

**Question for written answer E-014146/2013
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Setting up special economic zones for maritime transshipment

The current economic and financial crisis is severely hampering the EU's ability to sustain its competitiveness in a number of key sectors. Owing to its globalised and volatile nature, maritime transshipment is among the sectors that have been most affected.

In addition, the favourable commercial conditions at north African ports are dramatically increasing the risk of European ports becoming marginalised, especially those in the Mediterranean that are geographically more exposed to competition from non-EU ports. Today, a significant percentage of goods entering the EU is transhipped via non-EU ports in the Mediterranean, and this trend is expected to continue to grow, especially given that, recently, the size of ships has constantly been on the increase. The security of goods supply to EU countries, moreover, is being put at risk by a dangerous dependence on non-EU hub ports.

For this reason it is necessary to increase the overall standard of EU ports to match that of non-EU ports by creating 'special economic zones', a tool that has proven to be most effective in boosting non-EU transshipment ports and their related logistics and industrial areas.

This initiative implemented outside the EU has improved competitiveness, created tax advantages for companies attracted by the smaller administrative burden, enhanced the business environment and created jobs by attracting foreign investment for innovative, high-technology activities.

As per the joint answer given by Mr Rehn on behalf of the Commission on 11 December 2012, special economic zones (SEZs) can be established on the territory of Member States, and undertakings located therein can receive support, e.g. for new investment, as long as it is granted in line with EU rules, including state aid rules.

1. Given that the Commission is reviewing experience gained with the use of SEZs, does the Commission intend to promote SEZs as a tool and advise the Member States on how to establish SEZs in their territories?
2. What practical steps is the Commission willing to take in order to overcome marginalisation with regard to transshipment? Is the Commission aiming to take any relevant initiatives? Could the Commission provide detailed information on any initiatives that have already been taken for this purpose?
3. Does the Commission share the view that locating SEZs in Mediterranean transshipment hubs would have the double benefit of safeguarding the European supply chain and protecting existing jobs in EU transshipment ports, at the same time creating new jobs in the industrial and logistics zones of regions suffering as a result of high unemployment rates?