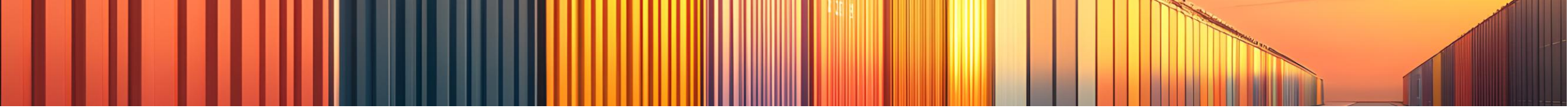
Synergies among European funds for digitalising road freight flows

Insights from ACCESSMILE, ELODIE, MERIDIAN, MILEPORT and PRESPORT projects

Trieste, 25 March 2026



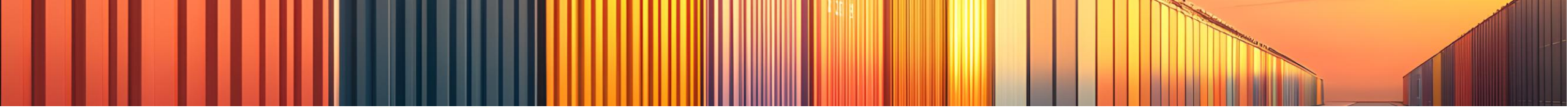
The hidden bottleneck

Freight transport is often analysed at the level of long-distance corridors, where major infrastructure investments are concentrated.

However, in operational terms, the most critical inefficiencies tend to emerge in the final kilometres before ports and terminals.

These “last mile” segments are where delays accumulate and where the overall performance of the logistics chain is ultimately determined.

→ How “last” is last mile?



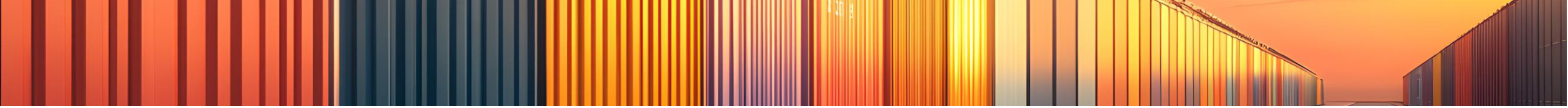
A systemic problem

The last mile is not a single infrastructure element, but a complex <u>system</u> involving multiple components and actors:

- road networks
- port gates
- terminal operations
- logistics platforms

all interact within a limited space and time frame

→ Inefficiencies arise not only from physical constraints, but from the lack of coordination between these elements.



Why trucks wait

Waiting times are often perceived as a consequence of insufficient infrastructure. In reality, they are frequently caused by:

- poor synchronisation between arrivals
- limited visibility on terminal capacity
- absence of shared information among operators.

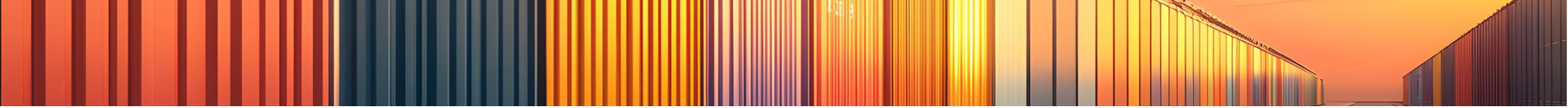
→ As a result, trucks tend to concentrate in specific time windows, creating avoidable congestion.

Impact on operations

Operational inefficiencies in the last mile generate <u>cascading effects</u> along the entire logistics chain ← because we belong to network! They:

- reduce reliability
- increase turnaround times
- create uncertainty for both transport operators and terminal managers.

