PORT ENGINEERING

Antwerp/Flanders Port Training Center October 30, 2009 (Final speech)

Two weeks are a small spot in a lifetime, but it does not when you cross your way with new friends and experiences; when yo do feel that this world is a nutshell. Probably all of those who have travelled long distances to reach this homefull country feel alike, no matter what is you mother toungue, religion or personal beliefths. The world is inhabitted mainly by kind people, however our differences sometimes create artificial barriers which are to be torn down through education, trade and personal contacts, to become finally friends.

And you people of Antwerp, specially from APEC, really know how to do it. Maybe centuries of history have given you the wisdom to put effort and funds to run these courses, and surely you understand how a two-weeks stay in one of the biggest ports worldwide can broaden the view of how we are doing things in our home countries. Lets see some examples.

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The problems found in the Schelde river have probably little to do with the local constrains at the port of Ashdod -an open port in the coast of Israel- but certainly Yehuda has found new ideas on how to handle some common environmental problems after the course. Eid and Mohammad are not so far from Israel, but I bet they do share similar problems in own their port Aqaba, located halfway in the road to Asia. By the way, we should congratulate Eid as he became father for seventh time while being here in Antwerp.

Celso can also tell us how important is to know about the Belgium experience in breakwaters, before going through the development of the new port in Praia, Cabo Verde. In a few years time and in just a couple of hours, he will have the chance to sail in a cargo ship from the newly constructed berth, to Banjul, where our gambian friends Jarju, Ballo and Ousainou will certainly receive him as partner.

Perhaps Karolis, Sulev and Gencho -the three mosquetiers- are not very much concerned about big waves in their ports, but do care in which infrastructure they should invest so as to improve the efficiency of their quays. Perhaps the visit to PSA (Port of Singapore Authority) was an outstanding stage in the course.

And so do our polish friends, Aleksandra and Karol -who soon will become decision makers at the large port of Gdansk- and will be eager to travel to Colombia to do some cooffee business with Humberto Bozzi, the future "bossy" of the Cartagena Port Authority. Obviously a stop in Zeebrugge will be a good oportunity to a pint of de Koeningen before travelling to southamerican lands.

Southafrica will soon be the home town of the world football championship. As expected, local newsapers must be invaded with footbal matters, but I can bet Vishaal and Denovan are much more worried, on a daily basis, on how to improve the export rates of the iron ore terminal at Saldanha, in South Africa. Since the world is nutshell as I said, we have here in Belgium one of the most prosperous steel industries worldwide and lots of things to learn on bulk terminals.

Henry, on the other hand, was delighted with the cannals we visisted in Brugge, despite their huge difference to the waterways of the strait of Malacca, between Indonesia and Malasia. From the coast of Medan -his working town- he admires the largest ships ever built navigating to the far east; ships which may once berthed in the Deuregangdok, here in Antwerp, moving thousand of TEUs in one stay.

So believe me: we are more connected than ever and less than in the incoming days. Kozeta might share this thought after working in the Cruise industry, in the Adriatic sea, before becoming en engineer director at Durres, Albania.

Liu, Mei and Chai, from the eastern cities of Wuhan and Tianjin, came here because they understand that connections are necessary. So did their ancestors, since chinese merchants have been trading for thousands of years with the western world. Their ports are focussing the attention on every single person in the world, and certainly their will to learn about occidental culture will tear down language barriers between us.

One of the things I've admired most during this short stay, is how the flemish people live among water quite naturally, making a rational use of it as it is an increasingly scarce resource. There's much to learn about you, and probably Sussana and Caroline will bring back to Nigeria a full spoon of knowledge on how to face the impacts of future developments in water pollution. Andrea, will also be concerned on these matters while planning a new facility in any of those sites along the brazilian coast, which might be one of the most beautiful pieces of coast I've ever visited.

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So madams and sirs: it's our duty, in this connected world, to give adaptative answers as responsible beings in environmental and productive matters, considering the role of our local communities and all the complexities which may arise. In doing so, we must think globally and act locally, with ethics and sensitivity; we must learn and share our knowledge; we must work as partners. This big opportunity given to us by the Antwerp/Flanders Port Training Center will certainly help us to follow this path. Therefore, I offer in the name of all my colleagues, infinite thanks to the Flemish Governement, the Antwertp port authority and specially to the APEC staff, who treated us as real VIPs (I'm certainly far from being one).

To end up, with my frien Mauricio we'd like to invite you to come to Chile, to learn about our our culture, which from now on is also yours. As a small country, we are aware that the global village is expecting some contribution from us and therefore we are eager to follow what APEC has done for us.

And to finish, I thanks to everyone of you who made this short stay in Flanders a very special one.

Shalom (Israel)
Nägemist (Estonia)
Dovijdane (Bulgaria)
Zai Gijen (China)
Selamat Berpisah (Indonesia)
Mirupafshim (Albania)

Hasta Siempre (Colombia, Chile, Cabo Verde)

Good Bye (Nigeria, Gambia)

Adeus (Brasil) Czesc (Polonia)

(Jordania) (Lituania) (Belga)

