

CATALONIA'S MARITIME FAÇADE



THE SEA ROUTES OFF THE COASTS OF CATALONIA, THE PAÍS VALENCIÀ AND THE BALEARICS ARE NOT LIMITED EXCLUSIVELY TO THE MEDITERRANEAN MARKET, BUT GO ON TO REACH MARKETS IN THE FARTHEST CORNERS OF THE EARTH.

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The imports that characterize Catalonia's maritime façade consist of petroleum products unloaded at the port of Tarragona, in whose hinterland there is a considerable petro-chemical industry, with the subsequent range of subsidiary industries, as well as the Repsol refinery, while Barcelona is the most important port in Spain for the importation of liquefied natural gas.

Coal, soya-bean and wheat are also typical imports. The first is used as a source of energy, especially for the cement industry and the power stations of Aragon, and the soya-bean is used in the manufacture of flour and soya oil for distribution to the animal-feed industry and for the re-exportation of its derivatives.

Exports are far more closely tied to the industrial activity described above. Thus there are the petroleum products that are refined and transformed by the petrochemical industry; cement from the cement factories along the Catalan coast and potash from the mines at Súria and Sallent.

Finally, the products making up the bulk of the operations, including goods that are characteristic of both external and coastal trade, are building materials, machinery and accessories, motor-cars and wine.

As regards the most characteristic cargoes on the coast of the País Valencià, we find the crude oil imports destined for the Petromed refinery at Castelló, from where, once refined, it is once again distributed by sea, adding to coastal trade. There is also an important traffic in raw materials as a result of the recently created fertilizer factory at Sagunt. Similarly, imports of wood, cereals and soya-bean constitute a form of trade which is closely tied to the kind of industrial and commercial activity to be found in the area.

The goods exported by sea from the coast of the País Valencià consist of products from the fertilizer factory at



Sagunt, salt from Torrevieja and Portland cement from the factory at Valencia. Tiles, preserves, cereals and flour are further products linked to the area's economic activity.

Petroleum products, iron and steel products, cement, tiles, fruit and vegetables are also important elements in coastal trade.

Maritime trade around the Balearics is largely coastal and consists mainly of supplies from the Peninsula.

This trade has also increased considerably since the sixties. This is connected with the peak in external trade from the ports of the País Valencià and Catalonia, which has favoured the transformation and redistribution of products, since one of the destinations is the provisioning of the Balearics.

The principal cargoes in this coastal trade consist of petroleum products, building materials, motor cars, industrial vehicles and food products. Imports of minerals from the Republic of South Africa have also given rise to considerable traffic over the last year.

So far we have looked at the commercial activity of the ports along the coasts of Catalonia, the País Valencià and the

Balearics, relating the maritime trade to the activities of the hinterland. Let us now see what this maritime trade represents in the international context –that is, what commercial routes determine its foreland.

The maritime routes cover the whole of the planet and trade during 1989 represented 25 % of all Spanish exterior trade and 29 % of maritime trade.

In the context of Spanish maritime trade, exchanges with the areas of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caspian and North Africa register a higher level of traffic than Spanish external trade. This is due to the growing importance of through trade –in other words, although goods are loaded or unloaded in this area, this does not mean that their destination or point of origin is necessarily local, since they continue via land connections or by sea, so that their foreland is even larger than is shown by the port statistics.

As regards the exterior markets, there are two peculiarities that characterize the maritime routes from Catalonia, the País Valencià and the Balearics. The main trade routes in terms of volume are not limited exclusively to the Mediterranean market, but go on to reach markets in the farthest corners of the earth, as in the case of the route to North-America and Mexico, which ranks first in the list. The routes that can be considered the most important in terms of their share of the market, as opposed to volume, are those corresponding to South-East Asia and the Far East, on which trade from ports in the Països Catalans accounts for 57 % and 51 %, respectively, of the total for the whole of Spain.

We have attempted here to provide a view of the basic function of the Mediterranean ports, a function centred on the continued creation of civilization, a form of coexistence which has arisen as the antithesis of historical naval conquests. All we ask is that this be continued in the future. ●