

MARINE TRANSPORT

The marine sector offers continuing opportunities related to the rehabilitation of the existing port facilities of Barranquilla, Cartagena, Santa Marta and Buenaventura. The equipment of these facilities is becoming obsolete and a US \$60 million rehabilitation program (repeatedly delayed) has been under way since the early 1980s. In addition to civil works valued at US \$29 million and equipment valued at US \$21 million, the program seeks to decentralize and improve the Colombian port authority, Puertos de Colombia (Colpuertos). Studies were contracted on container facilities, bulk handling facilities, port operations, management, maintenance, and port expansion.

Under consideration is a container terminal at Barrancabermeja on the Magdalena River to facilitate container traffic to and from the interior.

Ecopetrol, the state oil company, exports its oil from special facilities at Coveñas on the Caribbean coast. A specialized coal export port was constructed in the early 1980s at Puerto Bolívar on the Caribbean coast to export coal from the El Cerrejón project.

The government of President Virgilio Barco (1986-90) sought to promote construction of an Interocean Land Bridge between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans near the border with Panama. Initial feasibility studies were commissioned, although the multi-billion dollar cost, unfavourable climate and instability of the Urabá region have been major considerations against this project.

KEY PLAYERS:

EMPRESA PUERTOS DE COLOMBIA (COLPUERTOS)

Colpuertos is the Colombian port authority which manages and operates five ports (Barranquilla, Buenaventura, Cartagena, Santa Marta, and Tumaco). It has been plagued by labour problems, overstaffing, inefficiency, and high tariffs that discourage potential clients. The situation had deteriorated to such an extent that more than 40 major exporters and importers in Barranquilla and Cartagena, built their own shipping terminals. Colpuertos lost US \$10 million in 1988. Although staff has been reduced from 12,000 in 1983 to 8,400 in 1989, and will be further cut to 6,000 in 1993, the government warned publicly in late 1989 that the company might be dissolved and replaced by a new entity if reform efforts prove unsuccessful.

FLOTA MERCANTE GRANCOLOMBIANA

The Flota is a regional maritime fleet originally formed by Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, and from which the latter withdrew. It is 80 percent by the Colombian National Coffee Federation and 20 percent owned by the Ecuadorian state development bank, and operates services to Asia, North and South America, and Europe. In 1988 it transported 2.15 million tons of cargo, of which 71 percent was import trade. The Flota recently initiated construction of a container terminal in Cartagena.