→ Over time, this undermines not only the competitiveness of ports and logistics nodes, but also the catchment areas (central or peripheral) that they serve

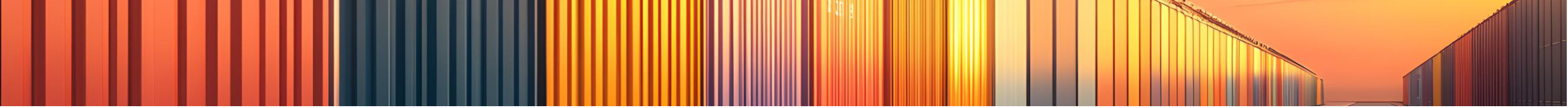


Environment impact

Congestion in port access areas has a direct environmental impact

idling vehicles and stop-and-go traffic lead to higher fuel consumption and increased emissions

in many cases, these effects are concentrated in urban or peri-urban areas, amplifying their social and environmental relevance.



The challenge for peripheral regions

The challenges of last mile accessibility are even more pronounced in peripheral and cross-border regions

infrastructure gaps, fragmented governance and the presence of multiple regulatory frameworks make coordination more difficult

without targeted action, these areas risk being marginalised within the main European transport corridors.

From infrastructure to flow management

Traditionally, the response to congestion has been to expand infrastructure capacity, but while this remains important, it is no longer sufficient.

Today, improving efficiency increasingly depends on the ability to manage transport flows dynamically, using data and digital tools.

The digital shift

Digital solutions make it possible to anticipate arrivals, distribute traffic more evenly over time and improve the interaction between actors.

By enabling better planning and real-time adjustments, these tools support a shift from reactive to proactive logistics management.

However, despite the availability of digital tools, many systems operate in isolation

Lack of interoperability and limited data sharing prevent the creation of a coherent operational picture

→ This leads to situations where individual actors optimise their processes locally, while the system as a whole remains inefficient.

The EU policy framework

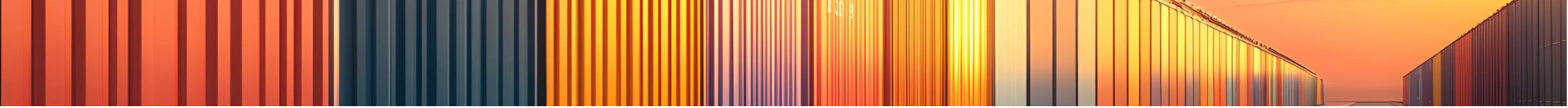
European transport policy increasingly recognises the importance of digitalisation and integration.

There is a clear shift from a focus on infrastructure alone towards a broader approach that includes data, interoperability and system-level coordination:

- the EU Ports Strategy (4 March 2026) dedicates a chapter to “Efficient and digital port operations and logistics chains”, indicating that “*B2B data exchange is fragmented and often bound to proprietary software. Better integration of systems can improve supply chain visibility without imposing centralised platforms and safeguards existing IT investments. The Commission will establish EU guidelines for efficient data sharing in the transport chain, together with actions of Member States*”

The EU policy framework

- the Work Plan of the Action Group no. 4 “Mobility” of the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) identifies as a top priority “*Smart clean logistics and policy measures in freight transport to support modal shift (rail and combined and multimodal transport)*” promoting “*(…) new potentials of innovative technologies and digitalization” including “automatisation of logistic processes, and freight*”
- the pillar no. 2 of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) identifies one of its specific objectives as “*improving the effectiveness of port infrastructure and equipment, hence the competitiveness of maritime transport services, through the interoperability of IT systems and solutions in ports including the development and/or improvement of Port Community System*”



The EU policy framework

- with the Electronic Freight Transport Information (eFTI) Regulation, the EU is moving towards a standardised digital freight ecosystem for Business to Administration processes that are expected to:
  - reduce administrative burdens for businesses and authorities by eliminating paperwork
  - enhance data security and compliance with EU and national freight transport regulations
  - facilitate seamless data exchange across transport modes and borders
  - support real-time decision-making, improving logistical planning and efficiency

As from 9 July 2027 Member States must accept digital freight transport data…

The EU policy framework

…with some challenges:

- IT System Development: Member States must invest in digital infrastructure to integrate eFTI-compliant IT platforms.
- Certification and Compliance: eFTI platforms and service providers need to undergo certification processes to meet EU standards.
- Cybersecurity and Data Protection: as digital freight data becomes the norm, robust cybersecurity measures will be necessary to protect sensitive transport information.
- Adoption by SMEs: Ensuring small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) can transition smoothly to digital systems will be crucial for widespread implementation.

