
Container Shipping in Cuba Receives Logistics Boost

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Container shipping in Cuba is set to receive a significant boost as one of the world's largest container ship operators entered into agreements Monday to build a logistics hub in Port Mariel. CMA CGM announced yesterday that it has signed an agreement with the Cuban government and Almacenes Universales SA (AUSA) for a 17 hectare facility that will handle the warehousing of goods as well as full and empty container storage.

Matthieu Friedberg, a vice-president of the shipping giant stated, "The platform of Mariel's is a first step in Cuba's land logistics development. It is also a new step in the acceleration of CMA CGM LOG's international development."

The Mariel seaport, largely subsidized by the Brazilian government, began operations in January 2014 and has been dredged to a depth of 60 feet to accommodate post-Panamex vessels. When final development on the project is completed, the port is expected to have an annual capacity of up to 1 million containers, almost triple the capacity of neighboring Port of Havana. Cuban officials are hoping the Mariel port will become a major container hub for the Caribbean on par with current regional leaders.

Monday's agreement between CMA CGM and the Cuban logistics company was signed in the presence of French President Francois Hollande, the first French president to visit the island since 1898.

France has been a long-time opponent of the U.S. embargo on Cuba, and on Monday Hollande further urged the U.S. to end its decade-long embargo on the island nation. In January, the Obama administration called for improved trade relations with Cuba, but congress has yet to act on any legislation to end the embargo.

CMA CGM LOG has had its sights set on international expansion in recent years with the opening of offices in six new countries and with the acquisition of one of India's main logistics companies, LCL Logistixs. This new logistic facility places the company at a strategic position for international trade, especially as prospects of commerce between Cuba and the U.S. increase.

