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MARITIME TRADE IN FRANCE: OPENING FRENCH PORTS TO FOREIGN OPERATORS

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Photo 1: Invest in France logo

Chicago, January 9, 2009 (word count: 419)

France, with a long maritime tradition thanks to its extensive coastlines along the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea and the Mediterranean, is now reforming its ports for added economic attractiveness and competitiveness.

Currently, 72% of France's imports and exports are transported by sea. Handling a volume of 384.7 million tons annually (including 101.6 Mt for the ports of Le Havre and Rouen together, 100 Mt for the port in Marseille), France's leading ports are second only to European heavyweights Rotterdam (430 Mt), Antwerp (200 Mt) and Hamburg (140 Mt), and offer great development potential.

Sea links, as well as recently established inter-European cabotage links, have contributed to the growth opportunities offered by French ports. Leading French shipping companies operating in these ports include Cetrappa, Marfret, Socatra, Bourbon, Louis Dreyfus, Geogas, Compagnie Maritime Nantaise.

The ports of Le Havre (Port 2000 Le Havre) and Marseille (Fos 2 XL Marseille) have already made strategic investments in response to recent developments in maritime trade (i.e. the transportation of bulk raw materials such as coal and iron ore, the widespread use of container transportation and concentration of traffic within leading ports). As a result, these ports have become the main interface between maritime and ground transportation systems (i.e. railway, road and river transportation).

The French government plans to modernize the country's ports and allow companies to make better and more frequent use of them. A law was passed on July 4, 2008 to streamline port organization and implement an ambitious economic development strategy. The law opens up port concessions, enabling port management and development to now be entrusted to private operators or new partnerships between public- and private-sector agents. The staff involved in

cargo-handling and equipment activities will now also be managed by private-sector operators, including operators from foreign countries. A number of private and foreign operators are already present in port, shipping and delivery services in France, including Prologis, Gazeley, Daher, Katoen Natie, SDV, DHL, Schenker and Dresser.

According to Olivier Cormier, President of Invest in France Agency, North America: “The government wants to reinforce the competitiveness and productivity of French ports. This means active significant investments (€445 million budgeted up to 2013) and private operators to increase average annual traffic from 3.5 to 10 million containers by 2015.”

Invest in France Agency (IFA) promotes and facilitates international investment in France. The IFA network operates worldwide. IFA works in partnership with regional development agencies to offer international investors business opportunities and customized services all over France. For more information, please visit www.investinfrance.org.

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