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Mersin optimistic as it attracts new service Lloyd's List, Pg 8

OVER the first seven months of this year, Mersin International Port handled around 6% fewer containers than in the corresponding period of 2008, due to the global economic downturn.

While clearly a setback for the port, these figures represent a much more robust performance in the face of the recession than other Turkish ports.

The port of Izmir has, for example, experienced a 16% downturn in container traffic over the same period while the port of Ambarli has also seen its throughput contract by more than 10% so far this year.

Since a joint venture between Singapore's PSA International and Akfen Holdings of Turkey took over the concession to run MIP in May 2007, Mersin has gained market share at the expense of other Turkish ports, especially Izmir.

In 2008, Mersin's throughput reached a new record of 868,000 teu, a 7% increase compared with 2007.

While MIP's container traffic has proved relatively resilient, its conventional non-container traffic has fared even better. Bucking the regional trend, volumes increased by around 10% between January and July this year, compared with the same months in 2008.

Prospects for the rest of the year appear relatively positive for Mersin, as three new liner shipping services have recently started calling at MIP. Maersk has commenced an additional weekly feeder service linking to the western Mediterranean, EMES has added Mersin to its service linking the eastern Mediterranean and Spain every 10 days, while UASC started its own dedicated feeder which called for the first time at MIP in late August.

MIP's ro-ro business has also recently received a boost with the start of a new weekly service operated by UN RoRo.

This operation, which commenced in April, carries road haulage vehicles between Mersin and Trieste in Italy and offers a convenient route for transit traffic to Iraq and Syria.

Over the past few years, Mersin's container traffic has benefited from increased exports of citrus fruits and vegetables from the port's hinterland. To support this trend, MIP is installing additional reefer points at the terminal to cater for the growing number of reefer containers passing through the facility.

MIP is also refurbishing two of its quayside container cranes and has eight new RTG stacking gantry cranes on order for the terminal. This follows the delivery of three mobile cranes, eight reach stackers and an empty container handler since 2006.

Looking ahead, MIP should benefit from a new highway between Mersin and Ankara that was completed in the second quarter of this year. This new road will reduce trucking time, making it more attractive for shippers from the Ankara industrial region to move cargo through the port of Mersin.

