated by RG Line shuttles once a day from Monday to Friday

and twice on Sundays. However, the cruise lasts 2.5 hours, which is a significant savings of time, money and the environment. The line serves 70,000 passengers, 13,500 trucks and 300,000 tons of cargo per year. It is only a part of the total cargo turnover, which last year came to 1.4m tons. As such a small port, Vaasa is managing quite well. In the difficult year of 2008 it generated a profit of EUR 800,000, with a total turnover of EUR 2.7 mln. Also in 2008 the port was visited by 554 vessels, of which four of them were cruisers. In spite of the fact that the Port of Vaasa by itself employs only 13 people, it works very efficiently. Its main operator, Blomberg provides all standard operations for cargo and ships. In November 2009 the Port of Vaasa is going to see a change in its director's seat. Mr. Teijo Seppelin will take the place of Mr. Lars Holmqvist.

Considering the potential and importance for the region, the port and the city of Vaasa could become a solid span of the "Bothnian bridge". Thanks to this shortcut many passengers and cargo can be transported in an ecological way. However, when thinking like an economist we cannot forget about the environment, which in the Gulf of Bothnia retains an almost virgin condition. ■

*Bartłomiej Hapka*

After the BPO meeting in Aarhus

# The recession is over but still a long way home

**Although the Baltic area is heavily affected by the downturn, positive signs for the Baltic Sea region have shyly begun to appear. More than 80 delegates debated on how the global economic slow-down can impact shipping and ports sectors. They met at the 12<sup>th</sup> Baltic Ports Conference that was held on 3-4<sup>th</sup> September, 2009 in Aarhus, Denmark.**



**T**he event was organized by the Baltic Ports Organization in cooperation with Port of Aarhus which was the host of the event. The official opening of the conference was made by the host Bjarne Mathiesen, Director of Port of Aarhus and Julian Skelnik, the BPO Chairman. Among other opening speakers were Nicolai Wammen, Mayor of the City of Aarhus and Victor Schoenmakers, ESPO Chairman who focused on the co-operation between ESPO and BPO. He underlined that BPO is the only port organization that has Russian ports as members.

## Day one. Situation in the Baltic ports

The conference began with a discussion about the perspectives for the Baltic Sea Ports for 2010 and the current economic downturn and its impact. Antti Saurama from the Centre of Maritime Studies presented the latest Baltic Port Barometer report, whose survey was conducted both by CMS and BPO. It univocally shows that there are some positive signs for Baltic ports that shyly appear, but there is still a slow recovery ahead. The majority of the ports expect that

in 2010 there will be a strong or some growth in cargo volumes. The highest increase in 2010 is expected in the containers segment.

Helge Pedersen, Chief Economist at Nordea Bank agreed that slightly better times are coming for ports. This assumption comes from the fact that the manufacturing sector is improving: the PMI factor is increasing in the US, Eurozone and Japan and there are the first signs that world trade has started to recover. Helge Pedersen explained that "the recession is over, but still a long way home." One of the main risks that will appear is the government debt problems. Another one is increasing unemployment that may cause lower consumption. Commodity prices are also an area of concern.

Philip Damas from Drewry stated that shipping companies, shippers, forwarders and ports have conflicting short-term goals during the recession. He also said that the second stage of the recession and recovery will lead to a more structural approach to cost actions. Port statuses are changing. Ports are no longer just a modal transfer point, they use more and more logistics potentials – he concluded. Staffan Herlin from Finnlines explained that

unitised cargo modes increase and combined intermodal transports will gain more and more foothold. He also added that volumes will concentrate on HUB-ports with good and diverse connections to production and market areas.

## Day two. What about the containers?

The second day of the conference raised the deep crisis subject in the container shipping industry. As the Baltic area is heavily affected by the downturn, the future for the Baltic hub is still uncertain. To leave it all behind a network must constantly be maintained and expanded and commercial feeders need to show flexibility in cooperation options. Jesper Kristensen, CEO of Unifeeder, explained that "Baltic ports must realize that the visions for a hub in the Baltic has de facto been postponed."

The activities, which are more and more attractive for the ports, are placing ports in the logistics chain of windmills. "It is a new, niche segment for the port business but has a very high potential for development," said Army Pedersen from Siemens Wind Power.

## Old and new

During the General Assembly of BPO Julian Skelnik was re-elected as the BPO Chairman. Additionally, there were minor changes in the BPO Board panel – Christel Wiman left the Board leaving the place for Mr. Henrik Widerstahl, vice-managing director at Ports of Stockholm. Moreover, a new BPO strategy was approved. The new strategy focuses on the initiatives promoting the "Baltic maritime highway" as the way to move cargo and passengers to/from the world through the Baltic ports. BPO should support entrepreneurs, ideas, visions, and initiatives that contribute to the overall transport developments in the Baltic Sea region; promote environmental management in the ports and take an active role in international dialogues when the environment is concerned. BPO will support and take an initiative in research and science that would lead to a better understanding of the transport sector in the region, to study future challenges.

The next BPO assembly will take place in Tallinn on 9-10 September 2010.

*Marta Friedrichowicz*