

The Port of Torre Annunziata

Interview with
the General Manager of SOLACEM
Giuseppe Rocco

When talking about ports, usually one lingers on the territory where the port authority is located, failing to analyze in depth the surrounding and smaller ports which are nevertheless important on a strategic and economic point of view. One of these realities is the third port of Campania, the Port of Torre Annunziata, which is also internationally oriented. This and other topics were discussed with **Giuseppe Rocco, General Manager of SOLACEM SpA**, a company of integrated port logistics, operating since 1967 in the port of Torre Annunziata, more specifically in the fields of debarking operations, the handling of cereals and flours and of their distribution in the south of Italy and in the Mediterranean in general.

Can you describe the reality of the port of Torre Annunziata in terms of orientation, volume of traffic, main services and infrastructure?

The tradition of the Port of Torre Annunziata, over a century old, is tied to cereals (even prior to the construction of the Solacem silos which dates back to 1967, the traffic of cereals was meant for the flour milling of Campania). From 1986, this traditional activity was joined by the petrochemical sector of the Isecold SpA and by the general cargo sector of the Seaport Srl. Basically, the port is equipped for all types of bulks, solid and liquid, as well as for the loading and unloading of break-bulk cargo such as aluminum, wood, iron and steel. Despite the years of crisis, the volumes of traffic handled in the port are on average, around 7/800,000 tonnes per year

(3/400,000 of cereals and flours, 300,000 of diesel, 100,000 miscellaneous goods) and the 1 million tonnes goal appears very likely in the next few years.

The port features 3 quays, one of which is exclusively used for the petrochemical traffic, which allows the mooring of 5 medium sized ships. The versatility of the port management allowed the mooring of over 100 ships over the last year, despite the limited diurnal access and the seabed which is not sufficiently deep (max 8,50 m) to moor larger ships.

What are the main routes and the types of goods which are shipped to/from the port?

The success of a port mainly depends on the ability to create logistics centers which work as attractors for the whole territory. Solacem SpA, for example, which is the sole and exclusive manager of the Molo di Levante in the port of Torre Annunziata, is able to concentrate in the port significant amounts of goods thanks to its professional, effective and efficient managing of the services.

Solacem principally deals with medium distance transport, that is to say that the ships' routes are within the Mediterranean and they mostly transport grain products but also receive goods from the USA, Canada and South America.

From your website one understands that traffic is developing and that important investments are currently being made. Can you illustrate what the investments are and what impact will they have on infrastructures?

Despite the unfavorable economic situation, since 2010 the partners of Solacem, with great foresight, made significant investment in highly innovative projects to renovate the reinforced concrete silos and for the complete automation of the debarking and warehouse filling process.

In this regard, Solacem's silos can be defined as "the newest and most modern silos of Italy". The market showed appreciation for the level of efficiency reached by our terminal and to date, the most important multinationals in the sector are amongst our best clients.

Let's talk about Italy in general and of its port economy. What is needed to foster the development of Italian ports, both on a strategic and regulatory point of view?

Red tape and bureaucracy are the real great problems which are a nip in the bud of even the best initiatives. Despite substantial private investment made by Solacem over the last few years, the port keeps suffering from many limitations due to the silting of the seabed and the lack of an adequate road/railway system.

Fortunately, after years of passiveness, Campania regional authority financed an ambitious project of the Municipality of Torre Annunziata for the redevelopment of the port and its surrounding areas which includes the dredging of the seabed and the completion of the motorway link between the port and the A3/A30 motorways. We hope work will start soon and won't suffer further delays which would be fatal for the economy of the entire harbor.

What about shipping? What are the most urgent problems to be solved and, in particular, what does Italy lack compared to other competitor countries?

I believe it lacks a real awareness of the importance of our geographical position. I always hear that we define our country as the European logistics platform on the Mediterranean, but the reality is that we are stuck compared to other countries like Greece, Egypt and the countries of North Africa which realized cyclopean infrastructures which cut us off from the Far East and transoceanic routes.

Once again, the excessive bureaucracy and the myriad of constraints which afflict us prevent our ports from fully succeeding.

Returning to our territory, how can the port of Torre Annunziata foster the growth of the operators and Campania's logistics system? What's the strategic factor which favors it compared to others: position, quality of services, number of operators, infrastructure?

Great traffic attractors include the presence of some reserved structures such as the silos and the flat warehouse with over 80,000 tonnes of capacity for grains and flours, the coastal oil deposit linked to an exclusive mooring through an underwater pipeline, the availability of more than 500m quays, and large open yard for storage are undoubtedly. However, I also believe that our attention for customers' needs, our competence and managerial approach are our real trump cards.

With regards to the projects, what is your opinion on the growth prospects in the port of Naples (considered as the complex of ports under the authority's jurisdiction)? How can the larger port integrate and complete the surrounding ports?

It is evident that, especially in Campania, there is a lack of coordination amongst the public bodies that manage the ports. The two main ports of Campania should be handled as a unique port which could then be integrated with the other regional ports and which would detect the peculiarities and highlight the specializations of each port, avoiding extreme competition and not favoring any of the ports, circumstance which leads, in the long run, to the loss of profitable traffic.

What are the most ambitious projects and objectives in the short, medium and long run?

To consolidate and reinforce the current traffic is the real priority. The strategic plans of all the port's companies include investment projects to boost the deposits and increase the unloading of equipment. But all of them depend on authorizations and permissions to be given and, especially, by the realization of public works, like dredging and road link, without which any hypothesis of further development would fail. Once completed the road link works one could think to the expansion of the range of the Ro-Ro traffic, and the freight/passenger traffic to and from the major islands and North Africa. Let us not forget that historically the port of Oplontis (the ancient Torre Annunziata) was the port of Pompei.