➢ Need for collaboration between industry stakeholders, policymakers, and technology providers

The implementation gap

While policies provide a clear direction, their practical implementation remains challenging → bridging the gap between strategic objectives and operational reality requires testing, investment and coordination among a wide range of actors.

EU-funded projects play a crucial role in this context:

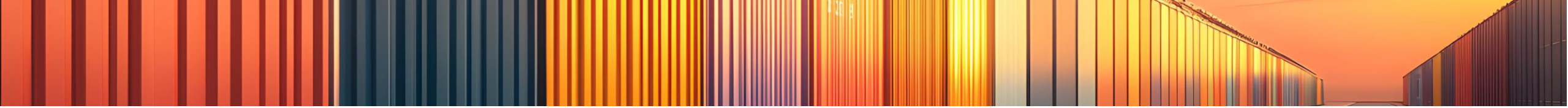
- they provide a structured environment for experimenting with new solutions, involving stakeholders and validating approaches before large-scale deployment.
- they act as a bridge between policy and implementation

From policy to implementation

Addressing the last mile challenge requires a combination of initiatives rather than a single intervention → different projects contribute to different aspects of the problem, creating a portfolio of complementary actions that, together, can generate systemic change.

The projects presented today can be seen as components of a broader system:

- ACCESSMILE focuses on coordination and governance aspects between rural and peripheral areas and the main TEN-T nodes
- MILEPORT develops and tests ICT-based solutions for traffic management.
- PRESPORT combines digitalisation and investments.
- MERIDIAN operates at corridor level.
- ELODIE represents the deployment phase at logistics node level.



ACCESMILE

ACCESSMILE – Improving last mile accessibility to TEN-T nodes

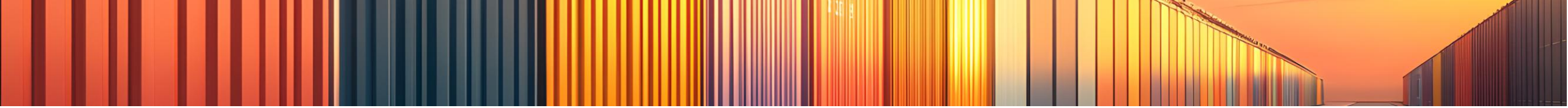
Programme: Interreg Central Europe
Duration: 04/2023 – 03/2026 (36 months)
Budget: approx. €2.2 million

ACCESSMILE addresses the structural challenges of last mile accessibility, particularly in peripheral and cross-border regions connected to the TEN-T network.
The project focuses on coordination mechanisms between local territories and major logistics nodes, where fragmentation often limits efficiency.

Through pilot actions and governance models, ACCESSMILE improves:

- synchronisation of freight flows
- cooperation between public and private actors
- integration between regional and corridor-level transport systems

Its added value lies in strengthening the connection between rural/peripheral areas and core network nodes, ensuring more balanced accessibility and reducing systemic inefficiencies.



MILEPORT

MILEPORT – Improving the last MILE accessibility of Adriatic PORTs

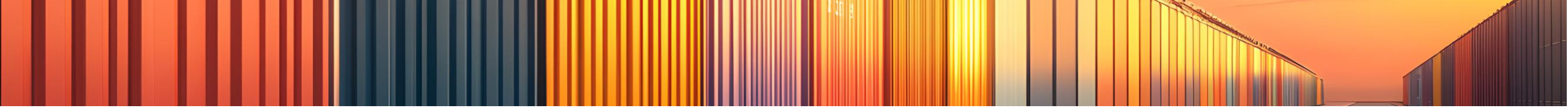
Programme: Interreg Italy-Croatia
Duration: 02/2024-01/2027 (36 months)
Budget: approx. €2.5 million

MILEPORT focuses on operational inefficiencies at port gates and access roads, where congestion and unpredictability affect the entire logistics chain.
The project develops and tests ICT-based tools to optimise the interaction between trucks, terminals and port authorities.

