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Port Traffic: The Impact of the Health Crisis Is Offset Thanks to the Resilience of Nantes – Saint Nazaire Port Professionals

In 2020, the overall traffic volume at the Port of Nantes – Saint Nazaire amounts to 28 million tonnes (MT). This figure is down 8.8 % compared to 2019, whereas all of France’s major seaports taken together recorded a 15 % decline in traffic volume as of the end of November. The mobilization of all the port professionals and the implementation of a business continuity plan in the spring of 2020 served to alleviate the effects of this unprecedented health and economic crisis.

For the third year in succession, natural gas traffic reaches a record level (8.8 MT), driven by the dynamism of the worldwide LNG market and the attractive price of gas. 21 transshipment operations were carried out for consignments of gas arriving from Yamal, in Siberia. The level of activity at the LNG terminal was particularly strong in the final quarter, being marked by the reception of Q-Flex and Q-Max vessels measuring 345 metres in length, the largest LNG carriers in the world.

A direct consequence of the health crisis and lockdown measures, the drastic reduction in fuel consumption resulted in a slowdown in refining activities. The economic slump compelled the Total Group to temporarily suspend production at the refining units of the Donges oil refinery as of the end of November. Imports of crude oil therefore saw a sharp fall compared to the previous year (5.9 MT, down 24 %), as did refined petroleum product exports (3 MT, down 22 %). Imports of refined petroleum products progressed, rebalancing volumes in the national market (1.6 MT, up 18 %).

Subsequent to the announcement that the facility is to close in a few years’ time, the EDF thermal power station at Cordemais was not very much in demand. The level of supplies of coal was therefore low (0.2 MT). Previously, this traffic area regularly approached a volume of 1.5 to 2 MT.

Bulk agri-food products are up by 15 %. Imports of dry bulk products used in animal feed continued their progression in 2020 (2.1 MT, up 11 %). The multi-bulk terminal was in particularly high demand during the first phase of the health crisis. This situation results in part from an increased requirement for proteins from animal feed manufacturers during the first lockdown, so as to build up stocks and to meet the needs of livestock farmers. Grain and cereals traffic amounts to 0.8 MT (up 21 %). The Loire Estuary silos saw intense activity in the first half of the year. The volumes were mainly driven by strong demand from North African countries fearing supply chain disruptions owing to the health crisis. The poor weather conditions impacted the 2020 harvest and brought an end to the positive export dynamic as of July.

After a year of contrasts, the main bulk products destined for the construction sector decrease somewhat (down 7 %). The interruption of work on building and civil engineering projects in the spring was followed by a strong upturn in June. Marine sand traffic stands at 1.2 MT (down 7 %). Imports of clinker, the raw material used to manufacture cement, stabilize at 0.3 MT. Exports of recycled scrap metal post a slight

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downturn after the temporary shutdown of the crushing and grinding facilities located close to the port activity zone, followed by a moderate recovery (0.4 Mt, down 7 %).

Having experienced strong growth over the previous five years, activity at the ro-ro terminal saw a pause in its progression in 2020 (0.4 MT, down 29 %), with the automotive and aeronautical sectors having been particularly affected by the health situation. The shutdown of vehicle production plants and the closure of dealerships led shipping lines to suspend their maritime links for several weeks. Following a six-week-long interruption, the Montoir de Bretagne – Vigo service handling imports of vehicles manufactured by the PSA Group and operated by the Suardiaz shipping line resumed progressively, returning to three calls per week as of the month of June. The downturn in activity experienced by the Airbus Group forced the LD Seaplane shipping line to reorganize its services, with only two vessels being utilized as opposed to the usual five.

The traffic level at the Montoir de Bretagne container terminal ends the year at 1.6 MT (153 000 TEUs), which represents a 10 % decrease compared to 2019. The rebound observed in the second half of the year was not enough to make up for the disruption earlier in the year, when numerous port calls were cancelled. Imports fall by 10 % and exports are down by 7 %.