Key solutions include:

- vehicle booking and slot management systems
- optimisation of truck arrival patterns
- improved coordination of gate operations

Through pilot implementations in Adriatic ports, MILEPORT demonstrates how digital tools can reduce waiting times, smooth traffic peaks and enhance the reliability of port operations.



PRESPORT

PRESPORT – PRomoting grEen and Smart PORT hubs in the Adriatic Sea

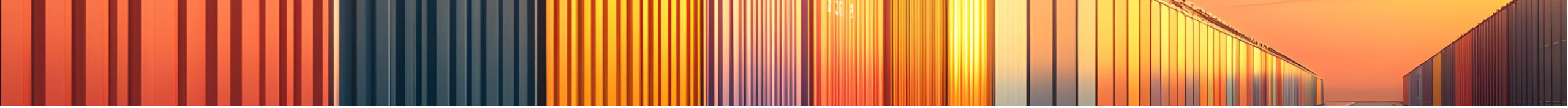
Programme: Interreg Italy-Croatia
Duration: 07/2025-12/2028 (42 months)
Budget: approx. €7 million

PRESPORT combines digitalisation with concrete investments to improve port accessibility and sustainability. Unlike purely experimental projects, it supports the deployment of technologies and infrastructure in real operational contexts.

The project contributes to:

- implementation of digital tools for traffic and terminal coordination
- investments in port equipment and smart systems
- integration of digital and physical interventions

PRESPORT shows how the twin transition (decarbonization and digitalization) can be translated into concrete actions



MERIDIAN

MERIDIAN – Managing European's busiest TEN-T corridors fostering green, digital and multimodal services

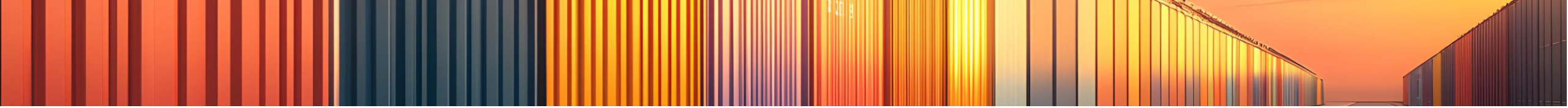
Programme: Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)
Duration: 01/2021-12/2026 (72 months)
Budget: approx. €131 million

MERIDIAN adopts a broader perspective, focusing on the integration of logistics flows along European transport corridors. The project promotes digitalisation and data exchange across nodes, rather than within individual ports.

Its objectives include:

- improving coordination between ports, terminals and hinterland networks
- enhancing data sharing along the corridor – ports, motorways, cities
- supporting more efficient and predictable freight flows

MERIDIAN highlights the importance of moving from local optimisation to corridor-level integration



ELODIE

ELODIE – European Logistic Organized Data Interchange Environment

Programme: Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)
Duration: 2024-2026
Budget: approx. €1 million

Within the ELODIE project, the Trieste Freight Village has implemented a comprehensive digitalisation process aimed at improving the management of road and intermodal freight flows. The project enabled:

- deployment of a Gate Operating System (GOS) for automated access control and vehicle identification
- integration with a Terminal Operating System (TOS) and warehouse management systems
- development of an integration layer connecting gate, terminal and logistics operations

A key achievement is the interoperability with external platforms, including:

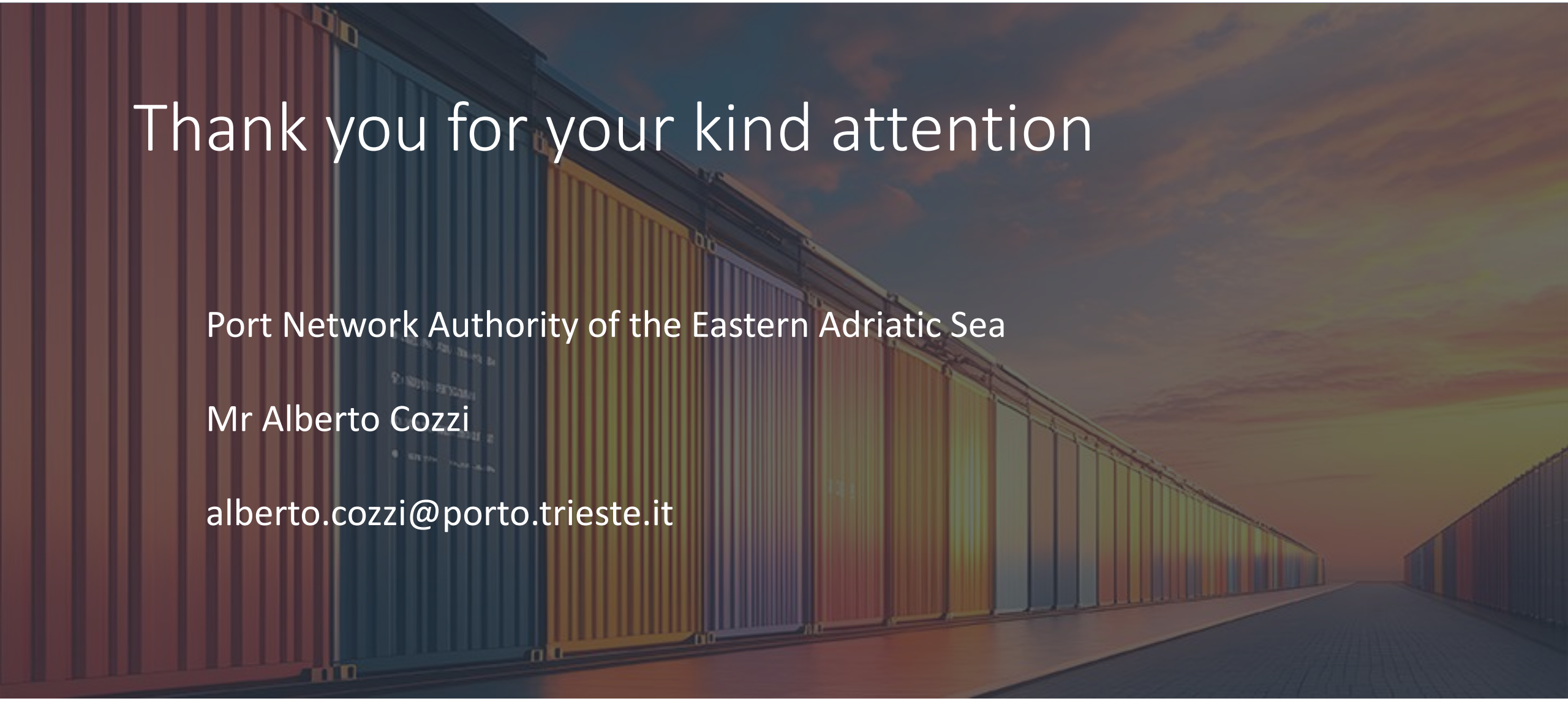
- the Port Community System (Sinfomar)
- the National Logistics Platform (PLN)
- the eFTI ecosystem for digital freight data exchange

From pilots to system integration

Taken together, these projects form a continuum that goes from coordination and experimentation to deployment and integration:

- they demonstrate how isolated initiatives can evolve into a coherent system when properly aligned;
- aligning different funding programmes can generate an impact that is significantly greater than the sum of individual initiatives;
- the combination of Interreg, CEF and RRF funding instruments enables continuity, scalability and real integration: it is not about individual projects, but about building a coherent European logistics ecosystem.

→This is essential to move from pilot solutions to systemic transformation.



Thank you for your kind attention

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